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Textisms, texting, and spelling in Spanish[☆]

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Abstract

This study examines undergraduates' perception of usage in smartphone text message and their relationship with the process of learning Spanish spelling. The aim is to establish whether subjects who have become competent language users in a digital environment accept the use of textisms and whether these textisms are perceived differently depending on their phonetic, lexical, and multimodal features. A total of 388 undergraduates from the Faculty of Education Science of the University of Seville participated in a non-experimental study of a descriptive type based on surveys. The data showed that both standard Spanish writing and digital usage coexisted harmoniously in participants' texts. However, a clear difference was established between textisms that modified Spanish writing rules and those that incorporated new elements not included in standard writing. Whereas textisms which modified the relationship between phonemes and graphemes were considered a challenge to standard writing as well as to academic literacy among young students (12–16), lexical textisms, emoticons, images, and videos were not considered harmful to standard Spanish. The study suggested that evolution of the writing rules set by the Spanish Academy could be influenced by the digital writing habits of young students.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Instant messaging and the Spanish language

Recent data show that 93.1% of the Spanish population over 18 use different instant messaging applications daily (AIMC, 2016). Instant messaging is by far the most widely used Internet service in Spain, and given that nine out of every ten speakers read and write instant messages every day, it is probably the most frequent text typology in Spanish (Martín, 2016). Text messages have given rise to a new written code that has been called *textese* (Johnson, 2015) and also *digitalk* (Turner, 2010). Nevertheless, despite the fact that more five hundred million people communicate in Spanish, this new written code has not received enough attention within Spanish Language studies. The practice used in texting is not a juvenile alternative jargon (Betti, 2006) or a linguistic prank, but a form of communication in Spanish that could

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influence conventional Spanish writing practice (Alonso and Perea, 2008; Mas and Zas, 2012). In order to address the issue properly, regard should be had to digital norm studies concerning languages related or close to Spanish. The influence of text messages on standard writing practices has been researched in languages closely related to Spanish (Bernicot et al., 2014; Bigot and Croute, 2012; Crystal, 2008; Gómez-Camacho et al., 2016; Gómez-Camacho and Lopes, 2017), and these previous studies have been used to establish parallels between certain Romance languages, specifically Spanish, French, and Italian (Panckhurst, 2010).

The writing style of text messages in English has been widely described by Thurlow and Brown (2003), Crystal (2008), Plester and Wood (2009), Kemp and Bushnell (2011), and De Jonge and Kemp (2012), Wood et al. (2014), Waldron et al. (2016) and Kemp and Grace (2017). The present work takes as major references the classifications of textisms provided by Lyddy et al. (2014) and Wood et al. (2014), which are based on previous classifications by De Jonge and Kemp (2012) and Plester et al. (2009). The classification used here has been organized by frequency order as follows: disregarded capitalization, accent stylization, letter/number homophones, missing punctuation, contractions, non-standard/phonetic spellings, *g* clippings, other clippings types, onomatopoeic/exclamatory expressions, shortenings, misspellings, initialisms, semantically unrecoverable words, emoticons, and typographic symbols.

Regarding the French language, textisms in text messages were first compared with standard orthographic practices in a study by Bouillaud et al. (2007). Later, Bernicot et al. (2014) established two different types of textisms: those consistent with the grapheme-phoneme correspondence (i.e. those which follow the standard written code) and those which are not. Recent studies on the perception of the digital norm in Italian (Gómez-Camacho et al., 2016) and Portuguese (Gómez-Camacho and Lopes, 2017) confirm the difference established at grapheme-phoneme level, lexical-semantic level and multimodal elements by speakers in languages close to Spanish, in line with the contribution of Bernicot et al. (2014) regarding the French language. A more exhaustive categorization is proposed by Lanchantin et al. (2014) in which three main groups of French textisms are established: additions (letters, punctuation marks, copy-and-paste tool); substitutions (extra-substitutions on several words, incomplete substitutions, missing letters in a word, deletions of letters with no phonic value, variant French words); and reductions (extra reductions of several words, whole reductions for one word, incomplete reductions or alterations and variants of French forms).

The taxonomy of textisms in the Spanish language has been established by previous research (Gómez-Camacho, 2007; Gómez-Camacho and Gómez del Castillo, 2017). Several authors (Calero, 2014; Caurcel et al., 2013; Domínguez, 2005; Galán, 2002; Llisterri, 2002; Mancera, 2016; Mas and Zas, 2012; Vázquez-Cano et al., 2015) have identified frequent features in text messages: suppression of silent letters (*h*, for example), digraphs (for example, *ll*, *ch*, *qu*, *gu*), simplification of graphemes representing the same phoneme (for example, *b* instead of *v*, *i* instead of *y*, *k* instead of *c* or *qu*) and vowel suppression. There are also recurrent features: writing numbers and mathematical symbols which are homophones and using letters by their name (for example, *x*, *+*, *d*, *t*, and *2* instead of *por*, *más*, *de*, *te*, and *-dos*).

The present study introduces a classification of textisms in Spanish which has three main sources. First, the three maxims of the text message style established by Thurlow and Poff (2013): shortness and speed, paralinguistic restitution, and phonological approximation, and, further, the most recent textism categorization by Kemp and Grace (2017). Second, the classifications of French textisms established by Bernicot et al. (2014) and Lanchantin et al. (2014). Finally, the classification for the Spanish language by Gómez-Camacho (2007), revised by Vázquez-Cano et al. (2015) and recently applied in Gómez-Camacho and Gómez del Castillo (2017), see Table 1. With these previous models taken into account, the present paper offers a codification of Spanish textisms divided into repetitions, omissions, non-normative graphemes, lexical textisms, and multimodal elements. This classification of textisms in Spanish gives rise to a framework structured according to grapheme-phoneme level, lexical-semantic level and multimodal element, all of which appear to be differentiated according to speaker perception. This has not been previously done for the Spanish language.

1.2. Text messaging and literacy

In general, the written norm used in text messages has been perceived as a threat to standard Spanish writing practice, in part due to negative repercussions in the acquisition of linguistic competence (Llisterri, 2002). These repercussions have not been sufficiently studied in the Spanish contexts. Nevertheless, they have been studied for other main languages.

Research on the English language regarding the relationship between communicating by text message and linguistic competence (Drouin and Driver, 2014) has been undertaken according to user age: children (Blom et al., 2017; Bushnell et al., 2011; Kemp and Bushnell, 2011; Plester and Wood, 2009; Wood et al., 2014), teenagers (Durkin et al., 2011; Gann et al., 2010; Turner et al., 2014), and young undergraduates (De Jonge and Kemp, 2012; Drouin, 2011; Kemp, 2010; Kemp and Grace, 2017; Ling and Baron, 2007; Powell and Dixon, 2011). Research mainly shows no detrimental effects of text messaging (Bushnell et al., 2011; Durkin et al., 2011; Gann et al., 2010; Kemp, 2010; Kemp and Bushnell, 2011; Plester and Wood, 2009; Powell and Dixon, 2011; Wood et al., 2014). Waldron et al. (2016) and Kemp and Grace (2017) recently analyzed the effect of predictive text use and literacy skills in primary- and secondary-school students, and also in

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