Text Messaging

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On the day we first started putting this chapter together, soon-to-be-President-of-the-United-States Barack Obama announced his choice of vice-presidential running mate by sending a text message to journalists and Democratic Party senators and supporters. One not-so-restrained *New York Times* journalist characterized the event: 'Mr. Obama's use of the newfound medium is the widest use of texting by a presidential candidate in history.' The following morning, again in the USA, a *National Public Radio* journalist talked about 'the most highly anticipated text message in human history'. This already newsworthy event was evidently being given an added mediatized spin thanks to texting. No doubt like many readers of the current volume, we are not convinced of the historic proportions of the Obama campaign's text message. This was, however, certainly a communicative event loaded with pragmatic – and metapragmatic – force. Why choose to use texting to deliver this public message? (After all, supporters could just as easily have been notified by the ancient technology of email.) What did the choice of text message mean to voters? Why should it warrant such media interest? Why make so much fuss about a text message which bore so little resemblance to the millions of text messages sent every day by ordinary people around the world?

In this chapter, we consider these matters by stepping back from the hyperbolic commentary on text messaging by journalists and the entertaining observations of popular writers. To this end, we start with a comprehensive but potted review of the scholarly, research-driven literature on text messaging; this work highlights the range of applications to which texting has been put as well as the ways in which sociolinguists, discourse analysts and other communication scholars have been attending to language in texting messaging. Shifting next to a more specifically pragmatic and metapragmatic focus, we present some of our own empirical research as a way to illustrate general phenomena covered in the wider scholarly literature and to ground text messaging as a pragmatic phenomenon. We close our chapter with some brief thoughts about gaps in the academic literature and possible directions for future research on the language of text messaging. Before we go any further, however, we offer the following brief account of text messaging as a digital technology.

1. The mechanics of texting

The terms 'text messaging' or just 'texting' refer to the brief typed messages sent using the SMS ('short message service') of mobile/cell phones, PDAs ('personal digital assistants'), smartphones or web browsers. Although messages nowadays often include images, videos and music (hence the newer term MMS 'multimedia message service'), the basic text-based messaging service continues to be enormously popular. Texting was initially developed and released commercially in the early to mid-1990s and has since seen a huge rise in popularity around the world following the rapid spread of mobile telephony in general. (In 2009, the United Nations reported that more than 60% of the world's population – about 4.1 billion people – had access to a mobile phone.

Note 1) Most often used for person-to-person communication, text messages are also increasingly being used to interact with automated systems (e.g. buying products, participating in television contests, recruiting voters). One interesting 'convergence' phenomenon is the use of short messaging services with interactive television, which confuses the boundary between interpersonal and broadcast messaging. As is usually the case, the technology is being continually transformed.

On this note, and in situating text messaging with reference to computer-mediated communication more generally, it is important to recognize always the interplay between what a technology itself allows (or affords) and what the communicator herself/himself brings to the technology. Most obviously, in the case of text messaging, the equipment is small and, eponymously, mobile; it therefore affords most texters an unobtrusive and relatively inexpensive means of communication. At the same time, text messaging is also technically and practically restricted, allowing only a certain number of characters per message. (Set by a worldwide industry standard, the limit is almost always 160 characters per message. Note 2) Moreover, like text-based CMC, it is *primarily* QWERTY-driven – which is to say, reliant on the standard 'type-writer' keyboard (cf Anis, 2007). Whether or not any mechanical feature of any technology presents as a communicative constraint or opportunity, however, invariably depends on the user and on the context of use.

