

“Where Are You?” The Communicative Functions of Saudi Students’ Text Messaging

Rafat M. Al Rousan¹, Noor Hashima binti Abdul Aziz² & Anne Christopher²

¹ Department of Applied Linguistics, Yanbu University College, Yanbu Industrial City, Saudi Arabia

² School of Education & Modern Languages, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Malaysia

Correspondence: Rafat M. Al Rousan, Department of Applied Linguistics, Yanbu University College, Yanbu Industrial City 51000, P.O. Box 31387, Saudi Arabia. Tel: 966-599-139-272. E-mail: ralrous1@gmail.com

Received: March 2, 2014 Accepted: April 16, 2014 Online Published: May 27, 2014

doi:10.5539/ijel.v4n3p23

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v4n3p23>

Abstract

The widespread use of the mobile phone service has greatly contributed to the proliferation of text messaging, particularly among young people. The main objective of this study is to examine the communicative functions of the text messaging of young Saudi university students. Thurlow’s (2003) theoretical framework is used in this study. The study has a straightforward research question: What are the communicative functions of young Saudi students’ text messaging? 750 text messages were collected from the participants. The data collected were coded based on their communicative functions. Five main categories of communicative functions emerged from the data, namely friendship maintenance, socialization, school collaboration, coordination, and exchange of information. The findings of the present study corroborate previous findings about communicative functions in text messaging.

Keywords: communicative functions, text messaging, Saudi students

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The world has been witnessing a huge revolution in the use of mobile phones. The widespread use of the mobile phone service has greatly contributed to the proliferation of text messaging, particularly among young people, sent via Short Messaging Service (SMS) (Klimsa, Ispandriarno, Sasinska-Klas, Döring, & Hellwig, 2006). It is the most popular and preferred method of contact among young people. Researchers show that text messaging has become an inseparable part of young people’s everyday life (Grinter & Eldridge, 2001; Klimsa et al., 2006; Thurlow, 2003), who use it for a variety of functions, ranging from keeping in touch to discussing school topics.

Young people are so attached to their mobile phones because they provide them with the sense of connectivity via voice calls and text messaging. Nowadays, they are using different available phone applications that offer them free text messaging such as BBM and Whatsapp, which have contributed immensely to the widespread use of text messaging. Young people are referred to as the “Mobile Phone Generation” (Reid & Reid, 2004), “Generation Txt” (Thurlow, 2003), “Generation SMS” (Bosco, 2007; Klimsa et al., 2006), “Generation Y” (Koutras, 2006), and “Digital Natives” (Prensky, 2001).

The communicative functions of text messaging have been widely studied in the western culture, but it remains neglected in the Arab world. The present study attempts to examine the communicative functions of text messaging in an Arab setting, particularly the Saudi setting.

1.2 What is Text Messaging?

Text messaging or SMS is a “a service that enables its users to send short text messages to one mobile phone from another, or to a mobile phone via the internet” (Hård af Segerstad, 2002, p. 68). The abbreviation SMS formally stands for “short text messaging” (Baron, 2003), or “Short message service” (Hård af Segerstad, 2002). In much of the western literature into texting, the term SMS is also used to describe both the medium and the messages (Kasesniemi & Rautianen, 2002). Text messages are limited to a small number of characters, encouraging the use of abbreviations, shortenings and other shortcuts in the language used in text messaging. For instance, text messaging is limited to 160 characters for Latin alphabets and to 70 characters for non-Latin

alphabets such as Arabic and Chinese. The terms “Text messaging” and “SMS” are used interchangeably in this study.

1.3 Statement of the Research

The widespread use of the mobile phone and its sister technology, text messaging has motivated many researchers to study its social impact on people, its language, and its use among people, particularly young people. Several studies on the use of text messaging by young people have been carried out in a western context and have mainly focused on specialized topics. Battestini, Setlur, and Sohn (2010) pointed out that there are clear differences in the use of text messaging around the globe, and a number of researches have been carried out in countries such as Germany, Finland, Norway, United Kingdom, Sweden, and Japan. However, the study of the use of text messaging in the Arab world in general, and in Saudi Arabia in particular, remains neglected to a certain level. The lack of such research inspired the researcher to conduct this study in a different country with a different language and culture. Thus, this study serves to fill in a gap in the related literature.

1.4 Objective and Research Question

The main objective of this study is to explore the communicative functions in the text messaging of young Saudi undergraduate students. As such, the present study has a straightforward research question: What are the communicative functions of young Saudi undergraduate students text messaging?

2. Related Literature

This section reviews the literature related to the study of communicative functions of text messaging. It discusses why young people prefer text messaging and what communicative functions they use it for.

2.1 Why Do Young People Use Text Messaging?

Although the mobile phone was invented in the 1970s, it was not until the beginning of this century that the power of the mobile phone became very clear (Vykoukalova, 2007). It has become an indispensable part of people's lives all over the world, and its amazing penetration is still growing. Texting is the preferred form of mediated interaction among young people, specifically youth, surpassing all other kinds of computer-mediated communication such as instant messaging, e-mail, voice mobile telephony and even land-line phones (Ling, 2005). Their low cost, their smaller size, their personal and private nature, and the introduction of the pre-paid phone cards have contributed significantly to the rapid adoption rate by young people (Faulkner & Culwin, 2005; Ling, 2005, 2008).

The mobile phone is a significant social and cultural phenomenon which is highly symbolic for boys and girls alike since it represents reachability and popularity (Klimsa et al., 2006). SMS is particularly popular among young people who often have a very strong emotional attachment with their mobile phones. They regard it as an extension of oneself, making statements such as “It's part of me” (Oksman & Rautiainen, 2004); “I have my life on the top of my hand” (Lorente, 2002, p. 4); or “your mobile is like your shoes” (Wei, 2007, p. 11). This emotional attachment results from the fact that this technology offers young people something extraordinary that other modes of communication do not. Taylor and Harper (2003) stated that mobile phones and text messaging are “a manifestation and a reflection of deeply rooted needs in these social relationships, needs that have to do with the system of reciprocity and social solidarity.” (p. 268)

Youths' interest in the mobile phone often originates from peer pressure (Boneva, Quinn, Kraut, Kiesler & Shklovski, 2006; Geser, 2004; Klimsa et al., 2006; Thurlow, 2003). Peer-based connectedness is very significant for adolescents (Boneva et al., 2006). As one adolescent reported: “If you don't use the technology, you are not part of the group”, and he also said that: “If you are not a name or a number in my phone book, then you're not on my radar screen” (Grinter & Eldridge, 2001). Teenagers usually have a higher number of friends than adults and interact with friends more often than adults (Boneva et al., 2006). Reid and Reid (2004) also highlighted the importance of peer relationships by noting that one of the most important findings of their studies is the notion of “text circles” (p. 7). Young texters seem to establish closely-knit groups of “textmates” with whom they engage in regular, and may be perpetual contact. Additionally, there is a pressing need for adolescents to have close friends to talk to, to hang out and have fun with. Thus, they take advantage of SMS since face-to-face interactions are sometimes very limited to them (Grinter & Eldridge, 2001). Ling (2005) concluded that youths use SMS messaging to extend their social activities, gain prestige, and facilitate the process of courting and flirting (p. 336). Their developmental period is characterized by the need for person-to-person communication with friends (Klimsa et al., 2006). Peer talk, according to Kyratzi (2004), is very essential for adolescents to show their identities and ideologies. This explains why they maintain a higher number of friends than adults.

A different psychological account explaining youths' motivation for mobile phone adoption is presented by

Geser (2004) who mentioned that texting provides a means through which youth can overcome the “adult-controlled power structures” that control their everyday lives. Furthermore, mobile phones offer young adults and teenagers a special kind of freedom, independence and privacy (Grinter & Eldridge, 2001; Ito & Okabe, 2005).

2.2 What Do Young People Use Text Messaging for?

Previous research has looked into the communicative purposes for which young people use text messaging. Studying the text messaging of 200 people from Germany, Doering (2002) found out that German text messaging was used to fulfill five main communicative functions, namely: contact, information, appeal, obligation, and declaration. The prominent function of the German text messaging was contact, of which 20% dealt with appointments, 17% with greetings, 9% with change of media, 4% with relationship statements, and only 1% with emotional support.

In his study of the text messaging of young people in Wales, UK, Thurlow (2003) revealed nine communicational orientations and themes. They include: informational-practical orientation (14%), informational-relational orientation (8%), practical-arrangement orientation (15%), social arrangement orientation (9%), salutary orientation (17%), friendship maintenance orientation (23%), romantic orientation (9%), sexual orientation (3%), and chain messages (2%).

Deumart and Masinyana (2008) verified that the communicative functions found in their corpus were quite similar to those of Thurlow's. They pointed out, however, that the number of messages included under the category of practical/social arrangements are fewer than the ones mentioned by Thurlow (2.45%), and having more love-related messages and chain messages (19% and 7% compared to 12% and 2% respectively). According to Deumart and Masinyana, the low count of messages in the category practical/ social reflects the financial problems of many of the participants who prefer making such arrangements in face-to face meetings, if possible.

Grinter and Eldridge (2001) mentioned that young people use text messaging to arrange and adjust times to talk, coordinate with family and friends and chat. They have also reported the use of text messaging among intimate friends for a unique function,” which is the “good night” function. Ling and Baron (2007) showed that most American students have experience with text messaging, which they use to keep in touch with friends and family, arrange meetings, and share news.

In his study of the sociolinguistics of SMS by teen and young adult Norwegians, Ling (2005) found that 75% of the text messages fell into the categories of coordination, grooming, and question and answer. The remaining messages included categories such as 1) information, 2) command and requests, 3) personal news and 4) others. Battestini, Setlur, and Sohn (2010) found out that the most common content found in the text messaging of 71 undergraduate and graduate American students was planning. They revealed 13 different contents in the participants' text messages, namely: planning (31.7%), relationships (15.3%), chatting (13.7%), school/jobs (10.9%), places (10.2%), information seeking (10.2%), food (9.5%), current status (9.0%), sport/TV/News (6.8%), communication (5.3%), illicit activities (2.9%), health (1.7%), and money (1%).

Bosco (2007) presented a number of communicative functions used in the text messages of the people in Hong Kong. He stated that text messaging is mainly used for informal communicative functions. The following four categories of communicative functions were set up from his data: information 24%, interpersonal relationship 49%, social arrangement 26%, and chain messages 1%. The findings of Bosco's study in terms of the communicative functions used in text messaging agree with that of Thurlow's.

3. Methods

The present study is both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Specifically, it is a case study that examines the communicative functions of the text messaging of a group of Saudi undergraduates.

3.1 Participants

This study employed non-probability sampling, particularly purposive sampling, to select the participants. One hundred and seventy eight Saudi undergraduate students from different majors at Yanbu University College participated in the current study. They were all males ranging from 18 to 22 years of age. The mean age of participants was 19 years old. Only Saudi students are allowed to study at this college. Arabic is the first language of all the participants, but they all know English as a second language and use it as a medium of instruction in the college. All of the participants completed their foundation year, which is mandatory in the Saudi educational system. During this year, Saudi students study 640 credit hours of basic English along with courses in Physics, Mathematics, Computer Science, and Physical Education. The participants are homogenous

in terms of age, gender, nationality, and languages spoken. This homogeneity would contribute to the validity of the study with respect to intracultural comparison.

3.2 Data Collection

The researcher approached the students in their classes after obtaining permission from the faculty members concerned. The participants were asked to provide the researcher with the last 5 text messages they had sent from their phones. There were methodological and ethical concerns for ignoring received messages. The researcher asked the students to specify their age, and mention whom they had sent the text messages to. The participants were all informed that their names and information would be highly confidential. They were also requested to be very cautious while copying the text messages from their phones into the provided paper sheets. The data collection process took place in the spring semester of 2013, particularly in the second week of April.

A corpus of 762 text messages was collected from the participants. Twelve text messages were discarded from the data because they were incomprehensible. Therefore, the analysis of this study was based on 750 text messages. They were as follows: 240 (32%) text messages written in English, 442 (59%) written in Arabic, and 67 (9%) written in Romanized Arabic (Arabic messages written using English letters).

3.3 Data Analysis

The corpus of the English, Arabic, and Romanized Arabic SMS messages (750 text messages-6459 words) was stored separately in a Microsoft word document, and then analyzed for the occurrence of communicative functions. The average length of the English text messages was 8 words (totaling 1920 words), the Arabic messages 11 words (totaling 4104 words), and the Romanized Arabic messages 6.5 words (totaling 435 words). The longest text message was written in English and contained 19 words (145 characters), and the shortest was also written in English and contained one word (2 characters).

The researcher and a coder holding a Master's degree in linguistics with fair experience in research administered the coding independently. The coder was provided with a reference guide consisting of names and definitions of categories, as well as examples of each category. Having analyzed all the text messages, both the findings of the researcher and the coder were then compared. All issues of disagreement between the two were resolved. As a result, the agreement rate on the content of the SMS messages analyzed was 100%.

4. Results

4.1 The Communicative Functions of Text Messaging

Five main categories of communicative functions emerged from the data. It is important to note that some of the categories were drawn from previous research (Ling, 2005; Thurlow, 2003). However, adaptation was made to these categories. It is also noteworthy that there is no clear-cut boundary between the categories, that is, the content of one text message may in fact belong to more than one category. More specifically, the content of one text message may express more than one communicative function.

Brief explanations of the functions are provided, with three examples (English, Arabic, and Romanized Arabic examples) on each category. The original examples appear in bold exactly as they were received from the students. The English translation for the Arabic and Romanized Arabic examples are given in brackets. The original examples appear in bold font, numbered for ease of reference, and have been anonymized. Figure 1 shows the frequency of the communicative functions in the text messaging of the participants.

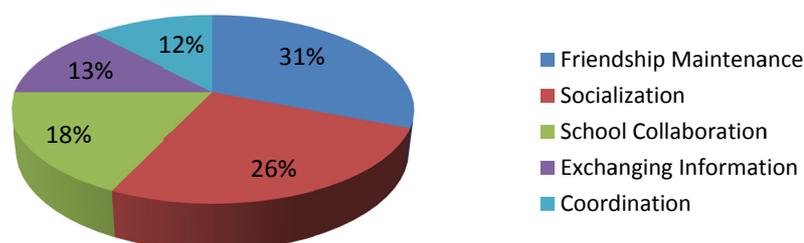


Figure 1. Frequency of communicative functions in text messaging

4.1.1 Friendship Maintenance

The analysis revealed that the prominent function among all was friendship maintenance. Thirty-one percent (232 SMSs) of all the text messages collected for this study carried friendship maintenance content. Text messages which belong to this category mainly dealt with maintaining and strengthening existing relationships among close and distant friends and family. However, the text messages sent to friends exceeded those sent to family members (89% and 11% respectively). This category was divided into 13 subcategories as shown in Figure 2.

E 1: **Thnk Allah (God) that the dr said that you are ok**

E 2: **مبروك يا الله عازمك عالغدا اليوم وعلى حسابك كمان**

(Congratulations. I am inviting for lunch and it is on you.)

E 3: **Wallh magidrit aji feeh ma3ai mishkilah bilsiyarah**

(I swear I couldn't make it. I have a problem with my car.)

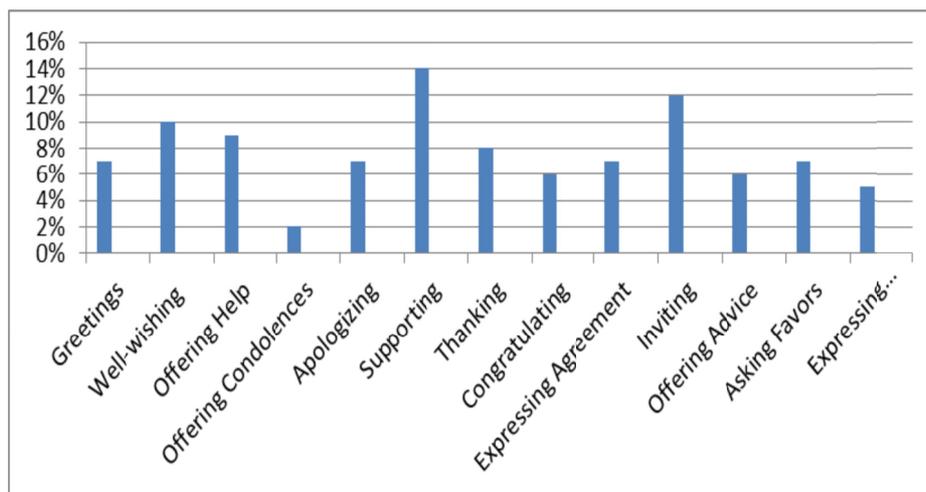


Figure 2. Subcategories of friendship maintenance function

4.1.2 Socialization

The second prominent category emerging from the data was socialization. Twenty-six percent (195 SMSs) of the data belonged to this category. In this particular category, the students attempted to keep in touch with their friends and family members. They sent text messages asking about the well-being, the whereabouts, and the health of friends and family. Besides the messages the participants sent to talk about movies, sports, and public news. They also sent text messages discussing some affairs of life including their own affairs and the affairs of others. Text messages belonging to this specific category primarily served a contact function.

E 4: **What happened to you no news for two days**

E 5: **دریت وش صار مع خالد بمحاضرة سيزار الصباح**

(Have you heard what happened with Khalid in Cezar's class this morning)

E 6: **weenak yadilkh wesh tsawi**

(Where are stupid. What are you doing)

This category was broken down into the communicative functions shown in Figure 3 below, namely chatting, gossiping, and phatic communication. Chatting, in this regard, is an informal way of discussing issues related to general or personal affairs, whereas gossiping deals with text messages related to the affairs of other people. Phatic communication is a type of communication which serves a social function. It primarily includes chain messages (messages composed of longer epigrams, jokes, word-play, short poems, or sayings and proverbs which are passed from one message sender to another, and do not require a response (Laursen, 2005).

The data also showed that the text messages sent to friends and colleagues surpassed those sent to family

members. All the SMS messages belonging to the phatic communication subcategory were written in Arabic.

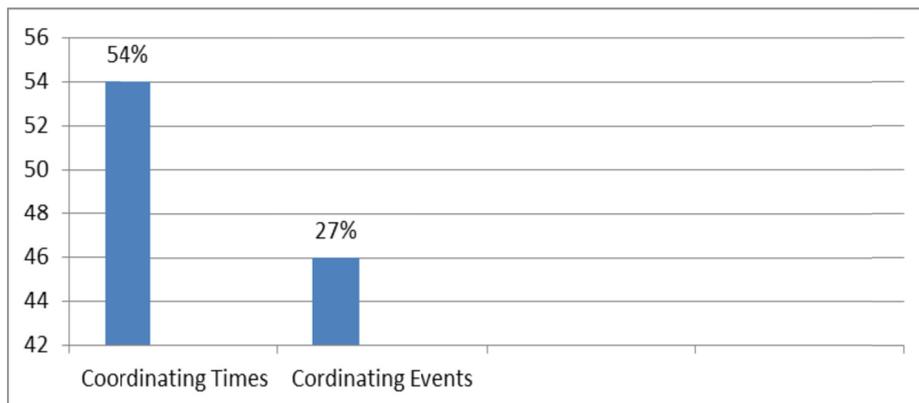


Figure 3. Subcategories of socialization function

4.1.3 School Collaboration

Figure 4 shows that 18% (135 SMSs) of the text messages of the students carry school collaboration content. The text messages in this category are strictly school-oriented. They were sent to close friends, classmates, as well as teachers. However, the text messages sent to teachers were not too many. The students sent text messages seeking help in a certain subject of study such as an assignment or a quiz, offering help in a certain topic of study, arranging times with a classmate or a teacher, or answering an inquiry about school work. Text messages were also sent asking about certain material, registration dates, exam times and dates, a specific teacher, a particular course, or about someone’s grade. This category was further classified into the subcategories appearing in Figure 4.

E 7: **Cn you tell Dr Zahir to give you one handout for me plssssss**

E 8: *تعبت وانا جالس ادور على الانجلىش بوك يارجل من فين شريته بربط*

(I am tired looking for the English book, man. Where did you get it from?)

E 9: **bisara7ah eldaktoor hatha mibishra7 kuwais bas bigra2 min elkitaab**

(Frankly, this teacher doesn’t explain the material well. He just reads from the book.)

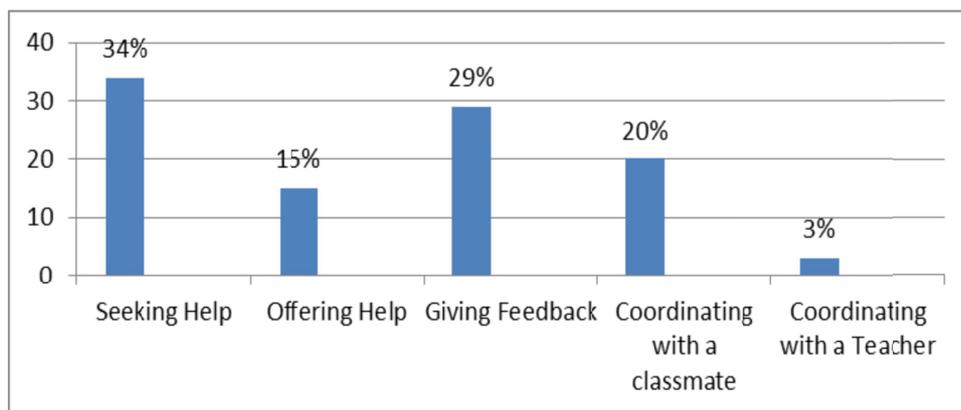


Figure 4. Subcategories of school collaboration function

4.1.4 Coordination

This category includes text messages that mainly deal with arranging times, events, and plans with friends and family. The data showed that 13% (97 SMSs) of the total data were related to this category. The text messages in this category were sent by the students to plan activities, rendezvous, and events, to do some general

arrangements and rearrangements, and to coordinate with a friend or a family member in doing something. The data also showed that coordination messages included examples of arranging meetings with close family members, and cancelling a date with a female friend or a male friend. Figure 5 shows the subcategories of this communicative function.

E 10: **Wanna come. We going to Jeddah this weekend**

E 11: بالله تجيب الثوب معك قبل الصلاة واخله نظيف

(Please bring my Thob with you before the prayer and keep it clean.)

E 12: **ana w 3amr ray7een elbaik ta3al enta w ahmad wla ti2khar**

(Amer and I are going to El Baik. Come with Ahmad and don't be late.)

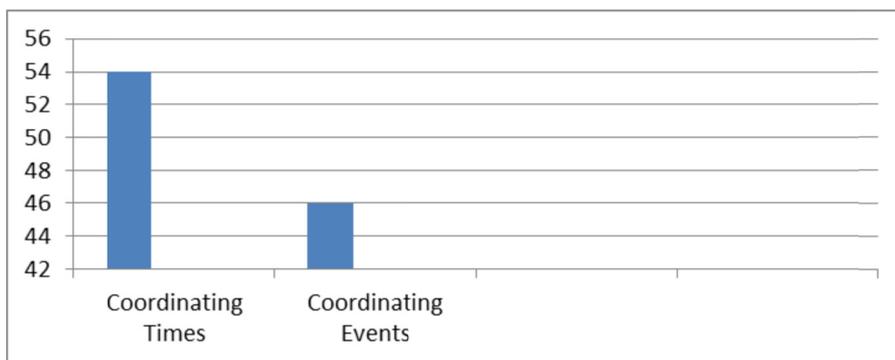


Figure 5. Subcategories of coordination

4.1.5 Exchange of Information

Figure 6 presents the subcategories of this communicative function. The text messages in this category focus on conveying and seeking personal and practical information. 12% (90 SMSs) of the text messages belongs to this category. The students sending this kind of text messaging straightforwardly inquired about specific information, sent personal and private news about themselves, friends, or families, exchanged some important public news about politics, sports, and social issues and events. The text messages in this category also comprised messages dealing with seeking information, answering questions from friends and family, and sending important information to friends and family.

E 13: **I don't feel well today am not coming to class.**

E 14: ابشرك ابوي شري سياره جديده كروزر ابيض لولو

(Good news. My father has bought a new pearl white Land Cruiser.)

E 15: **lageet elmifta7 ma3 sa3eed layhimak, ma3 elasalamah**

(I have found the key with sa3eed. Don't worry. Goodbye.)

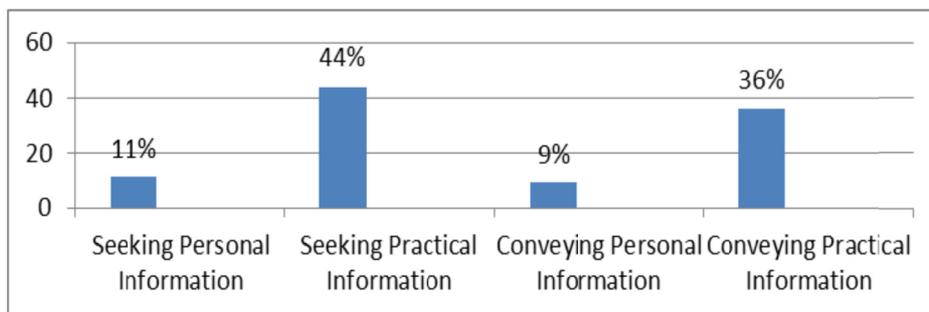


Figure 6. Subcategories of exchange of information

5. Discussion

The current research studied the text messaging of young Saudi students. In particular, it investigated the communicative functions in their sent text messages drawing upon previous work by Thurlow (2003). This study was conducted to fill a gap in the literature concerning the communicative functions of text messaging in an Arab setting since almost all of the research conducted on this particular topic took place in a western setting. Therefore, by analyzing the text messaging of Saudi students, this study came to complement previous work, and to show similarities and differences among them.

Friendship maintenance dominated the communicative functions found in the text messaging of the students in this study. This finding supports the findings of Battestini et al. (2010), Bosco (2007), Deumart and Masinyana (2008), and Thurlow (2003). Most of the text messages were sent by the students to strengthen their alliances and cement their relationships with their text-circle, which includes close and intimate friends. Text messaging allows them to enhance their relationships through sharing their emotions and exchanging content that is personally important to them. Therefore, you find these young students sending messages supporting, wishing well, offering help, advising, inviting, and so on, in order to stay close to their friends. This finding also emphasizes the necessity and high importance of such friendships among the students, since the text messages sent to close friends were 9 times more than those sent to family members. In this stage of life, it seems that young people are more attached to their friend than to their families. They usually seek help, emotional support, and favors more from their social circle.

It is noteworthy that some of the text messages in this category were highly intimate and showed a great deal of intimacy, particularly among the students. The need for intimacy and solidarity is an essential part of young people's culture. This need is significant to their identities. However, these intimate text messages lack romantic and sexual content. This may be due to the sensitive nature of text messaging since it is a very private part of the students' life, and may be to the conservative nature of the students' culture, where emotional and sexual intentions cannot be expressed openly.

Socialization came as the second dominating category in the list. As revealed from the data, the students used a high percentage of text messaging to stay in constant contact with their friends and family. This particular finding confirms Battestini et al.'s (2010), Bosco's (2007), Doering's (2002), Grinter and Eldridge's (2001), and Ling's (2005) findings that young people use a considerable part of their SMS messages to stay in touch with others, especially their text-circles. The young students sent more socialization text messages to their friends than to their family members, and the difference was similar to that in the friendship maintenance category. 91% of the text messages belonging to this category were sent to friends, whereas only 9% were sent to family members. The same finding was reported by Eldridge and Grinter (2001).

The need to stay socially connected and not feeling isolated is one of the important reasons that incite students to send this kind of messages. Some students reported feeling unhappy or sad and wanted someone to talk to and share their feelings with; therefore, text messaging with a friend or a family member provides them with a sense of peace and tranquility. Sharing their happy moments was also instantiated in their text messaging. Others mentioned that chatting with a friend via text messaging helps them get over their boredom by killing time and keeping themselves busy (Grinter & Eldridge, 2001). Further, the data revealed some meaningful socially-oriented text messaging, discussing some serious issues of life. Socially-oriented text messaging may also help young people strengthen their relationships with others by sharing their feelings, ideas, experiences, and ideologies, and complementing face-to face interactions.

It is important to mention that all the text messages belonging to the phatic communication category were sent in Arabic. Being all native speakers of Arabic, the students found it more expressive to send SMS messages of this type in Arabic. An explanation is that it may be difficult for them to translate such formulaic expressions or poetic verses into English. Another explanation is that it is more practical to send a Quranic verse or a saying in its original language because it might lose meaning in the process, or one may consider it irreligious.

Moreover, this study reveals that text messaging is an important tool for school collaboration. This means that not only does text messaging help students keep in touch with others and maintains friendships, it also provides them with a platform to conduct school-related matters. Thus, they utilize text messaging to inquire about school topics, teachers, courses, assignments, quizzes, exams, and other school work. Other students used text messaging to offer their help to their classmates concerning school issues. They also used it to coordinate times with their classmates and teachers even though they scarcely used it with teachers.

Although previous research revealed that text messaging was used for school work (Battestini et al., 2010; Ling, 2005), the current study is the first to specify it as a separate category. School collaboration via text messaging

assists students to enhance their relationships and better their school performance. Previous research has shown that text messaging has contributed to the improvement of students' academic performance (Crisp, 2009; Crystal, 2008; Mahmoud, 2013). Nowadays students are using new social network applications such as Whatsapp, BBM, and LINGO to set up study groups where they can ask questions, send feedback, discuss exams, as well as other school-oriented affairs. According to Motwalla (2007), students use text messaging to complement classroom interactions. They can ask a specific and direct question using text messaging instead of making a phone call that might take a longer time, cost money, or disrupt an ongoing activity. Furthermore, since text messaging offers students the advantage of being reachable 24 hours a day, it is the most used form of computer-mediated communication among the students, allowing them to communicate with classmates anywhere and anytime.

Coordination is another main communicative function yielded from the data of the present study. This finding agrees with the findings of Battestini et al. (2010), Deumart and Masinyana (2008), Doering (2002), Grinter and Eldridge (2001), Ling (2005), Ling and Baron (2007), and Thurlow (2003). Text messaging is the most common used means of interaction among people, particularly young people, to plan, arrange, and rearrange their times and activities with their friends and family. Its omnipresent nature and affordability may be the reason for that. Young people even prefer it to voice calls, emails, and instant messaging.

The findings showed that the students coordinated specific times to meet for lunch, to go visit someone, to play cards, go to the beach, and pick someone up, among others. The students also coordinated spontaneous activities and plans such as going to Jeddah, playing a game of soccer, meeting somewhere, going shopping for food or a new mobile phone and the best places to buy them. This category does not involve text messaging sent for coordination of school business. This finding goes in line with Ling and Yttri's (1999) study that text messaging is used for hyper-coordination. As the findings of this study revealed, the young students coordinated times and events more with friends than family using text messaging. A possible explanation is that text messaging is a peer-to-peer medium.

The data also revealed that the students employed text messaging to share personal and practical information. The same finding was reported by Bosco (2007); Ling (2005), and Thurlow (2008). The students asked questions and answered questions from others. They also kept friends and family members updated on personal events and news, and inquired simultaneously about their personal affairs. Further, the findings showed that they requested practical information such as directions, locations, best places to shop for something, best kinds of laptops or smart phones, among others. Seeking and conveying information is essential for the continuity and reinforcement of relationships among friends.

Moreover, text messaging is an important source of information nowadays. One can easily obtain a piece of information from one's friends or family since they are connected round-the-clock. People can also get a variety of information via text messaging such as breaking news, sports news, weather updates, doctor's appointments, bank transactions, flight updates, entertainment news health information, etc. As instantiated in the data, the students inquired and sent information about all the above mentioned. In sum, text messaging is offering the students what no other medium of communication is.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, there are five main categories of communicative functions found in Saudi Undergraduate text messaging. They are: friendship maintenance, socialization, school collaboration, coordination, and exchanging information. The findings of this study complement previous research that has focused on the communicative functions of text messaging. The findings revealed more similarities than differences between the findings of this study and that of other studies. This study shows that there is a cross-cultural similarity in terms of the communicative functions of text messaging. The study shows that via text messaging, students can maintain and strengthen their existing friendship, as well as start new ones. They can also stay connected and socialize with their text messaging social network and family members through chatting and gossiping. The study also indicates that text messaging is used beyond its original purpose, which is staying in social contact. It proves text messaging to be significant for students' school affairs. Not only does this medium of communication help young people plan and coordinate times and events, it has become one important source of information.

This study has its own limitations. Firstly, the results are confined to Yanbu University students and may not be generalized to other populations. Secondly, the data analyzed for the purpose of this study were those text messages sent from the participants. It was not possible to collect received text messages because the researcher did not have the permission to study them, and because the researcher would not be able to know the demographic information about the sender. Thirdly, the researcher and coder faced difficulty in analyzing certain text messages since they were decontextualized. Thus, the intention of the sender was not clear in some cases.

Fourthly, the present study was circumscribed to Saudi male students. Obtaining data from female students is a tough task for two reasons. The first is the conservative nature of the Saudi community, and the second is that coeducation is prohibited in this country. Finally, the participants may have avoided including some very private text messaging such as highly emotional ones. This may explain the scarcity of emotional SMS messages in the data. However, this study offers a contribution to the existing literature on text messaging. In the end, research on gender differences in the communicative functions of Saudi students' text messaging is recommended.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the students who participated in this study.

References

- American Psychological Association. (1972). *Ethical standards of psychologists*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Baron, N. S. (2003). Language of the internet. In A. Farghali (Ed.), *The Stanford Handbook for Language Engineers* (pp. 59-127). Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Battestini, A., Setlur, V., & Sohn, T. (2010). A Large Scale Study of Text Messaging Use. *Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Human Computer Interaction with Mobile Devices and Services (MobileHCI), Lisbon, Portugal* (pp. 229-238). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/1851600.1851638>
- Boneva, B. S., Quinn, A., Kraut, R. E., Kiesler, S., & Shklovski, I. (2006). Teenage communication in the instant messaging era. In R. Kraut, M. Brynin, & S. Kiesler (Eds.), *Computers, phones, and the Internet: Domesticating information technology* (pp. 201-218). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bosco, L. S. (2007). *SMS gener@tion: A study on the language of text messaging in Hong Kong* (Unpublished master's thesis). The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.
- Crisp, M. (2009). *Modernizing school communication systems: Using text messaging to improve student Academic performance* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation). Oregon State University.
- Crystal, D. (2008). *The gr8 db8*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Deumart, A., & Masinyana, S. O. (2008). Mobile language choice: The use of English and IsiXhosa in text messages (SMS). *English World Wide*, 29(2), 117-147. John Benjamins Publishing Company. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/eww.29.2.02deu>
- Doring, N. (2002). *Have you finished work yet? :). Communicative functions of text messages (SMS)*. Retrieved May 5, 2009, from <http://www.receiver.vodafone.com>
- Eldridge, M., & Grinter, R. (2001). *Studying text messaging in adolescents*. Paper presented to the Workshop on Mobile Communications: Understanding Users, Adoption & Design at the Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI), Seattle, WA. Retrieved December 28, 2013, from <https://www.google.com/search?q=eldridge+and+grinter+mobile+communication&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8&safe=active>
- Faulkner, X., & Culwin, F. (2005). When fingers do the talking: A study of text messaging. *Interacting with Computers*, 17(2), 167-185. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.intcom.2004.11.002>
- Geser, H. (2004). *Towards a sociological theory of the mobile phone. Sociology in Switzerland: Sociology of the Mobile Phone*. Retrieved June 17, 2009, from http://socio.ch/mobile/t_geser1.htm
- Grinter, R. E., & Eldridge, M. A. (2001). Y do tngrs luv 2 txt msg? In W. Prinz, M. Jarke, Y. Rogers, K. Schmidt, & V. Wulf (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Seventh European Conference on Computer-supported Cooperative Work, 16-20 September, Bonn, Germany* (pp. 219-238). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Hård af Segerstad, Y. (2002). *Use and adaptation of written language to the conditions of computer-mediated communication* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Göteborg University, Göteborg, Sweden.
- Ito, M., & Okabe, D. (2005). Intimate connections: Contextualizing Japanese youth and mobile messaging publications. In R. Harper, L. Palen, & A. Taylor (Eds.), *The Inside Text: Social, Cultural and Design Perspectives on SMS* (pp. 127-143). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-3060-6_7
- Kasesniemi, E., & Rautiainen, P. (2002). Mobile culture of children and teenagers in Finland. In J. E. Katz, & M. Aakhus (Eds.), *Perceptual contact: Mobile communication, private talk, and public performance* (pp.

- 170-192). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Klimsa, P., Colona, G., Ispandriarno, L., Sasinska-Klas, T., Döring, N., & Hellwig, K. (2006). *Generation SMS: An empirical, 4 country study carried out in Germany, Poland, Peru, and Indonesia*. Retrieved March 9, 2009, from http://km.meme.hokudai.ac.jp/people/jantke/Publications/2007/2007_TUI-IfMK-DB-29.pdf
- Koutras, E. (2006). The use of mobile phones by generation y students at two universities in the city of Johannesburg (Master's thesis). University of South Africa. Available from ProQuest Digital Dissertations (UMI No. 0-612-78775-3).
- Kyratzi, A. (2004). Codes, code-switching, and context: Style and footing in peer group bilingual play. *Multilingua*, 28(2-3).
- Laursen, D. (2005). Please reply! The replying norm in adolescent SMS communication. In H. Richard, P. Leysia, & T. Alex (Eds.), *The inside text: Social, cultural and design perspectives on SMS* (pp. 53-73). Springer. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-3060-6_4
- Ling, R. (2005). The Sociolinguistics of SMS: An analysis of SMS use by a random sample of Norwegians. In R. Ling, & P. Pederson (Eds.), *Mobile communication and the recognition of the social sphere* (pp. 335-350). London: Springer.
- Ling, R. (2008). *New tech, new ties: How mobile communication is reshaping social cohesion*. London: MIT Press.
- Ling, R., & Baron, N. (2007). Text messaging and IM: Linguistic comparison of American college data. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 26, 291-298. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0261927X06303480>
- Ling, R., & Yttri, B. (1999). "Nobody sits at home and waits for the telephone to ring:" *Micro and hyper-coordination through the use of the mobile telephone*. Telenor Repport No. 30-1999.
- Lorente, S. (2002). Youth and mobile telephones: More than just a fashion. *Revista de Estudios de Juventud*, 57(102), 9-24.
- Mahmoud, S. (2013). The eefect of using English SMS on KAU foundation year students' speaking and writing performance. *American International Journal of Social Science*, 2(2).
- Oksman, V., & Rautiainen, J. (2004). Mobile communication as a social stage: Meanings of mobile communication in everyday life among teenagers in Finland. *New Media Society*, 6, 319-339. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444804042518>
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1-6. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816>
- Reid, F. J. M., & Reid, D. J. (2004). Text appeal: The Psychology of SMS texting and its implications for the design of mobile phone interfaces. *Campus-Wide Information System*, 21(5), 196-200. Emerald Group Publishing Limited. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/10650740410567545>
- Taylor, A. S., & Harper, R. (2003). The gift of the gap? A design oriented sociology of young people's use of mobiles. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, 12(3), 267-296. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1025091532662>
- Thurlow, C. (2003). Generation TXT? The Sociolinguistics young people's text-messaging. *Discourse Analysis Online*, 1(1). Retrieved March 9, 2008, from <http://www.shu.ac.uk/daol/articles/v1/n1/a3/thurlow2002003-paper.html>
- Vykoukalova, Z. (2007). Adolescent mobile communication: Transformation of communication patterns of generation SMS? *Journal of Psychological Research on Cyberspace*, 1(1).
- Wei, C. Y. (2007). Mobile hybridity: Supporting personal and romantic relationships with mobile phones in digitally emergent spaces (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Washington, Seattle, WA.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).