INSTANT MESSAGING LANGUAGE IN JORDANIAN FEMALE SCHOOL STUDENTS' WRITING

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Abstract

This study seeks to examine the existence of Instant Messaging language phenomenon among female teenagers in some Jordanian private schools and its influence on their learning experience, mainly literacy. It also raises questions about the characteristics of textese as well as teachers' attitude towards their students' use of SMS language in their academic writing. The methodology used in this study involves the descriptive and quantitative analysis of writings taken from 320 female teenagers in four different private schools in Amman, Jordan following National and International Programs as well as the responses to a questionnaire filled out by 100 EFL teachers.

Upon the examination of these writings, it becomes clear that Instant Messaging language appears in students' writing, and teachers have reservations towards its use by their students in their writing. Data suggest that teachers should raise students' awareness of this issue to help them effectively control and enhance the influence of Instant Messaging on their academic writing.

Keywords: texting, instant messaging, mobile communication, academic writing, cyber language

1. Introduction

The unfolding advances of communication technology, such as mobile phones, online gaming, text messaging and social media, bring new avenues of social contact and interaction. Understanding emerging, new dynamics of communication which surround these tools and technologies can provide us with essential pillars for the education of today's youth. Among these growing technologies, the cell phone and its text messaging capability has become popular, especially among teens (Thurlow, 2002).

In the recent years, the Internet has come to dominate our lives. E-mail, Instant Messaging and chat are rapidly replacing conventional forms of correspondence, and the Web has become the first port for both information enquiry and leisure activity. IM is a form of

Computer-Mediated Communication in which two people (or more) engage in a conversation through texting. Swartzlander (2010: vi) admits that "It is a language that has swept our world like a tsunami, in less than a decade." According to Craig (2003), Instant Messaging or IM

> is a technology which allows two individuals, who are separated by any distance, to engage in synchronous written communication. Like a phone call, it takes place in a real-time environment; however, its mode of operation relies solely on the written word to transmit meaning (p. 118).

For Crystal (2006), texting is a form of writing utilized to write a message to someone via a cell phone, Twitter, Facebook, or any other social networking site. Texting comes in many forms; some people spell every word out, which is not common due to the lack of space that most social networking sites and SMS functions allow. Other forms of texting include text messaging using numbers; words spelled phonetically, words with numbers in them, symbols, and sometimes using only the first letter of each word in order for someone to provide information to the receiver.

Some researchers (Thurlow, 2002; Crystal, 2008) classify Instant Messaging language based on some stylistic properties. According to Thurlow, the word 'stylistic' refers to "one way of speaking starts to seep into another" (2002, p. 127). Although they are by no means exhaustive, some of these marked properties involve the use of reductions and shortenings, non-standard spelling, acronyms and abbreviations, etc.

Plester, Wood, & Bell (2008) listed the most common abbreviated forms in texting: "cuL8r" instead of using "see you later" and "BCNU" instead of "be seeing you". It is worth noting that days and months are commonly abbreviated. Crystal (2008) argues that contractions are words with omitted middle letters, usually vowels, because consonants provide more information than vowels. Examples of omitting vowels are: "text - txt", "message – msg", "have – hav" and "homework – hmwrk". These habits exist regularly in the "Insta-communication" (Salem, 2013, p. 66).

It is evidenced in research that both native and non-native English speakers use abbreviated forms for many words like "cuz" for "because", "U" for "you", and many other commonly used words. This observation has led the researchers to investigate the existence of Instant Messaging language, 'Textism' or 'Netspeak', in teenagers' academic writing. Moreover, this new language is called the 'Cyber slang' (Instant Messaging Language/Internet Language), which is a term used to describe shortcuts, alternative words, or even symbols used to convey thoughts in an electronic document (Tomaszewski, 2011).

Since the present research deals with the language used in mobile text messaging, we used the term 'Instant Messaging', shortly 'IM,' to refer to any occurrence of this language.

Across the globe, SMS (Short Messaging Services), which includes Instant Messaging or texting, has increased in zealous popularity, especially among teens (Thurlow, 2002). For example, Gromik (2009) surveyed 745 students and found out that 322 sent 1 to 5 messages per day, 267 respondents sent 5 to 10 messages per day, and the remaining 156 respondents sent more than 10 messages per day. However, these results conflict with Thornton and Houser (2005), who reported that their students sent an average of 200 text messages per week. The researchers of the present study noticed that many of their students use Instant Messaging language in their writings, and accordingly thought that this habit might endanger their English.

The present research, thus, aims to investigate EFL students' use of Instant Messaging language at both national and international programs in some female schools in Jordan. Our aim was to find their English language teachers' attitude toward the use of Instant Messaging language in students' academic writing. Findings of the present study may suggest some pedagogical implications for both teachers and students. This study would help determine the extent to which Instant Messaging is interfering with academic school writing, and how it may be addressed. Teachers might help their students make appropriate use of Instant Messaging. The results of this study could also help increase awareness of the potential relationship between Instant Messaging and writing quality.

2. Literature review

2.1. Negative impact of Instant Messaging on language skills

Findings of some researchers showed that Instant Messaging negatively affects English language through the use of ungrammatical and incorrect forms, and could ruin standardized words which are essential in the English language. For example, Eller (2005) explored whether Instant Messaging has a positive or negative effect on the written language. She found that many Instant Messaging conversations, in personal and professional settings, use Internet slang and short hand. The interviews revealed that many high school instructors have seen Internet language in their students' written work. Eller observed that not all "texters" use complete sentences when they "talk" on IM.

In another study, Cingel and Sundar (2012) conducted a survey to test the association between text message usage of sixth, seventh and eighth grade students and their scores on an

offline, age-appropriate grammar assessment test. Results showed broad support for a general negative relationship between the use of techspeak in text messages and scores of grammar assessment.

Similarly, De Jonge & Kemp (2012) investigated the use of text-message abbreviations (*textisms*) in Australian adolescents and young adults, and relations between *textism* use and literacy abilities. The use of *textisms* was negatively correlated with scores for reading, non-word reading, spelling and morphological awareness, but some of these relationships were accounted for by participants' usual text-messaging frequency.

2.2. Positive impact of Instant Messaging on language skills

Many studies indicated that Instant Messaging has positive impact on students' language. For instance, Plester, Wood & Bell (2008) investigated the relationship between children's texting behaviour, their knowledge of text abbreviations and their school attainment in written language skills of 11-12-year old children. The findings showed positive correlations between the spelling ability and performance on the translation exercise, and group-based comparisons based on the children's writing scores also indicated that good writing attainment was associated with greater use of textisms. Overall, the findings suggest that children's knowledge of textisms is not associated with poor written language outcomes for children in this age range.

In another study, Mildren (2010) found a positive correlation between students who use text language in their school work and their ability to spell and write proper English, indicating that higher text use can have "a significant impact on their ability to spell and write correctly" (Mildren, 2010, p.30).

Similarly, Coe and Oakhill (2011) conducted a study to explore whether or not there is a relationship between children's reading ability and text-messaging behaviour. The aims of this study were to compare good and poor readers on their amount of usage of mobile phones, the frequency and type of text devices they used, and the speed at which they could read messages in 'text' versus those written in formal English. Ten- and eleven-year-olds completed three assessments: a questionnaire, two writing tasks and a reading task. The results showed that, overall, poor readers spent more minutes per day using their phones. Despite their less frequent use of phones, the good readers used more textisms in their written text message and were faster at reading all the messages.

By the same token, Durkin, Conti-Ramsden and Walker (2011) investigated the relationships among textism use, language and literacy skills of 17-year old adolescents.

Participants completed standardized assessments of cognitive, language and literacy abilities, had an interview about the frequency of their text messaging, and were asked to send a text message in reply to one sent by the experimenter. Correlational analyses revealed significant positive relationships among textism density, the number of types of textism used and measures of literacy in adolescence.

In 2011, Drouin examined reported frequency of text messaging, use of textese and literacy skills (reading accuracy, spelling and reading fluency) in a sample of American college students. Participants reported using text messaging, social networking sites and textese, and their frequency of textese use varied across contexts. Correlational analyses revealed significant positive relationships between text messaging frequency and literacy skills (spelling and reading fluency), with significant negative relationships between textese usage in certain contexts (on social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook and in emails to professors) and literacy (reading accuracy).

In the same year, Wood, Jackson, Hart, Plester & Wilde (2011) studied the impact of text messaging on 9 to 10-year-old children's literacy skills. One hundred and fourteen children who had never owned a mobile phone before were recruited and randomly allocated to either the "intervention" or "control" conditions. It was found that there were no significant differences between the two groups of children in terms of their literacy attainment during a 10-week period. However, within the mobile phone group, there was evidence that the use of text abbreviations was positively related to gains in literacy skills. The results showed that the children's use of textism when text messaging is positively related to improvement in literacy skills, especially spelling.

Using a mixed methods study that not only examines the conventions of digitalk, but also explores the impetus behind teens' language choice, Turner, Abrams, Donovan and Katic (2014) collected their data over the course of two years and three rounds of data collection. They investigated the digital language use of 81 adolescents (Grades 7-12) from urban and suburban, public and private schools in a large metropolitan area. The data revealed teens engaged in purposeful writing that may differ from standard written English, but, nonetheless, show an awareness of audience, efficiency in communication, expression of personal voice, and inclusion in a community of practice.

Two recent studies investigated the relationship between texting and writing ability, and both found positive relationships. Janin-Starr (2014) addressed the relationship between texting and writing among college students and explored students and professors' perceptions of the impact of texting on students' writing skills. Based on the results of 10 professor

interviews, 10 student interviews, and 105 online survey responses, it was concluded that there was no relationship between the frequency of texting and student performance on written examinations. There were statistically significant relationships between writing performance and four types of text messaging. Writing performance was higher for those who used formal words in text messaging and lower for those who used slang, symbols, and phone apps. Similarly, in her PhD dissertation titled "The effect of text messaging on formal writing in English", Tirotta (2015) found a statistically significant effect of nonstandard punctuation on test scores. The participants whose texts included missing commas and/or superfluous punctuation marks produced higher scores on the test. Participants with higher levels of grammatical skill may have an enhanced ability to "code switch" between formal writing and texting.

2.3. Attitudes toward Instant Messaging

Concerning attitudes toward the impact of Instant Messaging/texting on students' language, Crystal (2008) summarized some of the prophecies of the linguistic evils of text messaging for which, he claims, there is no supporting evidence. Some of these prophecies were:

- Texting uses new and nonstandard orthography.
- Texting will inevitably erode children's ability to spell, punctuate, and capitalize correctly – an ability already thought to be poor.
- They will inevitably transfer these new habits into the rest of their schoolwork.

(Crystal 2008: 151)

Some researchers were interested in exploring students and teachers' attitudes towards Instant Messaging. Few studies revealed that Instant Messaging has negative impact on students' language learning. For instance, Salem (2013) conducted interviews with 211 participants. The findings indicated that using these wrong shortcuts, which are used in BBM and WhatsApp, is fossilized and cannot be repaired through remedial practice. The results of the study also showed that using Instant Messaging has an adverse impact on English language learning inside the classroom. However, if linguists find a way to standardize the use of these shortcuts, it will be of great help for non-native speakers of English. This is because certain languages, such as Arabic, do not have the same sound system of English.

However, some researchers found positive attitudes toward Instant Messaging. For example, Tayebinik & Puteh (2012) examined undergraduate students' perspective on the use of abbreviations or textism in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and the impact of such practice on students' competence. The analysis of the semi-structured face-to-face

interview indicated effective factors in the use of textism as well as its impact on university students' English language proficiency. In a recent study, while investigating professors' perceptions of the impact of texting on students' writing skills, Janin-Starr (2014) found that most of the professors perceived texting as a valid form of communication, although some felt that texting had adversely affected students' writing ability. The students felt that texting could adversely affect someone's writing abilities. To minimize the potential negative effects of texting on students' writing skills, the author recommended that school administrators should continue policies related to bans on using cell phones during class times, and implement a policy that all text messages between students and professors should use formal language rather than slang, symbols, or phone apps. University professors are advised to make their cell phone usage policies clear to students in the course syllabi, and require formal language in text message communication without slang, symbols, or phone apps.

As far as the literature review is concerned, the majority of the studies conducted on Instant Messaging revealed its positive impact on language users' literacy skills, although some studies showed negative impact. It has also shown that Jordanian EFL learners are underrepresented in Instant Messaging research. Thus, the present research aims to fill this research gap.

3. Methodology

3.1. Aims of the study

These days, Instant Messaging language appears in most teenagers' academic writing, forgetting about the Standard English that they should use. Primarily, this study aims to analyze the use of Instant Messaging (Cyber Slang) among female teenagers in Jordan. It also aims to find out if there are any differences in the use of Instant Messaging language in national vs. international programs in private schools. Furthermore, the study investigates the attitudes of EFL female teachers towards the use of Instant Messaging language in Jordanian EFL female students' writing. More specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Does Instant Messaging language exist in Jordanian EFL female students' writing? What are the stylistic and linguistic properties of this language?
2. Are there any differences in the use of Instant Messaging language between students due to the program they are joining (national vs. international)?

3. What is the teachers' attitude toward the use of Instant Messaging language in their students' academic writing?

3.2. Data collection and analysis procedures

Two methods were used to answer the questions of the study. Students' writing samples were used to see if they use texting language, and Instant Messaging language found in their writing was analyzed. The second method was a teachers' survey used to measure the teachers' attitude toward texting in their EFL students' writings.

3.2.1. Setting and participants

The present research was conducted in selected private schools in the capital city of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. It is worth mentioning that Jordan offers various educational programs: the National Program (first grade to "Tawjihi" or 12th grade) and the International Programs (IGCSE / GCE and SAT). Public schools follow the National Program only while private schools offer their students either to follow the National Program or one of the International Programs (IGCSE / GCE and SAT).

The subjects of this study were 320 female students selected randomly according to their availability in four different schools in Amman. Their age range was between 13 and 17 years old. At the time of data collection, both groups had been studying English for 7 to 11 years. The National Program students had been studying all the school subjects in Arabic, their native language, while the International Program students had been studying all the school subjects in English, which is their second language.

As far as the second aim of the study is concerned, a questionnaire was prepared and distributed to 100 female EFL teachers in selected private schools in Amman, some of which were the 4 private schools from which the students' writing samples were collected. The purpose of the questionnaire was to find out the teachers' attitudes towards the use of Instant Messaging language in their students' writings (see Appendix for the very tool). The questionnaire was adapted from Mildren (2010) with some modifications to suit the purpose and context of the study. It was given to a jury of judges that consisted of three English language expert teachers and supervisors to check its validity. Their comments and notes were taken into consideration in rewriting the final draft of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.83, which makes it an acceptable measurement instrument.

3.2.2. Students' writing samples

The students were all asked to write personal letters to their friends or family members. The students' writings consisted of 15,200 words for the National Program students and 15,450 words for the International Program students. The writing samples were collected from 4 private schools in Amman, Jordan. 160 students were studying in a National Program and 160 students were studying in an International Program, IGCSE.

3.3. Data analysis

Taking into consideration that the main goal of this study was to explore and analyze the existence of Instant Messaging language in Jordanian EFL females' academic writing, the researchers analyzed the data quantitatively. The analysis included frequencies and percentages of Instant Messaging language, which was classified according to its stylistic properties, and its linguistic realization. The samples of students' writings were first collected, analyzed to find out any instances of Instant Messaging language, and categorized. Afterwards, we identified and contextually interpreted the linguistic items which seemed to serve the need of this study. Then, these instances were classified according to their stylistic properties and linguistic realization. The SPSS statistical software was used to analyze and find out if there are any significant differences in the use of Instant Messaging language among the students due to the program they are in (national vs. international). Since the second aim of the study was to measure the teachers' attitudes towards the use of Instant Messaging language in their EFL students' writings, the questionnaire data were analyzed quantitatively by showing frequencies, means and Standard Deviations.

4. Results

4.1. Types of Instant Messaging language according to their stylistic properties

The data collected and presented in Table 1 revealed that seven stylistic categories were found in students' writings.

Table 1. Stylistic properties of IM language of both groups.

Stylistic Properties	Examples	National Program		International Program	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1. Reductions and shortenings	U, ur, ok	119	47.41%	114	42.70%

2. Non-standard spelling	Luv	44	17.53%	37	13.86%
3. Pictograms and logograms	xoxo	36	14.34%	34	12.73%
4. Acronyms and abbreviations composed of initials	OMG, LOL	12	4.78%	32	11.98%
5. Word Combination	gonna	14	5.58%	30	11.24%
6. Emoticons	:) ,):	22	8.77%	17	6.37%
7. Single digits can replace words	'2' for 'to'	4	1.59%	3	1.12%
Total		**251**	**100%**	**267**	**100%**

Table 1 shows that one of the most significant findings is that both groups (National vs. International) used an almost equal number of features of Instant Messaging language, 251 and 267, respectively. Another significant conclusion evident in Table 1 is that reductions and shortenings (e.g. 'u' for 'you' and 'r' for 'are') ranked first in both groups, 47.41% in the National Program and 42.70% in the International Program, followed by non-standard spelling (e.g. 'luv' and 'ya') with 17.53% in the National Program and 13.86% in the International Program. Another significant finding is that the International Program students recorded many more acronyms and abbreviations (e.g. 'btw' and 'idk'), and word combination (e.g. 'gonna' and 'wanna') than the National Program students. However, the table shows that the "Single digits can replace words" category was the least used stylistic category with the percentage of 1.59% in the National Program and 1.12% in the International Program.

Reductions and shortenings

Table 2 shows reductions and shortenings, which were the most frequently used IM category. As evidenced in Table 2, both groups (National and International) recorded an almost equal number of IM instances in their writing task, 119 and 114, respectively. However, there are some differences in the use of individual IM language. For example, the National Program students registered more instances of 'u' (66) than the International Program students, accounting for 55.46%. However, it is noticed that 'ur' and 'ok' were used more often by the International Program students. Another significant finding is that the National Program students did not use some IM language items, such as "b-day" instead of "birthday", while such IM language items were used by the International Program students.

Table 2. Reductions and shortenings according to educational system (National vs. International Programs).

Words in full	Instance	National		International	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
You	U	66	55.46	44	38.60
Your	ur	10	8.42	13	11.40
Okay	ok	5	4.20	9	7.90
Are	r	6	5.04	5	4.39
Please	Plz	3	2.52	5	4.39
Thanks	Thnx	3	2.52	2	1.75
Sister	Sis	2	1.68	3	2.63
People	Ppl	1	0.84	0	0.00
Listen	Lsn	1	0.84	2	1.75
Brother	Bro	1	0.84	3	2.63
University	Uni	1	0.84	0	0.00
Birthday	b-day	0	0.00	3	2.63
Something	Sth	6	5.04	4	3.51
Good	Gd	5	4.20	0	0.00
Because	cuz/cause	8	6.72	9	7.90
Doing	doin’	1	0.84	3	2.63
Going	goin’	0	0.00	2	1.75
Joking	jokin’	0	0.00	4	3.51
Honey	Hun	0	0.00	2	1.75
Favourite	fav.	0	0.00	1	0.88
Total		**119**	**100%**	**114**	**100%**

Non-standard spelling

Table 3 shows the non-standard spelling used by teens in their writing tasks. As seen in Table 3, both groups (National and International) recorded an unequal number of IM instances in their writing tasks, 16 and 37, respectively. For example, the International Program students recorded more instances of ‘hey’ (30) than the National Program students, accounting for 81.08%. However, it is noticed that ‘luv’ was used by the National Program students, 12.50%; whereas it was not used at all by the International Program students. Another significant finding is that the National Program students did not use some IM language items, such as “yeah” instead of “yes”, while such IM language items were used by the International Program students with the percentage of 5.41%.

Table 3. Non-standard spelling according to educational system (National vs. International Programs).

Words in full	Instance	National		International	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Love	Luv	2	12.50%	0	0.00%
Yes	yeah	0	0.00%	2	5.41%
You	Ya	4	25.0%	5	13.51%
Hi/ hello	Hey	10	62.50%	30	81.08%
Total		**16**	**100%**	**37**	**100%**

Pictograms and logograms

Table 4 shows the pictograms and logograms used by teens in their writing tasks. As shown in Table 4, both groups (National and International) recorded an almost equal number of IM instances in their writing tasks, 36 and 34, respectively. For example, the International Program students recorded more instances of "<3" (27) than the National Program students, who recorded (26) instances. However, it is noticed that "xoxo" was used by the National Program students (27.78%) more than the International Program students (20.59%).

Table 4. Pictograms and logograms according to educational system (National vs. International Programs).

Words in full	Instance	National		International	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
A heart	<3	26	72.22%	27	79.41%
Hugs & kisses	Xoxo	10	27.78%	7	20.59%
Total		**36**	**100%**	**34**	**100%**

Acronyms and abbreviations composed of initials

Table 5 below shows the acronyms and abbreviations composed of initials used by both National and International Program students in their writing tasks. As noticed in Table 5, both groups (National and International) recorded an unequal number of IM instances in their writing tasks, 12 and 32, respectively. For example, the International Program students used instances of "OMG" with the percentage of 40.63%, "JK" and "ttyl" with the percentage of 3.12% for each; whereas these instances were not used at all by the National Program students in their writing tasks.

On the other hand, the instances "asap", "ik" and ""tc" were used by the National Program students with the percentage of 8.33% each, while it is noticed that these instances were not used by the International Program students at all.

Another significant finding is that the National Program students used the instance "btw" instead of "by the way" with the percentage of 50%, which is the highest percentage among other instances, while it is shown in the results that the instance "btw" prevailed with a percentage of only 21.88% in the International Program students' writings.

Table 5. Acronyms and abbreviations composed of initials according to educational system (National vs. International Programs).

Words in full	Instance	National		International	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
By the way	Btw	6	50.00%	7	21.88%
I don't know	Idk	2	16.68%	4	12.50%
Laugh out loud	LOL	1	8.33%	6	18.75%
As soon as possible	Asap	1	8.33%	0	0.00%
I know	Ik	1	8.33%	0	0.00%
Just kidding	JK	0	0.00%	1	3.12%
Talk to you later	Ttyl	0	0.00%	1	3.12%
Take care	Tc	1	8.33%	0	0.00%
Oh my God	OMG	0	0.00%	13	40.63%
Total		**12**	**100%**	**32**	**100%**

Emoticons

The data revealed a total of 39 instances of smileys. The National Program students registered 22, while the International IGCSE students registered 17 instances.

Single digits can replace words

In their writing tasks, it is noticed that teens replaced words with a single digit such as "2" instead of "to". The data showed that the National Program students used the instance "2" four times, whereas the same instance, "2", was used 3 times by the International Program students.

Word combination

One of the most significant findings evidenced in Table 6 is that the students in the International Program used word combination more than the students in the National Program, 30 and 14, respectively. Another significant feature visible in Table 6 is that the instance "gonna" ranked first in both groups, 50.00% in the National Program and 46.66% in the International Program, followed by the instance "wanna" with 42.86% in the National

Program and 33.33% in the International Program. It is noticed that the forms "wassup", "gotta" and "dunno" were used with the percentage 6.67% for each of them by the International Program students; however, they were not used at all by the National Program students.

Table 6. Word combination according to educational system (National vs. International Programs).

Words in full	Instance	National		International	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Going to	gonna	7	50.00%	14	46.66%
Want to	wanna	6	42.86%	10	33.33%
Kind of	kinda	1	7.14%	0	0.00%
What's up	wassup	0	0.00%	2	6.67%
Got to	gotta	0	0.00%	2	6.67%
Don't know	dunno	0	0.00%	2	6.67%
Total		**14**	**100%**	**30**	**100%**

4.2. Types of Instant Messaging language according to their linguistic realization (parts of speech).

Some researchers categorized IM language according to their linguistic realization or part of speech. Such language can be categorized into verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc. Table 7 shows the major linguistic realizations of the IM language found in the data.

Table 7. Major categories of the linguistic realization of Instant Messaging language.

Words in full	Examples	National		International	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Nouns	'luv' for 'love'	7	3.14%	9	3.37%
Verbs	'gonna' for 'going to'	23	10.31%	50	18.73%
Adjectives	'gd' for 'good'	10	4.48%	12	4.49%
Adverbs	'btw' for 'by the way'	7	3.14%	7	2.62%
Pronouns	'u' for 'you'	86	38.57%	66	24.72%
Interjections	'OMG' for 'Oh My God'	16	7.18%	52	19.48%
Conjunctions	'cuz' for 'because'	8	3.59%	9	3.37%
Prepositions	'2' for 'to'	4	1.79%	3	1.12%
Others	'Ik' for 'I know' 'Jk' for Just Kidding' 'xoxo' for 'hugs and kisses'	62	27.80%	59	22.10%
Total		**223**	**100%**	**267**	**100%**

Table 7 shows that the most used linguistic categories were pronouns, verbs and interjections, with the percentages of 38.57%, 10.31% and 7.18% by the National Program students and 24.72%, 18.73% and 19.48% by the International Program students, respectively. Another significant observation was that a total of 121 IM language instances could not be classified into any of the linguistic categories, which were classified under others. The least used linguistic category was prepositions with the percentages 1.79% in the National Program and 1.12% in the International Program writing tasks. It was also noticed that the National Program students used IM language to write pronouns more than the students of the International Program with the percentages 38.57% and 24.72%, respectively.

Nouns

Table 8 shows nouns which were used by the participants of this study. As noticed in Table 8, both groups of students (National and International) recorded an almost equal number of nouns in their writing tasks, 7 and 9, respectively. However, there are some differences in the use of the nouns. For example, the International Program students registered more instances of 'sis' 33.33% than the National Program students, accounting for 28.56%. However, it is noticed that "luv", "ppl" and "uni" were used more by the National Program students than the International Program students, who did not use these instances at all. Another significant finding is that the International Program students used the instance "b-day" instead of "birthday" with the percentage 33.33%, while such a form was not used by the National Program students at all.

Table 8. Nouns according to educational system (National vs. International Programs).

Words in full	**Instance**	**National**		**International**	
		Freq.	**%**	**Freq.**	**%**
Love	Luv	2	28.56%	0	0.00%
Sister	Sis	2	28.56%	3	33.33%
People	Ppl	1	14.29%	0	0.00%
Brother	Bro	1	14.29%	3	33.33%
University	Uni	1	14.29%	0	0.00%
Birthday	b-day	0	0.00%	3	33.33%
Total		**7**	**9.99%**	9	**99.9%**

Verbs

One of the most significant findings in Table 9 is that the students in the International Program used the IM Verbs more than the students in the National Program, 50 and 23,

respectively. Another significant observation is that the instance "gonna" ranked first in both groups, 30.42% in the National Program and 28.00% in the International Program, followed by the instance "wanna" with 26.09% in the National Program and 20.00% in the International Program. It is noticed that the instance "tc" was used with the percentage 4.35% by the National Program students; however, it was not used at all by the International Program students.

Table 9. Verbs according to educational system (National vs. International Programs).

Words in full	Instance	National		International	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Going to	Gonna	7	30.42%	14	28.00%
Want to	Wanna	6	26.09%	10	20.00%
Are	R	6	26.09%	5	10.00%
Doing	doin'	1	4.35%	3	6.00%
Listen	Lsn	1	4.35%	2	4.00%
Got to	Gotta	0	0.00%	2	4.00%
Don't know	Dunno	0	0.00%	2	4.00%
Going	goin'	0	0.00%	2	4.00%
Joking	jokin'	0	0.00%	4	8.00%
Take care	Tc	1	4.35%	0	0.00%
Laugh out loud	LOL	1	4.35%	6	12.00%
Total		**23**	**100%**	**50**	**100%**

Adjectives

One of the most significant findings in Table 10 is that the students in the International Program almost used the same number of instances of adjectives as the students in the National Program, 12 and 10, in that order. Another significant observation is that the form "ok" ranked first in the International Program, 75.00%, whereas "gd" and "ok" were used with the same percentage in the National Program, 50.00% for each of them. It is also noticed that the instance "gd", which was used with the percentage 50.00% by the National Program students, was not used at all by the International Program students. Finally, as Table 10 shows, the instances "hun." and "fav." were used by the International Program students with the percentages 16.67% and 8.33%, respectively; however, they were not used by the National Program students at all.

Table 10. Adjectives according to educational system (National vs. International Programs).

Words in full	Instance	National		International	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Good	Gd	5	50.00%	0	0.00%
Honey	Hun	0	0.00%	2	16.67%
Favourite	fav.	0	0.00%	1	8.33%
Okay	Ok	5	50.00%	9	75.00%
Total		**10**	**100%**	**12**	**100%**

Adverbs

As shown in Table 11, the International Program students used the instance "btw", 7 times, but they did not use the instance "asap" at all. On the other hand, the National Program students used both instances "btw" and "asap" with the percentages 85.71% and 14.29%, respectively.

Table 11. Adverbs according to educational system (National vs. International Programs).

Words in full	Instance	National		International	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
By the way	Btw	6	85.71%	7	100.00%
As soon as possible	asap	1	14.29%	0	0.00%
Total		**7**	**100%**	**7**	**100%**

Pronouns

One of the most significant findings evidenced in Table 12 is that the students in the National Program used pronouns more than the students in the International Program, 86 and 66, in that order. Another significant observation is that the instance "u" ranked first in the International Program and the National Program, 66.66% and 76.74%, respectively, whereas the instance "sth" ranked the last in the International Program with the percentage 6.06% and "ya" ranked the last in the National Program with the percentage 4.65%.

Table 12. Pronouns according to educational system (National vs. International Programs).

Words in full	Instance	National		International	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
You	U	66	76.74%	44	66.66%
Your	Ur	10	11.63%	13	19.70%
Something	Sth	6	6.98%	4	6.06%
You	Ya	4	4.65%	5	7.58%
Total		**86**	**100%**	**66**	**100%**

Interjections

Table 13 shows that the students in the International Program used the linguistic category "Interjections" more than the students in the National Program, 52 and 16, respectively. Another significant feature in Table 13 is that the instance “hey” ranked first in both groups, 57.69% in the International Program and 62.50% in the National Program. Furthermore, Table 13 shows that the instances “OMG” and “yeah” were used with the percentages 25.00% and 3.85%, respectively, by the teens in the International Program, whereas these instances were not used at all by the teens in the National Program. Finally, it is worth noting that the very commonly used instance “thnx”, which was used instead of “thanks”, got the percentages 3.85% in the International Program whereas it got the percentage 18.75% in the National Program. We should admit that no explanation can be offered regarding this point.

Table 13. Interjections according to educational system (National vs. International Programs).

Words in full	**Instance**	**National**		**International**	
		Freq.	**%**	**Freq.**	**%**
Oh my God	OMG	0	0.00%	13	25.00%
Yes	Yeah	0	0.00%	2	3.85%
Please	Plz	3	18.75%	5	9.61%
Hi/ hello	Hey	10	62.50%	30	57.69%
Thanks	Thnx	3	18.75%	2	3.85%
Total		**16**	**100%**	**52**	**100%**

Conjunctions

The data showed that the National Program students used the instance “cuz/cause” eight times, whereas the same instance was used nine times by the International Program students.

Prepositions

Another linguistic category used by the participants in this study are prepositions, which were represented by numbers, such as “2” instead of “to”. As mentioned previously, the data showed that the National Program students used the instance “2” four times, whereas the same instance, “2”, was used three times by the International Program students.

Other Instant Messaging expressions

Finally, Table 14 shows some instances that were classified as “Other IM Expressions”, such as “xoxo” instead of “Hugs and Kisses” and “Idk” instead of “I don’t know”. One of the most

significant findings visible in Table 14 is that the instance "<3", which was used instead of "a heart", ranked the first in both groups, 41.94% in the National Program and 45.76% in the International Program. Added to that, the use of emoticons got the second rank with 35.48% in the National Program and 28.81% in the International Program. Another significant feature in Table 14 is that the instances "kinda" and "ik" were only used by the students in the National Program with the percentages 1.61% for each of them; however, the instances "wassup", "JK" and "ttyl" were only used by the students in the International Program.

Table 14. Other Instant Messaging expressions according to educational system (National vs. International Programs).

Words in full	**Instance**	**National**		**International**	
		Freq.	**%**	**Freq.**	**%**
A heart	<3	26	41.94%	27	45.76%
Emoticons	Smiley	22	35.48%	17	28.81%
Hugs & kisses	Xoxo	10	16.13%	7	11.86%
I don't know	Idk	2	3.23%	4	6.78%
Kind of	Kinda	1	1.61%	0	0.00%
What's up	Wassup	0	0.00%	2	3.39%
I know	Ik	1	1.61%	0	0.00%
Just kidding	JK	0	0.00%	1	1.70%
Talk to you later	Ttyl	0	0.00%	1	1.70%
Total		**62**	**100%**	**59**	**100%**

4.3. Results related to the teachers' attitudes toward Instant Messaging language

4.3.1. Teachers' attitudes

Table 15. Question 1. What are your thoughts regarding the possible use of text messages by the school and/or teachers?

Questionnaire item		**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Rank**
1. It would be helpful to get emergency messages from the school (i.e. closures or cancellation of sports)	**F**	0	5	35	60	**3.33**	**.59**	**1**
	%	0	5%	35%	60%			
2. It would be helpful to send assignments or input relating to course work to students.	**F**	11	44	36	9	**2.43**	**.81**	**3**
	%	11%	44%	36%	9%			
3. I want to have cell phone numbers for my students.	**F**	4	42	35	19	**2.69**	**.83**	**2**
	%	4%	42%	35%	19%			

4. I would be open to utilizing text messaging during class time to incorporate technology into the lessons and teach language surrounding its use.	**F**	15	57	28	0	**2.13**	**.65**	**4**
	%	15%	57%	28%	0%			
5. I think it is appropriate.	**F**	0	19	61	20	**1.99**	**.63**	**5**
	%	0%	19%	61%	20%			

The results above reveal that a combined total of 95% of the participants agree that it would be helpful to get emergency messages from the school, while only 5% expressed disagreement. This statement gained a mean of 3.33 with a standard deviation of 0.59.

When prompted with the statement "It would be helpful to send assignments or input relating to course work to students", 36% agreed and only 9% strongly agreed, while 44% disagreed and only 11% strongly disagreed. This indicates that more than half of the participants feel that sending assignments via text messages is not helpful.

As a response to the statement "I want to have cell phone numbers for my students", 19% strongly agreed, 35% agreed, while 42% disagreed and only 4% strongly disagreed. This statement recorded a mean of 2.69 with a standard deviation of 0.83. Therefore, it can be inferred that having cell phone numbers for the students fails to match approval of the majority of the teachers, but obtains the approval of some.

With regard to whether teachers would be open to utilizing text messaging during class time to incorporate technology into the lessons, the majority of the participants (72%) disagreed with the statement. On the other hand, 28% of the participants agreed with this statement, while none of the participants strongly agreed. The mean gained by this statement is 2.13 with a standard deviation of 0.65. Finally, as a response to the statement "I think it is appropriate", a combined total of 81% of the participants agreed with using text messaging, whereas only 19% expressed disagreement.

Table 16. Question 2. What are your thoughts about the use of text messaging by teens?

Questionnaire item		**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Rank**
1. I think it is fine; there is nothing wrong with it.	F	3	38	44	15	2.70	.76	2
	%	3%	38%	44%	15%			
2. I think that it is overused.	F	0	21	49	30	3.09	.71	1
	%	0%	21%	49%	30%			
3. I think the abbreviated language that teens use	F	16	54	25	5	2.19	.76	5

in text messaging significantly affects their ability to spell and write proper English.	%	16%	54%	25%	5%			
4. I think that it affects teens' ability to communicate and write.	F	9	29	49	13	2.66	.82	3
	%	9%	29%	49%	13%			
5. I think it is a waste of time.	F	23	46	31	0	2.08	.73	6
	%	23%	46%	31%	0%			
6. I think teens should use text messaging.	F	4	39	44	13	2.34	.76	4
	%	4%	39%	44%	13%			

As can be seen Table 16 which shows the teachers' thoughts about the use of text messaging by teens, 15% of the respondents strongly agreed and 44% agreed with using text messaging by teens. Meanwhile, only 3% strongly disagreed and 38% disagreed with the statement regarding the use of text messaging by teens. This statement scored a mean of 2.70 with a standard deviation of 0.76.

With regard to the statement "I think that it is overused", the majority of the participants supported the statement that text messaging is overused by teens. 30% of the participants strongly agreed, and 49% agreed, while only 21% disagreed and none of the participants strongly disagreed. This statement obtained a mean of 3.09 with a standard deviation of 0.71.

In terms of the abbreviated language, a combined total of 30% of the participants agreed that the abbreviated language that teens use in text messaging significantly affects their ability to spell and write proper English, whereas a combined total of 70% of the participants disagreed, implying that IM does not negatively affect the students' spelling and proper English writing. This statement recorded a mean of 2.19 with a standard deviation of 0.76.

Moreover, 49% agreed and 13% strongly agreed that text messaging affects teens' ability to communicate and write, while the percentage of the participants who disagreed with this statement is 29% compared to 9% who strongly disagreed, making a total of 38%.

When prompted with the statement "I think it is a waste of time", only 31% agreed and 0% strongly agreed, while 46% disagreed and 23% strongly disagreed. This indicates that more than half of the participants feel that text messaging is not a waste of time.

Finally, 39% of the participants disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed that teens should use text messaging; however, a combined total of 57% of the participants supported the use of text messaging by teens.

Table 17. Question 3. What do you do when you see Instant Messaging language in your students' in-class or assignment writing?

Questionnaire item		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD	Rank
1. I allow my students to use the Instant Messaging language in their writing tasks.	F	8	54	35	3	2.33	.67	1
	%	8%	54%	35%	3%			
1. When I find Instant Messaging language in my students' writing, I mark them correct.	F	8	56	31	5	2.33	.70	1
	%	8%	56%	31%	5%			
2. When I find Instant Messaging language in my students' writing, I warn them against using them a second time.	F	4	40	49	7	2.59	.68	2
	%	4%	40%	49%	7%			

The results in Table 17 reveal that a combined total of 62% of the participants disagreed with the statement "I allow my students to use the Instant Messaging language in their writing tasks", while only 3% of the participants strongly agreed and 35% agreed. This statement obtained a mean of 2.33 with a standard deviation of 0.67.

Also, 8% of the participants strongly disagreed and 56% disagreed with the statement "When I find Instant Messaging language in my students' writing, I mark them correct"; however, the percentage of the participants who agreed with this statement is 5% strongly agree and 31% agree, making a total of 36%. This statement obtained a mean of 2.33 with a standard deviation of 0.70.

As a final point, the item "When I find Instant Messaging language in my students' writing, I warn them against using them a second time" got the highest mean (2.59) with a standard deviation of 0.68. In fact, a combined total of 44% of the participants disagreed and 56% agreed to warn the students when they find Instant Messaging language in their writing.

Question 4: How often do you see "text language" in students' school work or tests?

With regard to this question, the majority of the participants (49) occasionally see Instant Messaging, 25 participants regularly see it, 16 participants rarely see Instant Messaging and 10 participants don't know how often they see it in their students' work. This item got a mean of 2.47 with a standard deviation of 0.88.

Tables 18 and 19. Answers to Question 4.

Item	I don't know	Rarely	Occasionally	Regularly
How often do you see "text language" in students' school work or tests?	10	16	49	25

Item	Mean	SD
How often have you seen "text language" show up in students' school work or on tests in class?	2.47	.88

Tables 19 and 20. Question 5: To what degree do you think students are able to identify the difference and make the "switch" between language for text messaging (informal) and what is necessary for work in school (formal)?

Item	Rarely	Occasionally	Usually	Always
To what degree do you think students are able to identify the difference and make the "switch" between language for text messaging (informal) and what is necessary for work in school (formal)?	10	16	49	25

With respect to the statement "To what degree do you think students are able to identify the difference and make the "switch" between language for text messaging (informal) and what is necessary for work in school (formal)", 49% thought that students are usually able to do so, 25 participants believed they are always able to do so, while 16 and 10 participants claimed that students are occasionally and rarely able to do so, respectively. This item got a mean of 2.65 with a standard deviation of 0.97.

Item	Mean	SD
To what degree do you think students are able to identify the difference and make the "switch" between language for text messaging (informal) and what is necessary for work in school (formal)?	2.65	.97

5. Discussion

Instant Messaging language has become the norm for many students. The findings of this study show that it occasionally exists in Jordanian EFL female students' writings, both in the International Program (IGCSE) and the National Program (Ministry of Education Curriculum), with the majority of instances used by those enrolled in the International Program. This is consistent with the findings of Eller's (2005) study, in which she indicated that many high school instructors have seen Instant Messaging language in their students' written work.

The study also demonstrates that the most used linguistic categories were pronouns, verbs and interjections. Furthermore, it revealed that seven stylistic categories were found in students' writings. In both groups, reductions and shortenings ranked first, followed by "Non-

standard spelling" while the "Single digits can replace words" category was the least used stylistic category in the two programs. Similarly, features including abbreviations and shorthand as well as frequent negligence of the grammatical rules and punctuation were among the many aspects that several researchers revealed in their studies (e.g., Eller, 2005; Plester et al., 2008; Wood, Jackson, Hart, Plester & Wilde, 2011; De Jonge & Kemp, 2012).

The results of the study also indicate that both groups (National and International Program students), due to the program they are joining, sometimes employed an unequal number of IM instances in their writing tasks, while in other cases some IM language items were used almost equally. This indicates that the program does not have a significant impact of the use of Instant Messaging language.

Regarding the teachers' attitudes toward the use of Instant Messaging language in their students' academic writing, the collected data showed, similarly to Salem's (2013) study, that the majority of teachers support the use of text messaging by students only outside the classroom, indicating that they do not allow their students to use the Instant Messaging language in their English writing tasks. In their response to "I think the abbreviated language that teens use in text messaging significantly affects their ability to spell and write proper English" the majority of the teachers (70%) disagreed, implying that Instant Messaging has a positive impact on the students' spelling and proper writing. This result lends support to previous research which found positive impact on students' language skills, and their positive attitude toward using IM in academic writing (Durkin, Conti-Ramsden and Walker, 2011; Wood, Jackson, Hart, Plester, & Wilde, 2011; Tirotta, 2015).

On the other hand, the majority of the sample were not in favor of using Instant Messaging in their students' academic writing, and they thought that using Instant Messaging has an adverse impact on English language learning inside the classroom (Salem, 2013). This opposition of the use of textese in the classroom is also supported by evidence that IM language affects teens' ability to communicate and write (Eller, 2005; De Jonge & Kemp, 2012).

This study, just like some previous research (Mildren, 2010; Turner et al., 2014), found a positive correlation between students' ability to use text language in their school work, and make the "switch" between language for text messaging (informal), and what is necessary for work at school (formal). This implies that students can easily switch from the informal to the formal. With such empirical evidence, the mainstream of researchers (e.g. Wood, Jackson, Hart, Plester, & Wilde, 2011; Coe and Oakhill, 2011; Janin-Starr, 2014) emphasized the lack of threat imposed by the use of textism on students' English language

proficiency. The present study concludes that Instant Messaging in general and the abbreviated language that teens use in text messaging in particular do not pose a threat to their ability to spell and write proper English.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study could help increase the awareness of the potential relationship between Instant Messaging and writing, as well as determine the extent to which Instant Messaging interferes with academic school writing. Some unanswered questions have been exposed in this endeavor, such as the English language teachers' attitudes toward the use of the Instant Messaging language in the academic writing of their students.

However, the question arises what tools might help teachers to effectively prevent students from using Instant Messaging language inappropriately. Classroom awareness and instruction would help students effectively control or enhance the influence of Instant Messaging on their academic writing through the efficient utilization of mini lessons as well as evaluation and execution of various steps of the writing processes to improve students' written work. This remedial work would target the most common mistakes made by students who text regularly and help them improve their writing quickly and efficiently. It would be beneficial for all students to know the impact or potential influence of Instant Messaging on their writing skills, and teachers should discuss this phenomenon to help all students be aware of it.

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Appendix. Teachers' Questionnaire

Question 1. What are your thoughts regarding the possible use of text messages by the school and/or teachers? Tick the most appropriate box.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. It would be helpful to get emergency messages from the school (i.e. closures or cancellation of sports)				
2. It would be helpful to send assignments or input relating to course work to students.				
3. I want to have cell phone numbers for my students.				
4. I would be open to utilizing text messaging during class time to incorporate technology into the lessons and teach language surrounding its use.				
5. I do not think it is appropriate at all.				

Question 2. What are your thoughts about the use of text messaging by teens? Tick the most appropriate box.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I think it is fine; there is nothing wrong with it.				
2. I think that it is overused.				
3. I think the abbreviated language that teens use in text messaging significantly affects their ability to spell and write proper English.				
4. I think that it affects teens' ability to communicate and write.				
5. I think it is a waste of time.				
6. I do not think teens should use text messaging.				

Question 3. What do you do when you see Instant Messaging language in your students' in-class or assignment writing?

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I allow my students to use the Instant Messaging language in their writing tasks.				
2. When I find Instant Messaging language in my students' writing, I mark them correct.				
3. When I find Instant Messaging language in my students' writing, I warn them against using them a second time.				

4- How often do you see "text language" in students' school work or tests? (Tick one)
1 = Regularly 2 = Occasionally 3 = Rarely 4 = I don't know

5- To what degree do you think students are able to identify the difference and make the "switch" between language for text messaging (informal) and what is necessary for work in school (formal)? (Tick one)
1 = Always 2 = Usually 3 = Occasionally 4 = Rarely