2. Locating the linguistic: An overview of the literature

For a technology that only really went 'live' in the mid-1990s, it took scholars a while to attend to texting. Since the early 2000s, however, research from a range of disciplines and a number of countries has been growing. While much of this work falls beyond the immediate interests of language scholars, it does reveal the increasing importance and application of texting in both scholarly and public contexts. This research also demonstrates how much scholarly writing focuses on the *transactional* and often commercial uses of texting rather than the *relational* function which, as we will suggest, sits at the heart of most everyday texting. Representing a veritable 'shopping list', texting research spans a wide range of disciplines and topics. From medicine, studies include the use of texting for patient reminders (e.g. Downer, et al. 2006; Leong, et al. 2006) and for aftercare treatment (e.g. Robinson, et al. 2006; Weitzel, et al. 2007). In academics, studies include texting as library support (Herman 2007; Hill, Hill and Sherman 2007), as a research methodology (Bosnjak, et al. 2008; Cheung 2008; Steeh, Buskirk and Callegaro 2007), as a pedagogical tool (Dürscheid 2002a; Naismith 2007), as a recruitment strategy (Maher 2007), and as a means for reducing school truancy (Allison 2004). Research in environmental development has examined how texting assists Bangladeshi villagers to locate clean water sources (Opar 2006). Texting research extends to business and commercial uses (e.g., Bamba and Barnes 2007; Hsu, Wang and Wen 2006; Mahatanankoon 2007), political campaigning (Prete 2007) and media broadcasting (Enli 2007). Closer to human communication research, psychologists have looked at compulsive texting (Rutland, Sheets and Young 2007) and so-called *cyberbullying* (e.g. Raskauskas and Stoltz 2007; Smith, et al. 2008). What is apparent from this research is how often the purely informational uses of texting are often privileged.

A lot of other research does address the role of texting as a social-communicative resource in people's daily lives. Take these examples: thirty-two percent of adult texters in Malaysia cannot use their mobile phones without texting (Tanakinjal, et al. 2007); texting is a status symbol with Hong Kong college students, with texters being predominantly male and having a high household income (Leung 2007); young adults with lower social skills in Hong Kong (Leung 2007) and Japan (Ishii 2006) prefer texting to voice communication; Filipino mothers in the U.S. with children overseas use texting to maintain real-time relationships with

their children (Uy-Tioco 2007); and subtle gender relations are negotiated via texting in Taiwan (Lin and Tong 2007). Lists like this illustrate nicely the ways in which texting is typically embedded in people's daily lives.

In terms of language and communication in particular, scholarly interest has been a little slower still to establish itself, and texting continues to be a relatively under-examined area of research (compared, say, with other modes of CMC). This too has been changing, however, and a growing body of properly sociolinguistic and discourse analytic research attends to texting in English and other national languages. Our quick overview of the literature here, for example, covers work done in Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, South Africa, Nigeria, New Zealand, Kuwait, Malaysia, Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as the UK and USA. Pragmatically-oriented studies meanwhile have begun to address, amongst other things, turn-taking, code-switching, openings and closings, and general communicative intent. They have also considered, explicitly or not, the pragmatic implications of message length, textual complexity, grammar and punctuation, spelling and orthography, and the use of emoticons. In every case, studies typically situate pragmalinguistic phenomena with a view to broad cultural and interactional variations, which has important implications for any gross generalizations about the uniform nature of texting – a point we return to below.

2.1 Cross-cultural contexts

Speaking of variation, cross-cultural research on texting typically focuses on 'linguacultural' (Agar 1994) and gendered differences. A small handful of studies consider age differences. Perhaps not surprisingly, young people and older people have been found to use texting in different ways (Kim, et al. 2007). Teenagers and young adults are typically the most avid texters in a range of cross-cultural settings (Kasesniemi 2003; Ling 2005; Spagnolli and Gamberini 2007) which is not to say that it is exclusive to, or has relevance only for, young people. In reviewing the literature briefly, we find very little research that focuses on adult texters; the vast majority attends to children and young people. As with popular media coverage, therefore, the broader demographics of texters in largely overlooked.

