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## **The Linguistic Consequences of Digital Technology on the Learning of English in the Senegalese University Environment: The case of the SMS**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The present work is devoted to the analysis of the linguistic consequences of digital technology in the learning of the English language in a university environment. In other words, this article talks about the linguistic consequences of SMS on the learning of English in a context dominated by the implementation, by the State of Senegal, of the "Digital Senegal" strategy and the concretization of certain programs in building an "inclusive digital society", in order to promote a learning society. SMS (Short Message Service) is a method of communication that allows short messages to be sent by telephone, computer or other mobile devices. Thus, this work aims to analyze the grammatical, morphological and orthographic consequences of this method of communication on the learning of English at university. However, to collect data in order to develop a corpus, process it and analyze it to end up with results, research, interviews, exchanges by SMS, etc. have been done. And these approaches have allowed us to point out that SMS have a negative impact on learning English and on the writing of educational and administrative documents at the grammatical, morphological, orthographic, etc. levels. Nevertheless, we have also noticed that for some, the great majority of the "errors" or "mistakes" present in the written discourse are not the result of a lack of knowledge of the norm or a lack of interest on the part of the speakers, but rather the mark of an underlying structure.*

**KEYWORDS:** communication, consequence, language, learning, linguistics

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The State of Senegal, a country located in West Africa, has implemented several projects and programs including "Digital Senegal" which makes it easier for Senegalese people to communicate remotely. This digital strategy has linguistic consequences on the learning of the English language in the Senegalese university environment. This is why this article was written to address the linguistic consequences of SMS on the learning of English in a context dominated, as we have said, by the implementation by the State of Senegal of the "Digital Senegal" strategy and the realization of certain programs by building an "inclusive digital

society”, in order to promote a learning society. These programs have allowed a lot of Senegalese people to have access to the Internet and the networks of telephone operators. This facilitates communication within the country. Taking advantage of this accessibility of the Internet and networks, several Senegalese people and more particularly students use SMS to communicate.

But what is an SMS? Why do we communicate using this method? What is the impact of “SMS” on learning English? What is the difference between this method of communication and the other methods? What are the grammatical, morphological, orthographic, phonological, etc. consequences of “SMS” about learning English? To answer these questions and achieve results, we consulted a lot of documents in libraries, research centers and also exchanged SMS messages with students to collect data in order to develop a corpus, process it and analyze it. This work allowed us to note that SMS (Short Message Service), which is a method of communication that allows short messages to be sent by telephone, computer or other mobile devices, has a negative impact on learning English and writing educational documents in English. In addition, SMS has remarkable linguistic consequences in terms of grammar, morphology, spelling, phonology, etc. on learning English in Senegalese universities.

Thus, to better understand the scope of such a subject we focus on the theory of linguistic pragmatics. Pragmatics is defined as a branch of linguistics concerned with elements of language whose meaning can only be understood by knowing the context of their uses. It is thus interested, on the one hand, in the phenomena of contextual dependencies which see their references determined by parameters linked to the context of utterance. Additionally, it studies the use of language in communication and knowledge. Largely dependent on cognitivism, extended pragmatics considers the mechanisms of inference in knowledge, the construction of concepts, the non-literal use of language, intentionality in argumentation, etc. It also deals with the influence and consequences of language on the context (how to change the world by saying something / how to act on the world by saying something) and the influence and consequences of language on the context (in what is said depends on the circumstances in which it is said). The work is structured around three parts. The first part is devoted to grammatical consequences. As for the second, it relates to the morphological consequences of this method of communication in learning English. The third and final part refers to the spellings of these SMS messages on learning English in the Senegalese university environment.

### **1. Grammatical Consequences**

Grammar (Faye: 2022) is the branch of linguistics that studies the rules that govern language. According to the Larousse dictionary (1905), it is defined as a set of phonetic, morphological and syntactic rules written or spoken. It can be roughly defined as the way in which a language manipulates and combines words or expressions in order to form longer units of meaning. In any language, there is a set of rules that govern how units of meaning can be constructed. They provide linguistic uniformity necessary for effective communication and universal understanding. It (grammar) can then serve as the basis for a set of classroom activities during which it temporarily becomes the main learning objective. Learning grammar should be seen

in the long term as one of the means to acquiring or mastering the language as a whole, and not as an end in itself.

Grammar is used to refer to a number of different things: it can be used to refer to books containing descriptions of the structure of a language. We can also speak of grammar to refer to the knowledge that a native speaker has of his language and to descriptions of this knowledge. Grammar can also refer to a set of rules developed to control certain aspects of native speaker usage and to a set of rules typically taught in school about "proper use" and writing.

However, learning grammar and more precisely English grammar is often impacted by certain communication methods such as SMS (Short Message Service) in a Senegalese university environment. Let's look at the examples below:

- *Xaw du u fil?* (How do you feel?)
- *S, wi nid sm explanation.* (We need some explanations.)

In these examples taken from a discussion via SMS with a student, we have noted a lack of respect of the English grammar rules. In other words, these sentences are ungrammatical. The enunciator does not take into account the rules that govern the grammar of the English language. In the first sentence, the use of the word "**xaw**" to designate the interrogative adverb (**how**) may mislead some readers. Likewise, in this sentence, the enunciator uses the term "**du**" to refer to the (auxiliary) operator "**do**" conjugated in the simple present tense in the second person singular or plural. Thus, in this same sentence, the enunciator uses the letter "**u**" to designate the personal pronoun "**you**" used in the second person plural or singular; which can cause some misunderstanding for the native speaker or the learner. The use of "**fil**" instead of "**feel**" may also mislead some readers as both terms exist in English.

As for the second sentence, it is marked by the structure and formation of the sentence. The use of the letter "**S**" followed by a comma shows an apposition. The speaker uses this letter to designate "**Sir**" which refers to the co-speaker or recipient of the message. He addresses his master or teacher to express their wish to leave or leave. Moreover, the use of "**wi**" to mean "**we**", first person plural, can be explained by a phonological influence of local languages. The enunciator writes the word as they can hear it.

As for the word "**nid**" which refers to the verb "**need**", its use in this sentence is a mistake and can mislead readers, because it is a term (verb) which exists in English and whose meaning is entirely different from that of the verb in question. "**Need**", in English, is an operator of modality which is both a verb and an auxiliary and whose difference in nature depends on the structure and morphology of the concept. It is used (as an operator) when the enunciator expresses a necessity with a subjective orientation, depending more or less on them or on the addressee or the co-enunciator (in interrogative sentences). This remark is also valid for the rest of the sentence, which makes the sentence grammatically incorrect even if it is not semantically incorrect.

- *Zey will liv as sun as he will km.* ( They will leave as soon as he comes)

- *I fenk u veri much.* (I thank you very much)

The analysis of these examples taken from a conversation through SMS with a student shows a failure to take into account the concordance of tenses in English. The speaker uses two future tenses (will liv and will km) in the two clauses (main and subordinate). However, in English, the future is not used in the subordinate clauses of time introduced by as soon as, as long as, when, etc. Furthermore, the enunciator uses “*liv*” to designate the verb “*leave*”. The use of this word may mislead some speakers who might think that it is the verb “*live*”. Similarly, in this sentence, they use the words “*sun*” and “*km*” to refer to “*soon*” and “*come*”. This style, which can be considered telegraphic, consists of a reduction of the message combining omissions of words with other processes such as abbreviations and often creates some problems of understanding for English native speakers and some other learners. However, this style of writing not only creates problems at the grammar level, but it has also consequences on the morphology of the English language.

## 2. Morphological consequences

Morphology, which is traditionally defined as the branch of grammar that studies the form and/or formation of words, is nowadays impacted by new information and communication technologies. Thus, in the present study, we were able to notice that the SMS writing style had morphological consequences in the learning of English in the Senegalese university environment. Several students resort to abbreviations that remove certain syllables from words in English.

- *Dnt wry about that, I undstn* (Don't worry about, I understand.)
- *John hz givn him sm mni.* (John has given him some money.)

We have noticed that a lot of words are truncated or abbreviated. The enunciator, as FAIRON (2006: 33) says, uses letters to replace sounds with a sound value that are given to these letters when they are named. The “phonetic” use of characters (letters) constitutes one of the most characteristic marks attributed to digital technology and more particularly to SMS language. In these sentences, the enunciator makes a combination of consonants to express their ideas. In other words, for most words, they do not use vowels. However, this style of writing can cause a lack of understanding or confusion. When we take the example of the word “*wry*”, in the first sentence, the interlocutor or recipient of the message may be confused because this word (*wry*) exists in English even if it is truncated in this present speech. The learner or native English speaker may believe that it would mean “*rai*”, “*ironic*”, etc. instead of “*worry*”. It is also interesting to note that some students use numbers to replace segments of words in their text messages. Let's look at the following examples:

- *2day* (today)
- *2night* (tonight)
- *4tune* (fortune)

In the sentences, the enunciator uses numbers combined with letters to express sounds. This is a set of graphics intended to reproduce forms specific to the orality of users. For various reasons

which aim at both brevity and simplicity, we can see some deletions and substitutions of letters by numbers. This style of communication, as we have seen, has harmful consequences in the morphology of the English language. Some readers (recipients) of these SMS (words) may have a completely different understanding from that of the speaker to the extent that these words are composed of numbers and word segments which can sometimes be free morphemes. The latter are nouns that exist in English. So combining them with numbers could lead the interlocutor to believe that it is the number or plurality of words (*2 (two) days* instead of “*today*”; *2 (two) nights* instead of “*tonight*”; *4 (four) tunes* instead of *fortune*).

Thus, as Alexander Guryev<sup>1</sup> (2013: 84) says, the choice of variants does not seem particularly guided by pragmatic motivations, but it is apparently a matter of external constraints. The choice between several variants allows the speaker to better adapt to his or her communicative needs; they use a variant that is more effective than the others in a particular communication context of a personal nature.

The morphology of the English language is also affected by the use of abbreviations, acronyms and abbreviations by certain enunciators in their SMS messages. Abbreviation, as defined by FAIRON (2006:41), is a strictly graphic phenomenon, unlike various forms such as truncations, acronyms and acronyms, which consists of removing letters in a word while ensuring that it is always recognizable. This is a very common writing style in English SMS messages. Moreover, the word SMS, which is at the heart of the study, is a perfect illustration because it is the abbreviation or acronym for the term “Short Message Service”.

- *I ‘v sent u a sms. Hav u sin it?*
- *Zeyd sm research in www.*
- *Dr. Ndiaye wil not km 2day.*

The enunciator (the student who sent the message) uses acronyms and abbreviators in their speech. In the first sentence, they use the word “*sms*” to designate the type of short message they send to their interlocutor. In addition, they truncate the auxiliary “*have*” and uses an apostrophe (‘) plus the letter “*v*”. This truncation and/or omission of syllables or letters or grammatical words is undoubtedly one of the most important phenomena in SMS language. Logically, the other grammatical categories are much less affected, since the absence of certain “full” words, such as nouns and adjectives, would make the messages incomprehensible and it is difficult to detect the deletion of adverbs.

The same process is seen in the second sentence of this example. Here, the enunciator uses an acronym (www) and a truncation or abbreviation of words. The use of “*zeyd*” to designate “*they had*” refers to this strictly graphic phenomenon which consists of removing letters from a word while ensuring that it is still recognizable. This pushes some thinkers to qualify this method of communication as “oral language” because there are a certain number of typical phenomena of spoken language there. However, texting language is not just about removing or truncating letters in communication. Some students lengthen vowels or consonants in their exchanges or conversations via this method of communication.

- *Ooooooh you are right.* (oh you are right.)
- *Howww can you say such things!* (How can you say such things!)
- *It's cooooool 2day.* (It is cool today.)

In the examples, we have noticed an elongation of letters compared to the standard form. This can be explained by various reasons. Some enunciators may want to express expressive needs to emphasize the emotional nature of the message by resorting to the lengthening of certain consonants and vowels. On the other hand, others use these forms in this method of communication to transgress. It also seems that contrary to what several students claim, the "shorter message" principle is moderated in some cases where it might apply, as if users were not willing to sacrifice themselves to gain brevity or typing speed.

However, as FAIRON (2006: 69) says, phenomena that are sometimes described as oral traces such as the use of the sound value of a letter: *w* for *we* or *u* for *you* are only understood or interpreted when they are written. Likewise, the replacement of certain spellings for economic or game reasons has no oral consequences, the game is therefore purely graphic; which leads us to think about the orthographic consequences of this method of communication in the learning of English in university environment.

### 3. Orthographic Consequences

From a linguistic point of view, English spelling regulates the way of graphically representing phonemes of this language according to the standard considered to be the only correct one. Its operation is governed by a principle which refers to the main role of graphemes that is represented by phonemes and another principle whose role consists of referring to sounds a grammatical and lexical meaning of written signs. Thus, the method of writing SMS has had harmful consequences on the spelling of the English language in university setting. Let us consider the following examples:

- *U a rayit my frend* (you are right my friend.)
- *Wer iz xi* (where is he?)
- *Xaw r u?* (how are you ?)

The examples demonstrate the consequences of this writing style on the spelling of the English language. The great freedom offered by this language can bring people to lose touch with the standardized spelling system of the English language. Intuitively, one might think, as some researchers say, that young students who, while learning, have not yet mastered the standard of writing certain English words, are often "weak links" in this style of writing. Not only do these examples show a lack of respect for English spelling, but there is also the influence or interference of local languages in the expression or learning of foreign languages.

Some teachers who are privileged observers of developments note the appearance, in a lot of student papers, of this type of error. An often cited example is that of the use of the letters *u* and *r* particularly used in English SMS language. Today in our universities there is more

confusion regarding the use of these letters which are often used as subject or object complement (**u**) and as verb or auxiliary conjugated in the present tense (**r**).

## CONCLUSION

The analysis we carried out has allowed us to note that the SMS has a negative impact on the learning of English and on the writing of educational and administrative documents at the grammatical, morphological, spelling levels, etc. Nevertheless, we were also able to notice that for some, the vast majority of "errors" or "mistakes" present in written speech are not the result of a lack of knowledge of the grammatical norm or rule or of a lack of interest in the speakers but rather the mark of an underlying structure. This style of writing, which can be considered telegraphic, consists of a reduction of the message combining omissions of words with other devices such as abbreviations and often causes some problems of understanding for English native speakers and other learners. It can also consist of the lengthening of certain letters (consonants or vowels). However, this style of writing not only causes grammatical problems, but it also has consequences on the morphology of the English language.

The combination of digital and linguistic resources is at the heart of the transformation of information technologies into cognitive technologies. The digital SMS and language contents are integrated into all of our cultural references. In this general recoding of information and knowledge, the method of communication by SMS appears as the dominant element because it is the new element, but it must not obscure the even more essential breeding ground which is language. Thus, the linguistic consequences of this writing style still constitute an unthoughtful "black hole". An intellectual laziness among students has set in, pushing far beyond the level of learning and mastery of the English language the question of linguistic consequences, affecting the learning of the English language in a university environment.

The technological challenge is to ensure that the faculty of language, of our language, written and oral, is extended within machines and communication tools through needs as diverse as exchanging, expressing oneself, creating, researching, classify, analyze, disseminate, reproduce and verify as one researcher said. Language technology developers have significant and unrelenting needs for linguistic resources to power and evaluate these technologies.

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