Estudios de

lingüística inglesa aplicada

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TEACHING L2 VOCABULARY THROUGH SMS LANGUAGE: SOME DIDACTIC GUIDELINES

Paula López Rúa
University of the Balearic Islands, Spain

This article focuses on texting or SMS language, which is nowadays the most popular means of communication for a whole generation of mobile phone users. The introductory section comprises a parameter-based description of texting and a brief explanation of the features shared with other modalities of text-based electronic communication, after which the article provides an overview of the linguistic peculiarities of the system, i.e. its shortening mechanisms. It is suggested that an incursion into a subcode with which youngsters feel so identified could be beneficial for both L2 and L1 learning. This suggestion is illustrated by a series of exercises of different formats intended to practise the codification and interpretation of English texting. The conclusion drawn is that the exploitation of texting in the L2 classroom may be extremely interesting for several reasons: first, it may contribute to improving the students' spelling and pronunciation skills in both the L1 and the L2, and it may also contribute to increasing their lexicon in the L2; second, students may acquire a better understanding of the notion of linguistic appropriateness and at the same time gain an insight into the functioning of languages and their flexibility to adapt themselves to different communicative situations.

Key words: abbreviation, appropriateness, SMS, spelling

El presente artículo trata sobre el lenguaje SMS, actualmente el medio de comunicación más popular para toda una generación de jóvenes usuarios de teléfonos móviles. La introducción comprende una descripción del subcódigo y una breve explicación de los rasgos compartidos con otras modalidades de comunicación electrónica escrita, tras lo cual se

proporciona una visión general de los mecanismos de abreviación empleados en este sistema. La principal idea defendida en este artículo es que la explotación pedagógica de un subcódigo con el que los jóvenes se sienten identificados puede ser beneficiosa para el aprendizaje de la L1 y la L2. Esta sugerencia se acompaña de ejercicios de diferentes formatos destinados a la práctica de la codificación e interpretación del lenguaje SMS en inglés. Se concluye que las ventajas de esta actividad son múltiples: por una parte, se puede contribuir a mejorar los conocimientos de ortografía y pronunciación de los alumnos en la L1 y la L2; por otro lado, los alumnos pueden aumentar su vocabulario en la L2, comprender cómo las lenguas son instrumentos flexibles que se adaptan a distintas situaciones comunicativas y entender lo que implica la utilización apropiada de un código lingüístico.

Palabras clave: abreviación, adecuación lingüística, SMS, ortografía

1. Introduction. Features and Aims of SMS Language

SMS language, also known as texting, text messaging or text message shorthand, is the abbreviated form of language used in electronic communication, particularly via mobile phones and the Internet. It is nowadays the most popular means of communication for a whole generation of young users of mobile phones and Internet chat rooms. Pioneered by English in the late nineties, the text craze rapidly spread to other languages with similar success, since its main users (i.e. teenagers) share features across languages and the system seems to be in keeping with their feelings and needs. Although it owes the Internet an amount of shortened items and conventions, it is the massive use of mobile phones that has motivated a fast development of this specialized subcode.

SMS is "text talk"; in other words, it is a form of asynchronous conversation which still depends on the medium of writing. Texting has some features in common with the language used in Internet chats and thus with other modalities of CMC (computer-mediated communication) such as conferences, BBSs (bulletin board systems), MUDs (multi-user dungeons or

dimensions), or e-mails. For example, they all share the limitations imposed by the screen and the software (or, in the case of texting, by the specifications of a particular model of mobile phone). The characteristics of CMC pointed out by Sproull and Kiesler (1986, p. 1493) can also be generalized so as to encompass texting: they are both fast (like speech), text-based (like writing) and prototypically asynchronous or non-simultaneous (like writing), that is, communication does not take place in real time but, at most, in near-real time. Drawing on "spectral models", Baron (1998) provides an excellent account of different types of communication technologies (computers, telephone, videoconferencing) and also of the main modalities of CMC in terms of their proximity to prototypical ("traditional") writing or prototypical ("face-to-face") speech. Figure 1 below is a simplified version of Baron's "spectral relationships" in which I have included online chats and text messaging:

Figure 1

Spectral analysis of different modalities of text-based electronic communication (adapted from Baron, 1998, p. 143)

(Traditional) Writing				Face-to-face Speech
Posting	**Joint Composition**	**Anonymous Dialogue**	**One-to-Many Dialogue**	**One-to-One Dialogue**
Web page, Electronic journal,	Collaborative paper, Compositional	MUDs, *Online chat*	Conferences, BBSs, *SMS*	e-mail, *Online chat, SMS*
Scholarly paper	Hypertext			

In the light of the relationship between texting and other modalities of text-based electronic communication, Table 1 below displays a parameter-based description of texting in relation to prototypical informal speech and prototypical writing. In this case, texting will be compared with the subtype of writing which texting seems to share most features with, namely informal note writing, which is in turn closer to face-to-face speech than to "traditional" writing. This description draws on the features commented on by Baron (1998), Crystal (2001), and Gains (1999) with respect to e-mails. The parameters are the following: (1) number of participants; (2) physical proximity; (3) speed of transmission; (4) privacy of channel; (5) visible and auditory social cues (which constrain interaction); (6) durability; (7) mean length; (8) layout (i.e. structure); (9) editing process; (10) level of formality (style); and (11) emotion. Shaded cells mark the values of speech or writing which text messaging is closer to. As can be noticed, texting combines features of both informal speech and note writing besides displaying features of its own.

Table 1

Parameter-based description of texting

Para meters	Informal face-to-face speech	Informal note writing	Texting
1	2 or more	Usually 2	2 or more
2	Yes	No	No
3	Yes	No	Yes
4	Variable	Variable	Yes
5	Yes	No	No
6	No	Limited	Limited
7	Variable but unlimited	Variable but unlimited (usually short)	Variable but limited (usually short)

8	Dialogic structure (i.e. turn-taking). Answer expected	Variable Answer not usually expected. If expected, it does not use the same channel	Usually dialogic structure. Answer or acknowledgment of receipt usually expected
9	Unusual but possible	Unusual but possible	No
10	Usually low (informal): use of contractions, loose sentence constructions, subject ellipsis, oral shortenings i.e. *wanna* (occasionally), casual lexicon	Usually low (informal): use of contractions, loose sentence constructions, subject ellipsis, all types of shortenings having written forms (occasionally) casual lexicon	Usually low (informal): use of oral and written contractions, loose sentence constructions, subject ellipsis, all types of shortenings having written forms (extensively), casual lexicon
11	Conveyed through stress and intonation	Conveyed through graphological deviance (capitalization, punctuation)	Conveyed through graphological deviance (capitalization, punctuation, emoticons)

As regards the advantages of the system, which lie behind its unquestionable popularity, typing on a mobile keypad is convenient in many ways: it is fast, cheap and discreet, it can help people express things that they would not dare say face to face, and it allows users to be creative and develop their own rules for in-group communication, so that group bonds are reinforced. All that is required is to keep within the limits of around 160 characters per message; to that end, words are multifariously abbreviated and

combined with symbols intended to express feelings or tones, the so-called *emoticons.*It must be remarked, however, that the same freedom that users enjoy when codifying their messages is also responsible for the lack of consistency in the application of the rules.

2. Shortening Devices in SMS Language

This section is centred on the code itself, that is, on the linguistic peculiarities of SMS language, and comprises an overview of the shortening devices employed in texting, some of which can be recognized as productive word-formation mechanisms (for example, clipping or initialization). These devices will be explained and illustrated by resorting to examples from English and Spanish, with the aim of showing how languages select their abbreviating methods out of a common core of shortening mechanisms.

Since the number of characters per message is limited, languages manage to save space in writing by resorting to conventional and unconventional shortening devices. Thus texting brings into play both traditional and innovative shortening mechanisms which are frequently accompanied by a relaxed use of punctuation and grammar rules.

2.1. Established Devices: Abbreviation, Clipping and Initialization

Initialisms, clippings and abbreviations are used in text messages in both English and Spanish. Abbreviation is here basically equated with letter reduction, that is, with the elision of certain final and mid-letters, usually vowels and double consonants. The category of clippings comprises both clipped abbreviations (read out expanded) and proper clippings (read out unexpanded). As regards initialization, the result of the process may be an acronym (an initialism read out like an ordinary word), an alphabetism (an initialism read out letter by letter), or an abbreviation composed of initials and read out expanded. A few examples in both languages are the following:

(1) Initialization: E(nglish) *TTFN* ('ta-ta for now')*, LOL* ('lots of love/luck', 'laughing out loud')*, JIC* ('just in case')*, CWOT*

('complete waste of time'); S(panish) *NPI* ('ni puta idea': colloquial expression for 'I haven't got a clue')*, NV* ('nos vemos': 'see you')

(2) Clipping: E. *Sis* ('sister'), *mob* ('mobile phone'); Sp. *ilu* ('ilusión': 'thrill')*, uni* ('universidad': 'university')*, exam* ('examen' : 'examination')

(3) Abbreviation: E. *wk* ('week')*, pls* ('please')*, spk* ('speak')*, msg* ('message')*, vry* ('very'); Sp. *vns?* ('¿vienes ?': 'are you coming ?')*, gnl* ('genial': 'great')

Capital letters tend to be used in both languages for initialisms, and in English they occasionally replace word spacing. The Internet rule that associates capitalization with (impolite) screaming is sometimes overlooked in texting, particularly in Spanish, since capitals are the default (and thus the quickest) option in mobile phone keypads.

2.2. Phonetic Respellings

Apart from the institutionalized shortening methods already mentioned, texting also resorts to phonetic respellings, homophones, and a number of minor devices such as onomatopoeic expressions or symbols, all of them used on their own or in combination.

Phonetic respellings are shortened homophones which may replace genuine words (E. *wot*: 'what'), contractions (E. *yer*: 'you're') or longer expressions, such as E. *wenja…?*: 'when do you...?'. Some of them are already existing items (E. *luv*: 'love'*, ya*: 'you, your') while others are new creations to save space in writing, for example, E. *cupl*: 'couple', *ova*: 'over', *sum*: 'some', *wen*: 'when'. They even combine with other items to form compounds (E. *ne1*: 'anyone'*, sum1*: 'someone'*, yaslf*: 'yourself'). Sometimes only part of a word is respelled, while other devices are used to shorten the remaining parts, for example, E. *bcum*: 'become'.

A particular case of phonetic respelling, which is quite frequent in Spanish, consists in the replacement of certain digraphs with single letters which exactly or nearly correspond to the same phoneme and therefore save space. For example, in Spanish *qu* becomes *k* (*kerer*: 'querer': 'love, want')

and *ll* becomes *y* (*yamam*: 'llámame': 'call me'). The replacement can also comprise single letters which are read out in the same way as their counterparts. Thus, for example, *c* may become *k* whenever it is read out /k/: *kls* ('clase': 'class'), *kmprs* ('compras': 'shopping'). Lastly, in relation to phonetic respellings it is also worth mentioning that silent letters such as word-initial *h* are occasionally elided in Spanish, for example, *ambr* ('hambre': 'hunger'), *ay* ('hay': 'there is/are').

2.3. Letter and Number Homophones

The use of letter and number homophones is another popular shortening method in texting; thus entire words (especially in English) or parts of words (especially in Spanish) are replaced with numbers or letters which have the same pronunciation. In English (but not in Spanish), letter homophones tend to be written in capitals (they are also used to indicate the beginning of a word and thus replace spacing).

A few examples of letter homophones or nearly homophones used in English and Spanish text messaging are the following: E. *B* ('be')*, C* ('see')*, D* (sometimes used as a near homophone of 'the'), *N* (near homophone of 'an'/'and'), *U* ('you'), or *Y* ('why'); Sp. *d* ('de': 'of'), *t* ('te': 2nd person singular object pronoun), and *s* ('es': 'he/she/it is'). Letter homophones are very often part of words, as in E. *thkq, qt* ('thank you', 'cutie') or Sp. *aptcr, djar, ksa, sto* ('apetecer': 'fancy, like'; 'dejar': 'leave'; 'casa': 'house'; 'esto': 'this'). They may also be part of initialized expressions (E. *CUS*: 'see you soon'), or they may be combined to form expressions on their own, like E.*ICQ* ('I seek you').

As regards number homophones or near homophones, the most frequent correspondences between numbers and words or parts of words are listed below, together with some examples in English and Spanish:

a.   English:
(1) *1*: '-one', 'won-', 'want': *sum1, no1, 1daful.*

(2) *2*: 'to', 'to-', 'too': *2gthr,2moro, up2U, 2g4U* ('too good for you'), *f2t* ('free to talk'), *f2f* ('face to face'), *2U2* ('to you too').

(3) *3:* 'free': *RU3?* ('are you free?'), *3dom* ('freedom').

(4) *4*: 'for', 'for-', '-fore': *4U, 4(e)vr, B4.*

(5) *8*: '-ate', '-eat': *L8r, Gr8, d8, H8, m8, W8.*

b. Spanish:

(6) *2*: '-dos', '-dios: *salu2* ('saludos': 'regards')*, t2* ('todos': 'everybody')*, a2* ('adiós': 'goodbye').

(7) *3:* '-tres': *s3* ('estrés': 'stress').

(8) *6*: '-seis', '-sos': *p6* ('paséis': 2nd person plural, present subjunctive 'spend'), *b6*: ('besos': 'kisses')

(9) *7*: '-sete', '-sito': *b7* ('besetes, besitos': 'kisses')

2.5. Minor Devices: Symbols and Onomatopoeic Expressions

Texting also resorts to other devices which eventually contribute to saving time and space, particularly onomatopoeic expressions such as E. *zzz* ('boring, tired'), or Sp. *grrr* ('angry') and symbols (for instance, strokes are occasionally used with positive and negative meanings, as in *W/*: 'with', *W*: 'without', *D/*: 'do', *D*: 'don't'). Symbols keep their institutionalized uses or acquire new ones, although, once again, the rules of equivalence are not consistently applied. Table 2 below displays a few examples of symbols and their most common equivalents in English and Spanish.

Table 2

Examples of the use of symbols in texting

Symbol	Equivalent	Example
@	English: 'at'	*@wrk*: 'at work'; *w@*: 'what'
	Spanish: 'to send an e-mail', 'masculine and feminine'	*t @*: 'te mando un e-mail' ('I'll send you an e-mail') *td@s*: 'todos y todas' ('everybody: both males and females')
X / x	English: 'kiss', 'cross'	*XOXOXO*: 'hugs and kisses'; *aX*: 'across'; *Xme*: 'kiss me'
	Spanish: 'por'[a], 'par-', 'per-'	*xfa*: 'por favor' ('please'); *xa*: 'para' ('for'); *xo*: 'pero' ('but'); *xdon*: 'perdón' ('sorry')
$	English: '-ss-', 'money'	*M$U*: 'miss you'; *$$$, $$££* : 'money'
	Spanish: 'money, credit'	*n$*: 'I have no credit'
%	English: '-oo', '-ou-', '-oul-':	*C%l*: 'cool'; *W%d*: 'would'

[a] The mathematical symbol in Spanish is read out 'por'.

To close this section about shortening devices, it should be remarked that the shortening rules described in the previous paragraphs may operate quite freely on the same bases in any of the languages. Consequently, different devices can shorten the same word or expression with different results, as shown in the examples gathered in Table 3 below:

Table 3

Different shortening rules applying to the same bases

Lg.	Example	Device(s)
	'I love you': *ily*	initialization
	ilu	initialization + letter homophones
	iluvu	letter homophones + respelling
	'someone': *som1*	clipping + number homophones
	sum1	respelling + number homophones
E.	*sme1*	letter reduction (i.e. abbreviation) + number homophones
	'forever':	
	4e, 4evr, 4vr	number homophones + letter reduction
	4eva	number homophones + respelling
	'para' ('for'): *pra*	letter reduction
	xa	symbols
	'mensaje' ('message'):	
Sp.	*msj, mnsj*	letter reduction
	sms/SMS	borrowing (English)
	'te veo luego' ('see you later'):	
	TVL	initialization
	TBL	initialization + letter homophones

Lastly, Table 4 displays a few examples of equivalent words and expressions reduced with different methods in English and Spanish, in accordance with language-specific preferences (López Rúa, 2005). It can be noticed how initialization and the use of letter and number homophones are particularly popular in English, whereas letter reduction is far more frequent in Spanish.

Table 4

Illustrative examples of texting preferences: comparison English-Spanish

English	Spanish
CM(B): 'call me (back)'; *PCM*: 'please call me'; *JstCllMe*: 'just call me'	*ymame (xfa)*: 'llámame (por favor)'
SU: 'shut up'	*kyat*: 'cállate'
GL: 'good luck'; *FC*: 'fingers crossed'; *LOL*: 'lots of luck'	*(mxa) srt*: '(mucha) suerte'
IlBl8: 'I'll be late'	*llgre trd*: 'llegaré tarde'
CU: 'see you'; *BCNU*: 'be seeing you'	*NV / ns vms*: 'nos vemos'
GTH: 'go to hell'; *FOAD*: 'fuck off and die'; *GFY*: 'go fuck yourself'	*jdt*: 'jódete'; *ktden / q t dn*: 'que te den'
PITA: 'pain in the ass'	*kñzo / ptrdo*: 'coñazo, petardo'
WerRU?: 'Where are you?'	*dnd stas?*: '¿dónde estás?'
TTUL / TTYL / T2UL / T2YL / TTUL8r / TTYL8r / T2UL8r / T2YL8r: 'talk to you later'	*hblm(o)s lgo*: 'hablamos luego'; *hblm(o)s +trd*: 'hablamos más tarde'
HowRU?: 'how are you?'; *HIG?*: 'how's it going?'; *HUD*: 'how are you doing?'	*q tl (stas)?*: '¿qué tal (estás)?'; *kmo stas?*: '¿cómo estás?'
WUU2?: 'what are you up to?'; *WAYD?*: 'what are you doing?	*q hcs? / k acs?*: '¿qué haces?'

ATM: 'at the moment, now'	*ahra*: 'ahora'
LOL: 'laughing out loud';	*k rsa!*: ¡qué risa!
BWL: 'bursting with laughter';	
LMAO: 'laughing my arse/ass off'	
ROTFL: 'rolling on the floor laughing'	

3. SMS Language and FLL

Aside from the decodification difficulties derived from the proliferation of SMS subcodes, the most important consequence brought about by the popularization of SMS language is the fact that it is increasingly gaining ground outside its original channel ("BBC News", 1999, 2003b*;* De Sandoval, 2001; Galán Rodríguez, 2002; Moreno de los Ríos, 2001). Whereas for some experts texting is just an example of how language evolves with the times, or the typical sign of rebellion on the part of young generations, others see it as a dangerous invasion which is in fact debasing (written) language. The misuse of the code seems to be particularly problematic in the case of young teenagers, for whom the "rules" of texting may interfere with their learning of the rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation. Teachers and exam markers in different countries have already expressed their concern over the use of texting in the classroom and even in exam answers ("BBC News", 2003a; Ellison, 2001). On the other hand, the topic of the decline in spelling standards among schoolchildren is not new, and it is still reported as a problem at higher levels of education. In a recent article (Santodomingo, 2005) published by an on-line teaching journal, Spanish secondary school teachers and university professors agree that students make far more spelling mistakes now than 15 years ago. Although the majority state that the root of the problem actually lies in the lack of reading habits among teenagers, for some of them, the influence of SMS language on the impoverishment of written language is clear, particularly as regards spelling and the command of complex syntactic structures and compound tenses (De Sandoval, 2001).

In the light of the evidence that SMS language is becoming increasingly popular among young people, and that it might be exerting a negative influence on the development of their spelling skills, this article suggests that an incursion into a subcode with which youngsters feel so identified could be extremely beneficial, not only for L1 but also for L2 learning. In the case of Spanish students of English as a foreign language, it can contribute to enhancing the knowledge of the relations between the phonemic and the graphemic levels in a language which is generally recognized as belonging to the "deep orthography" type (Doval Suárez, 2004, p. 27). Moreover, using texting in the classroom can help to raise awareness of stylistic (formal, vs. informal and colloquial vocabulary) and dialectal (i.e. geographical: British English vs. American English) differences within the L2, and it can also increase the students' knowledge of contextual factors influencing communication.

The paragraphs that follow provide a few ideas to make use of texting in the L2 classroom. They display a series of exercises of different formats intended to practise the codification and interpretation of English SMS language. The activities should be preceded by an overview of the features of texting within its communicative frame; in other words, the teacher should briefly explain the particularities of texting as regards participants, code (shortening devices) channel and context, and draw a parallel with the L1 whenever possible. The exercises have been designed by the author, partly by using the printed and on-line material quoted in the appendix, and partly by creating new messages following SMS rules. They have been arranged into six different levels of complexity, ranging from guided practice to free production and covering from basic-level units (words) to higher-level units (phrases and clauses).

1. Level 1. Guided codification and decodification.

- Decodify respellings:

    Wer→ 'where'

    wen, luv, ya, ova, afta, sum, doin

    ('when', 'love', 'you/your', 'over', 'after', 'some', 'doing')

- Decodify letter names:

    B4→ 'before'

    C, Y, Q, Z, XLNt

    ('see', 'why', 'queue', 'said', 'excellent')
- Decodify symbols:

    @wk→ 'at work'

    dem&, C%l, M$U, W\, D/

    ('demand', 'cool', 'miss you', 'without', 'do')
- Codify abbreviations by letter reduction and clipping:

    'people' → *ppl*

    'speak', 'week', 'holidays', 'just', 'girlfriend', 'regards', 'sorry'

    (*spk, wk, hols, jst, gf* or *g/f, rgds, sry*)

2. Level 2. Word codification combining shortening devices:

'later' → *L8r*

'tonight', 'wait', 'wonderful', 'anyone', 'everyone'

(2nite, w8, 1daful, ne1, evry1)

3. Level 3. Codification of phrases and sentences combining shortening devices:

'to die for' → *2d4*   'Kiss me' → *XMe*
'Oh, I see' → *OIC*   'Anyone for tennis?' → *Ne1 410s?*
'See you later'→   'Get lost!' → *GL*
CUL8r   'Lots of love' → *LOL*
'What's up?' → *WU?, sup?*   'To you too' → *2U2*
wassup?   'I hate you' → *IH8U*
'I want to see you'   'It's up to you' → *IU2U*
→*Iwan2CU, I12CU*   'Keep in touch' → *KIT*
'Don't you see?' →   'Thank you'→ *ThnQ*
DntUC?, D\UC?
'Are you free to talk?' →
RUF2Tlk

4. Level 4. Decodification of phrases and clauses:

C/ThsBLuv?→   *IcntCU2niteIHve02Wear* → 'I can't
'Can this be love?'   see you tonight; I have nothing to
Nt2nite → 'Not   wear'
tonight'   *IM$U* → 'I miss you'
IlykU → 'I like you   *TTUL8r* → 'Talk to you later'
RUUp4It? → 'Are   *TA4N* → 'That's all for now'
you up for it?'
BCNU → 'Be
seeing you'
HpyBday2U →
'Happy birthday to
you'

5. Level 5. Translation and Codification

'Cara a cara' →   '¿Quieres hablar?' → *D/U12Tlk?*
F2F   *Wan2Tlk?*
'Métete en tus asuntos'→   'No es una buena idea'→ *NAGI*

MYOB	'Espérame' →*W84Me*
'Hasta mañana' →	'Sólo por si acaso'→ *JIC*
CU2moro	'En este momento'→ *ATM*
'Mucha suerte'	'Déjame en paz'→ *LMA*
→*LOL*	'Corta el rollo'→ *CIO* ('cut it out')
'¿Estás bien?' → *RUOK?*	
'Para que lo sepas' → *FYI*	

6. Level 6. Games:

These games are aimed at practising message codification and decodification in simulated contexts. They are also intended to train students in the effective use of the context and the cotext for successful communication.

• 'Split exchanges':

The material for this game is a set of short dialogues written in texting, each of them consisting of two short utterances (see Table 5 below). Every student gets one line of one of the dialogues and must complete his/her dialogue by finding the student who has got the other line. For less advanced students, clues can be given by inserting some spaces and punctuation marks between words (see the examples below). For a more challenging game, the messages could be matched in more than one way, so the students must find all the possible combinations.

Table 5

Split exchanges in SMS language: examples

First line	Second line
WotTIm2moRo? →	*C\CU2moro.BetaTues@10.XOXO*
W%dULIk2Cum2OurPlAc4DiNa?XX →	*SryICnt. IHvePpl4Dina.*
Ne14ADrnk@Bobz? →	*DunnoYet. TTUL8r,OK?*
ShllWeGo2DClubSatNite? →	*C%l!CUThr*
SryAbOtYrBro. RUOK? →	*DntWry ImOK, Thnq.CU@Bobz*
MEtingLiz4Lunch. CuminW/Us? →	*IC\,butW@RUDoin2nite?*
YRUDoinThs2Me?SheWasJstAFrnd! <3 →	*LMA!ID\Wan2Tlk2U.IH8U!* ☹
Thnx4ThRId. G8Car! →	*GladULkIt.* *Wan2JoinUs4ATrpThsWknd?*
Im@Mprtnt Mtng ATM. CnICllUL8r? →	*OK,butPeteSHereW8ing4U.* *CllMe@7pm&DntBL8!!*

- 'Message Exchange':

  This is an exercise of guided production to be done in pairs. Students must write and answer simple messages for different situations (arranging or cancelling a social meeting, breaking up with a boyfriend/girlfriend, congratulating somebody on something, etc). In a variant of this exercise, single students should send the same message to several recipients, who will answer it accordingly.

- 'Who am I?':

  In this game students are presented with text messages written by famous people whose identities they must guess. For example: *2B/Nt2B? Thts ?* (Hamlet); *Icme,Isw,Iconqrd* (Julius Caesar);

LMNtry, MyDErWtson (Sherlock Holmes); *IC\GtNoStisfctn* (Mick Jagger).

- 'Txtin4Fun':

Students must decode lyrics from songs, film or book titles, or fragments from well-known passages which have been humorously translated into texting by SMS users (the material for these and other activities can be obtained from online discussion forums and SMS glossaries, manuals, and dictionaries: see appendix). For example: *W8ing 4 Go.* ('Waiting for Godot'); *ioioItsOf2WrkWeGo* (the seven dwarfs' song in 'Snow White'); *D\StndSoCls2Me* ('Don't stand so close to me', a song by The Police), or the following passage, which partly summarizes the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*: *5Sistrs WntngHsbnds.NwMeninTwnBingly&Darcy. Fit&Loadd.BigSisJane*

Fals4B,2ndSisLizH8sDCozHesProud.TrnsOutDsActulyARlyNysGuy &RlyFancysLiz.SheDecydsSheLyksHim.Evry1GtsMaryd.

('Five sisters wanting husbands. New men in town: Bingley and Darcy. Fit and loaded. Big sister Jane falls for Bingley, second sister Liz hates Darcy because he is proud. Tursn out Darcy is actually a really nice guy and really fancies Liz. She decides she likes him. Everyone gets married').

It must be kept in mind that, as already mentioned, the rules of shortening have a certain degree of freedom in their application and that the code may be modified to satisfy in-group needs. Therefore, it is important to point out that these activities are not aimed at students' achieving complete mastery of the code, but rather at their acquiring a passive knowledge which will enable them to recognize and decodify the most widespread shortenings used in texting. On the other hand, it should also be remarked that these exercises and rules are mainly intended to practise what could be called "basic" texting. The best age to introduce this type of texting is probably when students are about 13-14 years old, as the effective presentation of the subcode requires that they have at least an intermediate knowledge of

English. Likewise, some previous knowledge of texting in the L1 is highly desirable, since that will contribute to the students' better understanding of the particularities of English texting besides reinforcing their motivation for learning.

Students at advanced and proficiency levels might also be introduced to "advanced" texting, a variety developed from basic texting whose most remarkable features are the total omission of word spacing, the extensive use of strokes with positive and negative meanings, and the use of capital letters with multiple values. Capitals are therefore used not only for initialized expressions and letter homophones, but also to indicate the beginning of a word (that is, to replace spacing), the existence of a double consonant letter, a double vowel letter or a long vowel sound or diphthong, as in *BeTa* ('better'), *GOd* ('good'), *FrE* ('free') or *WAt* ('wait'). By doing simple exercises of decodification of single items, students could enhance their knowledge of the correspondences between orthography and pronunciation.

4. Conclusion

The exploitation of the SMS subcode in the L2 classroom may be extremely interesting for several reasons. In the first place, it may contribute to improving the students' spelling and pronunciation skills in both the L1 and the L2, particularly by raising awareness of the relationship between orthography and pronunciation. Secondly, it may also contribute to increasing the students' lexicon in the foreign language. Concerning the lexical advantages of introducing texting into the classroom, it cannot be forgotten that the language of text messaging is basically shortened slang, which should be made clear when explaining the particularities of the subcode. This means that it abbreviates items which are highly colloquial and frequently used by young people, such as *GMBO* ('giggling my butt off', 'butt' being an informal term in American English for 'buttocks'), or Spanish *mrrn* ('marrón': 'trouble, jam'), and *star pdo* ('estar pedo': 'to be pissed'). It is obvious that texting displays a limited set of topics of interest (and therefore a limited range of vocabulary), namely studies, entertainment,

love and sex, and communication (farewells, greetings, goodbyes, dating, and so forth). However, texting arises as a valuable source of authentic everyday language, as well as a useful tool to understand stylistic and even dialectal variation: see, for instance, the example from American English above, or the initialism *TTFN* ('ta-ta for now'), where 'ta-ta' is an informal term in British English meaning 'goodbye'. Finally, texting may provide students with a better understanding of the notion of linguistic appropriateness and also give them an insight into the functioning of languages and their flexibility to adapt themselves to different communicative situations. In addition, SMS language can help students to increase their knowledge of the culture of the L2, since nowadays the great popularity of texting is largely responsible for its expansion to other domains (particularly mass media and advertising).

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Appendix

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