In terms of gendered differences in texting, research has again been done in a number of countries. In Norway, for example, female teenagers and young adults text most frequently, with more than 40% of young women texting daily (Ling 2005). Compared with young Norwegian men, these young women also send a greater number of longer and more syntactically complex messages, with 52% containing complex sentence structures compared with 15% of boys' messages. They also use capitalization and punctuation more prescriptively, are more adroit at innovating new forms, prefer to coordinate events in the immediate future (as opposed to the middle future as do boys), and are more likely to use texting for managing emotionally 'loaded' communication (Ling 2005). These broad difference between girls/women and boys/men are commonly reported; see, for example, also Höflich and Gebhardt (2005) and Schmidt and Androutsopoulos (2004) in Germany; Herring and Zelenkauslaite (2009) in Italy; and Deumert and Masinyana (2008) in South Africa. In Finland meanwhile, Kasesniemi (2003) too found that teenage girls are heavy texters, often placing greater emphasis on providing emotional exchanges, contemplating reasons behind interpersonal incidents, and discussing how incidents have affected them. Finnish boys, however, typically place greater emphasis on speed; their messages tend to be brief, informative, practical, often single-word or question-answer texts in a single sentence, and are about the facts of events. That gender differences emerge in young people's preferred communication styles is hardly surprising (Thurlow 2001); these findings do however reiterate the variability that exists between texters and the messages they send.

Other cross-cultural research has also shown variable patterns between social/demographic groups within countries. For example, texters in Germany (Dürscheid 2002b), Italy (Spagnolli and Gamberini 2007), France (Rivière and Licoppe 2005), Korea (Kim, et al. 2007) and young people in Japan (Ishii 2006) communicate predominantly with family or those in their innermost social circles. A study of older Japanese texters meanwhile found texting used more with those in extended social and even professional circles in order to preserve respect for the receiver by not risking interrupting their affairs (Rivière and Licoppe 2005). In studying Kuwaiti texters, Haggan (2007) notes the transcription of Arabic texts into English and a tendency towards formality and eloquence which, she argues, may arise from their value more generally. Spagnolli and Gamberini (2007) meanwhile comment on the way that some Italians send lengthy, elaborate refusals to invitations, which, the authors argue, again reflects particular local norms. Of course, in all these cases, it is not clear how generalizable findings are to the rest of the country. Related to this point, and although there are steps in the right direction (e.g. Nickerson, Isaac and Mak 2008; also see below: Bieswanger, 2008; Plester et al. 2009a; Spilioti, 2009), we were unable to find anyone pulling together a large multinational comparative study which might offer a more systematic perspective on these types of linguacultural differences

2.2. Interactional contexts

The use of texting in building and maintaining relationships has been a key aspect of research, which goes a long way to confirming the essentially *social* function of the technology. For example, texting can assist in establishing new relationships (Ling 2008; see also Thompson and Cupples' (2008) study of young New Zealanders) or, as in Japan, in maintaining and reinforcing existing ones (Ishii 2006). Young Japanese people also rated their relationships as more intimate when texting was an aspect of the relationship (Igarashi, Takai and Yoshida 2005). Scholars have also remarked on the ritualistic role of texting in defining social boundaries through shared linguistic codes (e.g. Ling 2008; Androutsopoulos and Schmidt, 2002; Spilioti, 2009), and demonstrated how speech styles constitute different types of social relationships, with style shifting providing a contextual cue for relationship maintenance and conflict management (Schmidt and Androutsopoulos 2004). The role of texting in maintaining an 'absent presence' in Japanese relationships is highlighted by Ito and Okabe (2005) as a key interactional function of texting – what they call *ambient virtual co-presence*. French texters, too, have been found to use texting for maintaining an absent presence among close friends (Rivière and Licoppe 2005). This research demonstrates nicely the deeply embedded nature of texting in people's lives and its key role in relational escalation and maintenance.

Privacy considerations in texting have also been explored; for example, Weilenmann and Larsson (2002) found that texting may be a collective, public practice, with young Swedes sometimes reading and composing aloud with co-present friends. French texters, however, have been found to appreciate the ability to engage in private communications in public places, as texting permits senders to freely express emotion absent inhibitions and modesties (Anis 2007; Rivière and Licoppe 2005). The privacy afforded by texting also enables young people to communicate more freely (e.g. without adults' surveillance), which shores up young people's communities (Thompson and Cupples 2008). Conversely, in China, the traditional social order as governed by the State is perceived to be under threat where texting facilitates a more or less Habermasian 'public sphere' (Latham 2007). Whether approved of or not, texting is clearly aiding sociality in interesting and, to some extent, novel ways.

Another area of research that speaks to the interactional contexts of texting – and that has received considerable scholarly attention – is the thematic content or functional orientation of people's text messages. Chiluwa (2008), for example, classified Nigerian texters' messages into

three categories: economic (business and commerce), social (religion, politics, education, and other social concerns) and personal (greetings, feelings, prayers, etc.), and found that 60% of text messages fell into this last category. Other researchers have similarly found the overall purpose of texting to be primarily affective (Androutsopoulos and Schmidt 2002; Kasesniemi 2003; Ling 2005; Rivière and Licoppe 2005), phatic, and socio-coordinative (Androutsopoulos and Schmidt 2002; Ling 2005; Rivière and Licoppe 2005). The socio-coordinative function might entail, for example, the sending of 'gifts' (akin to greeting cards) or a good-night message (Harper 2002; Laursen 2005; Ling 2005), managing a romantic relationship (Harper 2002), or the exchange of jokes and other word-play games (Rivière and Licoppe 2005). Content is also sometimes created together with co-present friends (Harper 2002; Weilenmann and Larsson 2002), and because texting is most often used to fill gaps in the day when texters are without direct, face-to-face interpersonal contact, it invariably takes on a chatty tone (Ito and Okabe 2005). This body of research further illuminates the range of different social functions texting plays in people's lives.

2.3. Pragmalinguistic contexts

Without a doubt, a favourite topic of interest in writing about texting, both lay and scholarly, has been its lexical and stylistic features. Thankfully, an increasing amount of empirical research has begun to provide more measured, discursively situated perspectives on popular stereotypes about the features most popularly attributed to texting, including use of abbreviations (e.g. *txt*), letter-number homophones (e.g. gr8), and non-standard spelling (e.g. *luv*) – some of the most popularly cited examples of texting.

A brief review of the texting literature such as ours here immediately reveals how the 'linguistics' of texting is again marked by a number of cross-cultural similarities and differences. For example, research on Swedish texters finds that they alter their spelling from the standard by spelling phonetically, splitting compounds, omitting vowels, using conventional and unconventional abbreviations, writing in either all caps or all lower case and exchanging longer words for shorter ones (Hård af Segerstad 2002). In Norway, meanwhile, teenagers do not use as many spelling alterations as do Swedish texters, with only 6% of participants in one study using abbreviations, acronyms or emoticons, and girls largely responsible for abbreviations and innovative spellings (Ling 2005). German texters commonly use reduction techniques (Androutsopoulos and Schmidt 2002), while French texters use phonetic reductions, syllabograms or rebus writing (e.g. as with the English *b4* for 'before'),\ and logograms which are symbols, acronyms, and unilateral abbreviations (Anis 2007), and reduce spoken forms to writing (Rivière and Licoppe 2005). In the US, unambiguous abbreviations (e.g. *u* for 'you'; *r* for 'are'), vowel deletions and lexical shortenings (e.g. *Sun* for 'Sunday') are common (Ling and Baron 2007). Nigerian English texters employ spelling manipulations, abbreviations and phonetic spellings (Chiluwa 2008), while British texters are also linguistically creative (Tagg forthcoming). In one of only two African studies on texting to our knowledge, South Africa provides an interesting case where texters are found to use abbreviations, paralinguistic restitutions and non-standard spellings when texting in English, but not at all when texting in isiXhosa (Deumert and Masinyana 2008). Capitalization, punctuation and blank spaces are often omitted in Swedish text messages (Hård af Segerstad 2002); apostrophes and sentence-final punctuation are omitted about two-thirds of the time in the US (Ling and Baron 2007). Emoticons, e.g. smiley faces, are rare but used in the US (Ling and Baron 2007) and in Sweden (Hård af Segerstad 2002). Once again, what is striking about this international research is how much variation there is.

In addition to examining the lexical or orthographic features of texting, research has also attended to a range of syntactical and textual features (i.e. looking at the composition, organization and coherence of messages). In this regard, message length has received some of

the greatest attention; for example, Hård af Segerstad (2002, 2005a, b) found that, at 14.77 words per message, Swedish text messages are typically longer than German messages at 13 words per message (Döring 2002a, b). It is possible that cross-language comparisons are complicated by variably morphemic structures (see Plester, et al. 2009a). Ling and Baron (2007) meanwhile found that text messages in the US averaged only 7.7 words each, making them closer in length to those in Norway, which average 6.95 words per message for girls and even fewer, at 5.54 words per message, for boys (Ling 2005). In an extensive comparison of English and German syntax in texts, Bieswanger (2008) found that English texts contain on average 91 characters per message while German texts contain 95. The pragmatic significance of message length will become apparent when we turn to our own case study in a moment.

Research on syntactic features also investigates message complexity, i.e. messages containing multiple clauses. As noted above, Norwegian teenage girls' messages contain far greater complexity (52%) than their male counterparts (15%) (Ling 2005). Similar results were found in Finland, where boys prefer to send one-sentence text messages while girls prefer longer and more complex messages (Kasesniemi 2003). These findings are consistent in the US, with Ling and Baron's (2007) finding that 60% of their female university students' text messages contained more than one sentence. Along these lines, the omission of auxiliary verbs, personal pronouns, and function words are common in Germany (Dürscheid 2002) and Sweden (Hård af Segerstad 2002), where omission of the subject pronoun is also the most common syntactical reduction (Hård af Segerstad 2002). In the UK, analyses of article use and texting language usage more generally are foci of Tagg's (2007a, b) work. A common thread across these studies is the syntactic variation in both gendered and other cross-cultural contexts.

In thinking about more specifically pragmatic research, studies show that, for example, openings and closings are frequently dropped by Italian (Spagnolli and Gamberini 2007), Japanese (Ito and Okabe 2005) and German (Dürscheid 2002) text messagers. Dürscheid (2002) views this as a function of the conversational frame of texting, as texting is often used as a conversation channel — and indeed adheres more to conversational norms — rather than a more prescriptive form of written communication (see also Anis 2007, Ito and Okabe 2005). Kasesniemi (2003) too has remarked on the increasingly dialogical nature of texting among young Finns. Other research suggests that turn-taking conventions may be even stricter in texting than in speech, although this varies by cultural context and topic content (or communicative intent), and adheres to some highly standardized exchange patterns (Androutsopoulos and Schmidt 2002; Spagnolli and Gamberini 2007). Texters in Italy (Spagnolli and Gamberini 2007) and Japan expect reciprocity, and Japanese texters are highly sensitive to the amount of time that passes between turns, sending a text message prompt for recipients who take too long to reply (Ito and Okabe 2005). Working with Danish data, Laursen (2005) found expectations of reciprocity and immediacy, while Harper (2002) argued that in the US, messages did not necessitate a reply and certainly not immediately.

Some research on code switching has also been done in multilingual cultures, predominantly, though not exclusively, investigating the use of English in combination with another national language. In Kuwait, Haggan (2007) found that texters use a mixture of Arabic and English in their text messages, while Finnish teenagers mix Finnish with a medley of foreign language words and expressions, drawing suitable expressions from any language mastered by the writer (Kasesniemi 2003), and South African texters blend English with isiXhosa by writing English nouns with isiXhosa prefixes (Deumert and Masinyana 2008). In contrast, