Reflections of Students' language Usage in Social Networking Sites: Making or Marring Academic English

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Abstract : Social networking sites (SNSs) have become a major form of communication in today's day and age whereby language use has been impacted in various areas especially in that of learning and teaching. Young users use literally half their week engaging in SNSs communication, thereby giving rise to a brand of internet slang which is entirely their own. This youth-speak has gone on to influence other areas of language usage. The questions asked in the survey increased the identification of the linguistic features such as the frequency of code switching and erratic spelling and leet, thus expanding the research base. The survey participants, the majority of who are from the Chinese ethnic group had experienced mother tongue interference in their English Language proficiency. The descriptive statistical method was used to analyse the questionnaires, wherein the data collected indicated a rather excessive usage of short messaging texts by almost all respondents owning a mobile device. To authenticate the research findings, an analysis of the text discourses was found to be necessary. The findings proved that the frequent use of short messaging had not majorly affected the English language proficiency of the participants. In academic writing there was a conscious effort to stay clear of SNSs language. The mushrooming SNSs has helped create a whole young generation who have their own meta-language, which provides an opportunity to probe to what extent the English language is altered. This research should kick-start research on how the English language in these areas is used and whether the frequent use of it can develop or weaken proficiency in the language. The results of the present study will definitely enrich the corpus of work conducted on the influence of language of social media and encourage further detailed research in this area.

Keywords: students' language usage, linguistic features, mobile phone, technology uses in education, e-learning, academic writing, classroom environment and social networking sites

1. Introduction

English Language proficiency is now a requirement in all areas of work, study, entertainment and communication. Used almost extensively in inter-state and international communication, it is important to have a working language of the English Language. In the case of Malaysians, it is almost true to a fault that Malaysians have a poor grasp of the language, with improper use of the language being rampant in daily conversation. Taking into consideration demographic factors of SNSs users, it is found that the age range is mostly 18 – 25 years. These users utilize more than half their week engaging in SNSs communication, leading to the creation of new phrases and words. The shortcut language used and created on instant messaging, on the offset, seems to be drastically deteriorating students' vocabulary. Many learn the language through observation and imitation in both speaking and writing. To take an example, one linguistic feature sprouting from this shortcut language base is "leet". Derived from the word *elite*, leet or leet speak serves as an alternative alphabet for the English language. It is generally seen used on the internet and in chat-rooms. For instance, the leet spelling of the word "*leet*" is *1337* and *l33t*. Hence, the leet alphabet is a specialized form of graphic symbolic writing. Even Manglish, or 'mangled English' generally used by Malaysians across ages and ethnicities, is a concoction of Malaysian English words, interchangeably used from the Malay, Chinese and Tamil languages.

A problem arises when users are not able to differentiate formal language from informal language as more often than not, the students at tertiary level, are inclined to use improper formats and sentences that stultify Standard English. This particular peculiar occurrence has given rise to Internet slang, further raising the question of the impact on Malaysian students. Those lacking English proficiency may be affected as they will have the tendency to imitate and this case, imitate improperly. Or will it not? What about those with a high level of English language proficiency? Would it deteriorate their language ability? Often, the inability to gauge

Reference this paper as Thurairaj S, Hoon E P, Roy S S and Fong P K "Reflections of Students' language Usage in Social Networking Sites: Making or Marring Academic English" *The Electronic Journal of e-Learning Volume 13 Issue 4 2015*, (pp302-316) available online at www.ejel.org

improper, ungrammatical language usage in these mediums, may, in the long run, affect their career in their respective fields. Those students who have graduated find it intimidating to communicate in proper English either in speaking or in writing, especially with workplace management. Language instruction is now becoming more and more expensive, preventing many graduate students to sign up for language courses. This and the underlying feeling of inferiority of a non-native speaker communicating with a conversant speaker prove to be stumbling blocks for the person.

Mobile phone users can communicate with others by using symbols or abbreviated forms of words and sentences in order to save space, time and money (Mphahlele & Mashamaite, 2005). The communication-style of social networking users is observed to be rather similar. The present study investigates how Internet slang used on SNSs and mobile phones differs from Standard English and the reasons for Internet slang usage on these social platforms. This research objective is to investigate the variables that influence English proficiency among the students in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To determine the association between language preference and English proficiency
- To examine how abbreviations and short forms relate to English proficiency; and
- To investigate the relationship between the usage of SNSs and English proficiency.

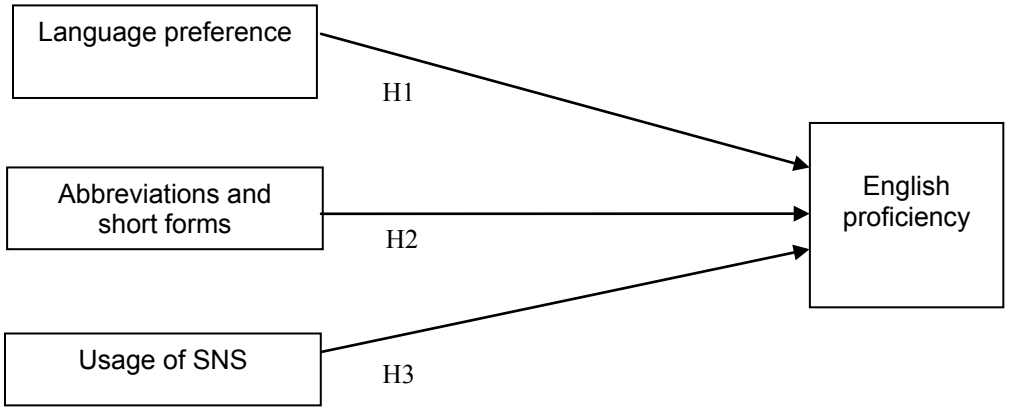

Figure 1 Research framework

Figure 1 shows the relations among the independent and dependent variables, the independent variables being language preference, abbreviations and short forms as well as usage of SNS and the dependent variable being the English proficiency of the respondents. Based on this, our hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between language preference and English proficiency.

Hypothesis 2: There is a relationship between abbreviations and short forms and English proficiency

Hypothesis 3: There is a relationship between usage of social networking sites (SNS) and English proficiency.

As this area can be further researched, particularly in the Malaysian context, this study hopes to enrich the knowledge on the study of language usage on SNSs as well as motivate other further research in this area.

2. Literature review

Language and communication play a crucial role in information sharing, specifically on the use of information technology in education. Tools and platforms such as Facebook enhance communication and human interaction and can potentially be harnessed for language learning. Sources indicate that factors like motivation, imitation and environment for learning are crucial in language learning.

The amount of SNS users has increased tremendously over the past five years, especially among teenagers and students (Aydin, 2012). Many users have created Internet slang to communicate and express their thoughts on SNSs and mobile networks.

Various researches have shown that Facebook impacts all levels of academia and academic settings. In opening up new worlds of learning for both teachers and students, Facebook has been found to have the potential for use in educational applications. Roblyer et al. (2010) found that Facebook can also become a valuable resource

to support students' educational communication and collaboration with faculty, providing a different model of how online tools can be utilized in educational contexts. Meanwhile, Cummings (2011) describes how social media impacts higher education through five (5) interconnected ''literacies''–attention, participation, collaboration, network awareness and critical consumption.

Grosseck (2008) and Muñoz (2009) have found that SNSs like Facebook and Twitter enable students to share information (e.g., when a Facebook 'Group Page' is created for a class or course subject), to learn about their classmates, to communicate with their classmates and professors, and to post and discuss relevant class information. In Twitter, a message is linked to a course or class blog that offers students opportunities to discuss various kinds of asynchronous online discourse.

Besides, according to Thurairaj et al., (2012) Facebook and Twitter do lead to positive language learning. Thus, these SNSs like Facebook and Twitter should be incorporated as learning tools for language learning. Based on the interviews conducted, students stated that activities through social media are very interesting and it makes learning easier besides helping them improve their communication. The researcher found that, making Facebook and Twitter as learning tools is claimed to be fun and it is welcomed by the students. Besides, the researchers have also indicated that Facebook and Twitter are used widely to communicate in English. There are various activities preferred by the students and most importantly everything leads to positive language learning. Thus the students do improve tremendously in their language as well as their writing skills. Besides, the students also claimed that they do learn and improve their language from the preferred activities on Facebook and Twitter. It is indeed a learning process when they check messages, tweets or notifications while surfing the sites. Besides, the students also confirmed that they learn new sets of vocabulary when they check their friends' activities or updates. In addition, it is revealed in this research that the students are very open to the usage of Facebook and other social networks to support classroom activities. With the features on Facebook and Twitter, they can enhance classroom discussion and make it more interesting. In Malaysia, the younger, college-going generation is paralysed without mobile phone apps such as Whatsapp, Viber, Hangout, Line, WeChat and Tango.

Thurairaj and Roy (2012) state that, besides keeping in mind that the teaching materials should help their students to master the language, teachers also have to make sure that the teaching materials are interesting. Thus activities trough Facebook and Twitter will definitely be more interesting in nature to enhance positive language learning. Since most of the respondents are very exposed to the usage of Facebook and Twitter, to support classroom learning efficiency, Facebook and Twitter should be used comprehensively in the classroom. That way it can provide an atmosphere for language learning. It is mentioned that human learning is a complex phenomenon and learning processes among individual students are never identical. Hence lecturers should vary their teaching methods. It is indisputable that Facebook and Twitter could make language learning enjoyable. However, time is needed to find people with good command of the language who are willing to share their knowledge on Facebook and Twitter. Besides, we also need to ensure that everyone who is in sync with this notion will give full support so that social networking sites can remain as vibrant language learning platforms for students.

Kabilan et al. (2010) found that the students believed Facebook could be utilized as an online environment to facilitate the learning of English since it led to improvement of language skills, confidence, motivation to communicate in English and a positive attitude towards learning English as a second language. The research found that only 8.1% of students disagreed that Facebook can be an effective online environment to facilitate their practice of writing in English. In terms of reading practice in English, 7.5% of the students claimed that Facebook is not a suitable environment. Hence, Kabilan (2010) concluded that language instructors need to integrate Facebook as an educational project with pre-determined learning objectives and outcomes in order for the learning experience to be meaningful.

Social networking can be utilized as a social learning resource and space for new literacy practices. Creating a well-crafted social learning platform would most likely require a deeply collaborative effort among technology experts, educators, social learning theorists, psychologists, sociologists and students. As professed by Aydin (2012), studies on the educational benefits of social networking focus on specific areas such as social learning, e-learning, environmental learning, business, art, and chemistry education. The author recommended Facebook as an effective medium for language learning and teaching, with the possibility of improving learners' language skills.

Md Yunus et al. (2012) investigated the advantages and disadvantages of integrating social networking tools into the ESL (English as a Second Language) writing classroom and discussed ways to plan related activities. Data collected through an online discussion board from TESL students in a state university in Malaysia revealed that integrating social networking services in ESL writing classrooms can broaden students' knowledge, increase their motivation and build confidence in learning ESL writing. The main hurdles in integrating social networking tools into ESL writing classes were students' difficulty in concentrating on the materials when using computers, lacking equipment, lacking access to the Internet, and having insufficient time for facilitators to interact with the students.

Internet slang and short message services have been shown to have an impact on the English language. It was estimated that 90% of school children owned a mobile phone, and 96% used text messaging. This shows that young people are active 'texters' (Plester et al., 2008). Internet slang was invented for the purpose of saving keystrokes. As typing is much slower than speaking, in order to counter this problem, people started shortening words and creating new words.

As for the impact of texting on English proficiency, Craig (2003) and David (2008) similarly concluded that texting through SNSs in some ways improves students' literacy as it provides more opportunities to engage with the language. However, Craig (2003) also found that texting also threatens students' literacy because it creates undesirable reading and writing habits due to common use of abbreviations and unusual jargon, thereby damaging students' ability to employ formal literacy skills. Text messaging is deemed to be detrimental to students' language proficiency since students mix this "text language" with the standard language they learn at school. Consequently, students displayed numerous errors ranging from incorrect spellings to "ungrammatical" sentence constructions (Mphahlele & Mashamaite, 2005). The danger extends to classwork, examinations and research reports, especially in an academic environment (Dansieh, 2008).

Nevertheless, it might be interesting to note a study by Abdul Kadir & Zubir (2012) on e-distance learning students in a public university in Malaysia. The study found that code-switching occurs intentionally and not through lack of competence in the base language. The students used code-switching functions for various purposes such as to capture attention, to show respect, to show empathy and to indicate a shift in topic. An earlier study (Muthusamy, 2009) showed that undergraduates of a Malaysian public university had emphasised habitual expression that was related to psychological aspect of behaviour as their main reason for code switching. Lack of register competence was also another contributing factor for code switching. The study concluded that the ability of the interlocutors who were able to speak more than one language fluently played an important role during their interaction.

Drouin (2011) examined the frequency of text messaging, use of ''textese'' and literacy skills (e.g., reading accuracy, spelling and reading fluency) in a sample of college students in America. Co-relational analyses revealed significant *positive* relationships between text messaging frequency and literacy skills (spelling and reading fluency) but significant, *negative* relationships between textese usage in certain contexts (e.g. emails to professors) and literacy (reading accuracy). Those reportedly using more textese on SNSs and those using more textese in emails to professors had significantly lower reading accuracy scores.

Regarding writing skills, Drouin (2011) also discussed the new shift of writing instruction and pedagogy that uses social networking tools in order for to attract students' interest in learning language. Research-based best practices and a sample writing assignment were presented to illustrate a new model of composing in an online environment that is encouraging to teenagers. Given that teenagers did not appear to recognize their out-of-school writing as ''real'' writing, Drouin (2011) emphasizes that one should be equipped with a variety of mentoring strategies and knowledge of different communication modes, which includes social networking and media platforms like Facebook.

Computer-assisted language learning has been shown to have its disadvantages. Cummings (2011) states that computer-assisted language learning will never be able to substitute for teachers because there could be issues of control in administrating relevant exercises in language teaching and learning. Nevertheless, the researcher conceded that they offer new opportunities for better language practice and may significantly reform a country's educational system.

Mphahlele and Mashamaite (2005) suggest that applications of expression tools such as blogs, MySpace, Facebook and Bebo into language learning contexts require further investigation by the computer-assisted language learning community.

The use of SNSs in educational contexts has not been sufficiently explored despite the prevalence of social networks around the world (Roblyer et al., 2010; Aydin, 2012). Research should investigate the various uses of Facebook within educational contexts. Kabilan (2010) suggests that future research focus on the meaningfulness of Facebook to students ' language learning experiences.

3. Methods

This quantitative study involving 236 participants from private universities in two states in Malaysia looks at assessing the language used in SNSs in students' day-to-day language usage, in accordance with their multiple levels of English proficiency. The respondents were selected based on convenience sampling method. This medium-scale survey was conducted at two major locations as a prelude to greater mining of data and an even bigger research opportunity. The responses were obtained from June 2013 to February 2014. The questionnaire was designed based on various question types such as multiple choice questions (MCQ), open-ended questions, yes/no questions, Likert scale questions (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree), ranking questions (1being the best/most preferred to 5 being the worst/least preferred), and frequency questions (frequently, occasionally and never).The respondents answered questions on what influences their English proficiency via SNSs and mobile phones. Respondents had to answer all the questions. However, only the following questions were analyzed in this study, and were grouped into three independent variables based on the objectives of this study. The full questionnaire will be provided upon request.

a. The association between language preference and English proficiency.

Q8. What language do you prefer to use when you are communicating with your friends at university via the SNSs as listed (in the questionnaire)?

Q18. Do you use only one language communicating with your friends via SNSs and mobile phone in each conversation?

b. The association between abbreviations and short form and English proficiency

Q12. Do you use proper abbreviations or short forms when communicating with your friends in UTAR through SNSs?

Q13. Why do you think UTAR students use linguistic features or abbreviations and short forms in these three mediums?

Q25. If you use any of the Internet slang below, how frequently do you use it on SNSs?

Q30. Using linguistic features such as improper grammar, abbreviations and code-switching to communicate with your friends will have a negative impact. What do you think about this statement?

c. The association between the usage of SNSs and English proficiency.

Q11. As a student, which do you think is the best media to learn English from?

Q14. Do you agree that Facebook, Twitter and mobile phones can enhance your language skills?

Q17. Rank the following elements in terms of your preference as the language you use in Facebook, Twitter and mobile phone.

The respondents were required to indicate perceptions of their own and friends' English proficiency:

Q16. How do you rate the language your friends use when communicate with you via social network and mobile phone?

Q26. How would you rate your English proficiency?

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 **Descriptive statistics**

Table 1 provides a summary of demographic information for all respondents, including gender, age, region, education level, owning a mobile phone, and availability of short-message service (SMS). Table 1 shows that from the total 236 respondents, 103 were male (43.6%) and the remaining 133 were female (56.4%). Female respondents were 12.8% more than male respondents. Additionally, the table showed that 99.2% of respondents fall under the category of 15-24 years old; however, people within the age of 25-34 years were relatively low (i.e., only 0.8%). Among the respondents, 68.6% were from the central region (Selangor) followed by 17.4%, 9.3%, 2.5% and 2.1% from the northern (Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Perak), southern (Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, Johor), east coast (Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang) and west coast regions (Sabah, Sarawak) respectively. Among the 236 respondents who owned a mobile phone, 99.2% used the SMS function. Only 0.8% of all respondents did not use it.

Table 1: Respondents' profile

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent (%)	Cumulative percent (%)
Gender			
Male	103	43.6	43.6
Female	133	56.4	100.0
Age			
15-24 years	234	99.2	99.2
25-34 years	2	0.8	100.0
Region			
Northern Region	41	17.4	17.4
Central Region	162	68.6	86.0
Southern Region	22	9.3	95.3
East Coast Region	6	2.5	97.9
West Coast Region	5	2.1	100.0
Mobile Phone			
Yes	236	100.0	100.0
No	0	0	0
Short-message service (SMS)			
Yes	234	99.2	99.2
No	2	0.8	100.0

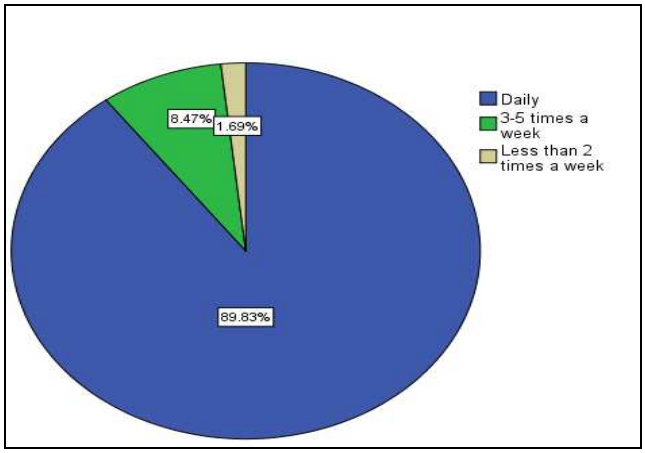

Figure 1: Usage frequency of social networking sites.

Time spent on SNS: 89.8% of respondents logged into the SNSs daily. Only 1.7% of them logged in less than twice a week.

The most preferred social networking sites: The most preferred sites were Facebook, Google+ and Twitter which were 99.2%, 36.4% and 24.2% respectively from 236 respondents. MySpace and LinkedIn were the least-used SNSs among the respondents.

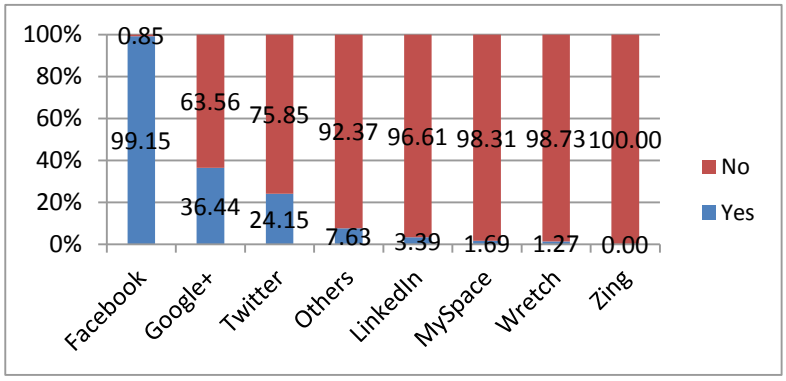

Figure 2: Usage of social networking sites

4.2 **Inferential statistics**

Table 2: The association between language preference and English proficiency

Panel A: How do you rate the language of your friends when they communicate with you via social network and mobile phone?								
		Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor	Chi-square	p
Q8	English	1.4%	27.2%	64.6%	5.4%	1.4%	5.417	0.712
	Chinese		19.3%	76.1%	4.5%			
	Others			100.0%				
Q18	Yes	1.7%	12.1%	81.0%	5.2%		7.594	0.108
	No	.6%	28.1%	65.2%	5.1%	1.1%		

Panel B: How would you rate your English proficiency?								
Q8	English	3.4%	21.1%	62.6%	10.2%	2.7%	14.218*	0.076
	Chinese		9.1%	68.2%	21.6%	1.1%		
	Others			100.0%				
Q18	Yes	3.4%	13.8%	75.9%	5.2%	1.7%	7.041	0.134
	No	1.7%	17.4%	61.2%	17.4%	2.2%		

*Significant at $\alpha = 0.10$

Table 2 illustrates the chi-square test results for the first objective. The chi-square tests in the Panel A suggest that perceived English proficiency of friends does not significantly associate with language preference ($\chi^2 = 5.407, p = 0.713$) and number of language ($\chi^2 = 7.294, p = 0.608$). However, the self-perception of English proficiency is significantly associated with language preference ($\chi^2 = 14.218, p = 0.076$). Among those who prefer to use English when communicating with friends using social networking sites indicated higher level of confidence on their English proficiency, where 3.4% respondents perceived they are *very good* and 21.1% *are good*.

Table 3a: The association between abbreviations and short form and English proficiency

Panel A: Q16. How do you rate the language of your friends when they communicate with you via social network and mobile phone?								
		Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor	Chi-square	p
Q12	Yes	1.0%	23.2%	70.0%	4.8%	1.0%	1.657	0.799
	No		31.0%	62.1%	6.9%			
Q13a	Yes	.5%	24.4%	69.8%	5.4%		15.994***	0.003
	No	3.2%	22.6%	64.5%	3.2%	6.5%		
Q13b	Yes	1.1%	27.4%	68.4%	3.2%		3.278	0.215
	No	.7%	22.0%	69.5%	6.4%	1.4%		
Q13c	Yes	1.4%	30.6%	65.3%	1.4%	1.4%	5.474	2.242
	No	.6%	21.3%	70.7%	6.7%	.6%		
Q13d	Yes		39.5%	57.9%	2.6%		6.524	0.163
	No	1.0%	21.2%	71.2%	5.6%	1.0%		
Q30a	Yes	.7%	26.6%	66.4%	4.9%	1.4%	2.665	0.615
	No	1.1%	20.4%	73.1%	5.4%			
Q30b	Yes	1.5%	16.8%	74.5%	6.6%	.7%	11.618**	0.020
	No		34.3%	61.6%	3.0%	1.0%		
Q30c	Yes		28.9%	65.8%	3.9%	1.3%	2.767	0.598

Panel A: Q16. How do you rate the language of your friends when they communicate with you via social network and mobile phone?								
		Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor	Chi-square	p
	No	1.3%	21.9%	70.6%	5.6%	.6%		
Q30d	Yes	1.8%	30.6%	61.3%	5.4%	.9%	7.792*	0.099
	No		18.4%	76.0%	4.8%	.8%		
Panel B: Q26 How would you rate your English proficiency?								
Q12	Yes	1.4%	15.5%	66.7%	14.0%	2.4%	6.483	0.166
	No	6.9%	24.1%	51.7%	17.2%			
Q13a	Yes	2.4%	15.6%	65.9%	14.6%	1.5%	5.018	0.285
	No		22.6%	58.1%	12.9%	6.5%		
Q13b	Yes	2.1%	16.8%	61.1%	16.8%	3.2%	1.825	0.768
	No	2.1%	16.3%	67.4%	12.8%	1.4%		
Q13c	Yes	6.9%	23.6%	58.3%	6.9%	4.2%	21.267***	0.000
	No		13.4%	67.7%	17.7%	1.2%		
Q13d	Yes		18.4%	65.8%	13.2%	2.6%	1.17	0.883
	No	2.5%	16.2%	64.6%	14.6%	2.0%		
Q30a	Yes	2.1%	22.4%	59.4%	14.7%	1.4%	10.055**	0.040
	No	2.2%	7.5%	73.1%	14.0%	3.2%		
Q30b	Yes	1.5%	12.4%	68.6%	16.1%	1.5%	6.026	0.197
	No	3.0%	22.2%	59.6%	12.1%	3.0%		
Q30c	Yes	2.6%	23.7%	60.5%	13.2%		6.432	0.169
	No	1.9%	13.1%	66.9%	15.0%	3.1%		
Q30d	Yes	.9%	18.0%	64.0%	15.3%	1.8%	1.993	0.737
	No	3.2%	15.2%	65.6%	13.6%	2.4%		

*Significant at $\alpha = 0.10$; **Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$;***Significant at $\alpha = 0.01$

Table 3a summarizes the chi-square tests and Table 3b summarizes the spearman correlation coefficients to examine the second objective. The results in the Panel A of Table 3a shows that the perceived friends' English proficiency (Q12) is not associated with proper use of abbreviations or short forms ($\chi^2 = 1.626, p = 0.799$).As for the reasons for the students using linguistic features in these three medium, the English proficiency is significantly associated with saving typing time (Q13a).Only 0.5% among those who use linguistics features for time saving purpose rated their English proficiency as *very good*, as opposed to 6.5% those who do not think that linguistics features are time saving rated their English proficiency as *very*

poor. 16.8% among the respondents who agree that using linguistic features such as improper grammar, abbreviations and code switching will have negative impact due to the fact that they did not realize that in fact the grammar is not presented in a proper way (Q30b) rated their friends having *good* English proficiency. In contrary, 34.8% among those do not think there is negative impact of using those linguistics features rated that their friends have *good* English proficiency (($\chi^2 = 11.618, p = 0.020$).30.6% respondents among those agree that the abbreviations are based on own personal patterns thus sometimes it leads to misunderstanding of a world or term by one another (Q30d), rated their friends as having good English proficiency; while 18.4% among those who disagreed rated their friends as having good English proficiency.

The Panel B of Table 3a relates the use of short forms and abbreviations to self-rated English proficiency. The self-perceived English proficiency is significant when associated with the reason of using linguistics features to amplify and emphasize a point ($Q13c, \chi^2 = 21.267, p = 0.000$). Among those who agree that practice becomes a habit and affects the use of the English language in many areas as well as in the corporate world, 22.4% respondents rated themselves as having *good* English proficiency as opposed to 7.5% among those did not agree ($Q30a, \chi^2 = 10.025, p = 0.040$).

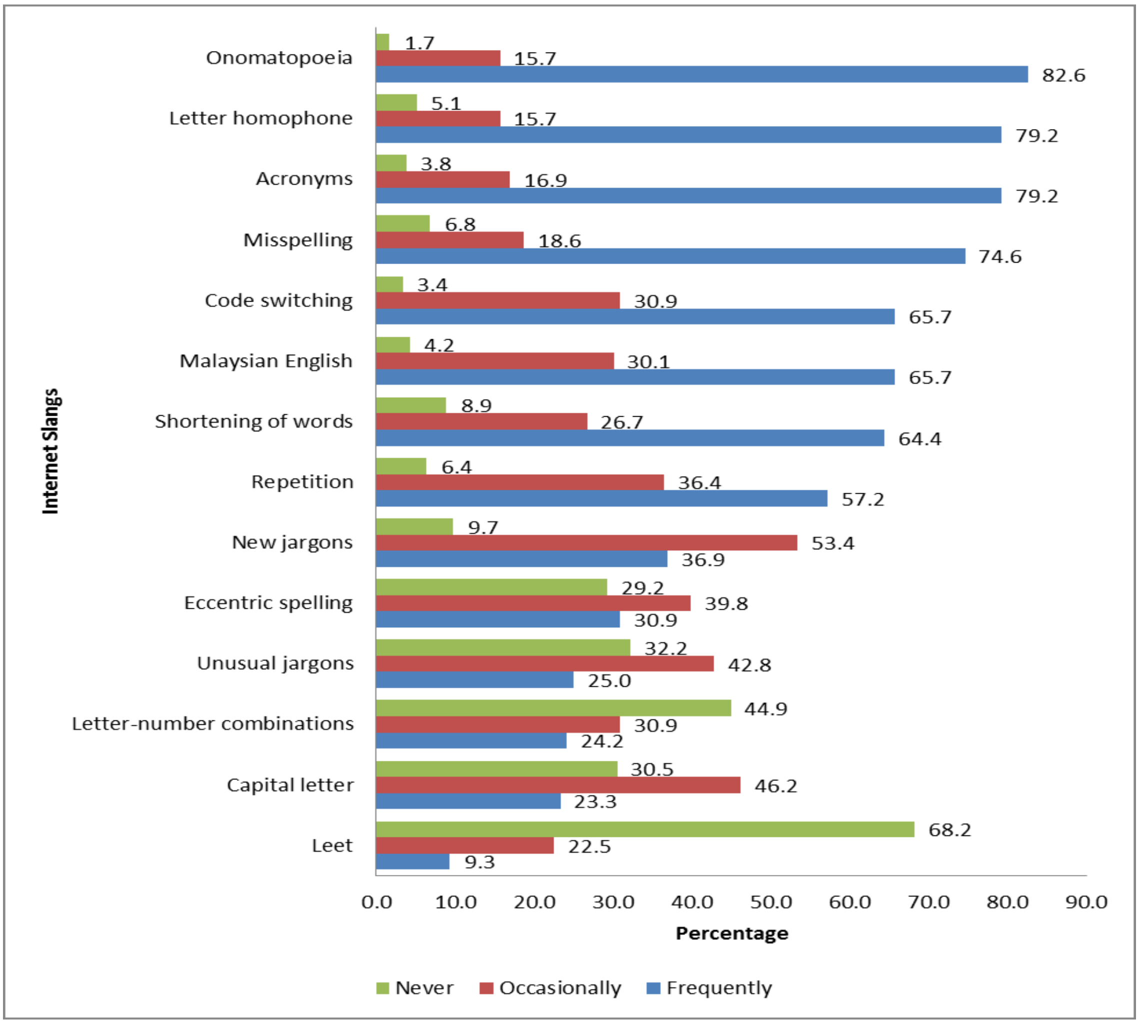

Figure 3: Usage frequency of thelinguistic features in social networking sites.

Figure 3 depicts the frequency of internet slangs usage based on its popularity, from top to bottom. The most popular linguistic features is Onomatopoeia (i.e. Exclamatory spellings of emotions, for *example Hahahah, wah,* and *woohoo*).More than half of the respondents indicate that they use Letter homophone (e.g. *u* to represent you), Acronyms (e.g. *lol* to present laughing out loud), Misspelling (e.g. *dun* to represent don't), Code Switching (i.e. concurrent use of more than one language in a sentence), Malaysian English (i.e. incorporates Malaysian slang into the English language), shortening of words (e.g, *msg* to represent message), and Repetition (e.g. *okayokay*). More than half indicated themselves use new jargons occasionally (e.g.

gooling and *tweeting*). The least popular internet slang is leet, in which 68 percent of the respondents never use it before.

Table 3b: The association between abbreviations and short form and English proficiency

	Q16			Q26	
	Correlation coefficient	P-value		Correlation coefficient	P-value
Leet	-.154**	.018		-.006	.932
New jargons	-.030	.649		.096	.143
Unusual jargons	-.100	.125		.014	.836
Acronyms	-.096	.143		-.141**	.031
Shortening of words	-.130**	.046		.023	.723
Code switching	-.028	.668		-.081	.217
Misspelling	-.152**	.020		-.125*	.055
Letter homophone	-.074	.257		-.158**	.015
Letter-number combinations	-.018	.788		-.007	.909
Onomatopoeia	.063	.335		-.064	.325
Malaysian English	.052	.429		.023	.727
Repetition	.060	.356		-.137**	.035
Capital letter	.090	.169		.042	.518
Eccentric spelling	.052	.428		.080	.223

*Significant at [illegible]; **Significant at [illegible];***Significant at [illegible]

Table 3b depicts the correlation coefficients between the frequency of linguistic features usage and English proficiency of their friends (Q16) and themselves (Q26). The usage of leet ([illegible]), shortening of words ([illegible]), and misspelling ([illegible]) are significantly negatively related to their friends' English proficiency. Meanwhile, the use of acronyms ([illegible]), misspelling ([illegible]), and repetition ([illegible]) are negatively related to their own self-rated English proficiency. The negative relationship implies that the more frequent the respondents use the linguistic features, the higher the tendency they rate themselves poorly in English proficiency. These can be observed in Figure 3, in which more than 50 percent of the respondents indicate that they use shortening of words, misspelling, acronyms, letter hormophone and repetition. It is worth to note that misspelling is significantly associated with self-rated English proficiency and their friend's English proficiency. Based on the lecturers' perceptive, by using their personal observation checklist in the classrooms, it is found that the respondents' do not use any misspelling in their assignments and presentation slides during oral presentation in classrooms. They are very aware that misspelling is not accepted and marks will be deducted if it is reflected in their assignments and oral presentation slides. However it is frequently used in social networking sites. Thus, it can be concluded that most of the students use misspelling in social networking sites for convenience purpose especially to save time. Furthermore they follow their friends' trends in the social networking sites.

Table 4: The association between usage of SNSs and English proficiency

	C16			D26	
	Correlation Coefficient	p-value		Correlation Coefficient	p-value
Q11. Newspaper	-.064	.329		-.008	.908
Q11. Magazine	-.086	.191		.010	.874
Q11. Television programme	-.125*	.055		.061	.348
Q11. Social networking sites	.240***	.000		-.011	.861
Q11. Radio	.088	.177		-.002	.979
Q11. Materials Provided in school	-.071	.279		-.010	.879
Q14	.305***	.000		.017	.793
Q17. Style/trend	-.079	.229		.034	.604
Q17. Grammar	.122*	.062		.168**	.010
Q17. Code Switching	-.057	.380		-.146**	.024
Q17. Smileys	-.076	.248		-.069	.293
Q17. Spelling	.114*	.081		-.025	.703

*Significant at [illegible]; **Significant at [illegible];***Significant at [illegible]

Table 4 summarizes the Spearman correlation coefficient to examine the third objective. The first two columns illustrate the findings of the respondents' rating of their friends' English proficiency. The respondents' perception on the best media, specifically television program ([illegible]) is negatively related to their friends' English proficiency. However, their perception on social networking sites ([illegible]), are positively related to how they perceived their friends' English proficiency. This conclusion is further confirmed by the finding on Q14.The extent to which the respondents agree that Facebook, Twitter and mobile phones can enhance their language is positively correlated with their perception of their friends' English proficiency. The more the respondents prioritize grammar ([illegible]), and spelling ([illegible]), the better the respondents rate their friends' English proficiency.

The last two columns of Table 4 report the finding on their self-rated English proficiency. The priority on grammar is positively related to self-rated English proficiency ([illegible]), while the priority on code switching is negatively related to self-rated English proficiency ([illegible])

5. Conclusion

The results show that most respondents set their own preferred language as a default language in SNS. The Chinese language is the most common and preferred among the respondents. This is causing less contact with English, making it worse for those who read and speak English on a daily basis. This negatively impacts the respondents' proficiency in the English language. However, the usage of abbreviation and short forms does not affect English proficiency. This is because the respondents tend to be aware of the examination requirements, the non-compliance of which would affect their scores. Besides, the respondents are also aware that the misspelling which has shown a significant value in both how the friends' are rated in SNSs in terms of English proficiency and also how they (the users; themselves) are treated until this case is over. They are very aware that misspelling is not accepted and marks will be deducted if it is reflected in their assignments and presentation slides for oral presentation. However it is frequently used in social networking sites. According to Thurairaj et.al. (2012) the users are able to switch their minds and apply different sets of words to cater to their purpose and to the occasion. Therefore in formal writing, students consciously avoid using short forms,

which does not affect their English proficiency. The usage of SNSs such as Face book, Twitter and mobile phones enhances English proficiency as these SNSs can be accessed worldwide and thus allow people all over the world to post and share their thoughts, feelings, news and articles. Since these are mostly penned in English, users tend to learn English by default, through SNS.

Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to extend their gratitude to the respondents who have made this project possible. This project is funded by Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman Research Fund (UTARRF) and for this, the researchers are grateful for all financial assistance and support from UTAR.

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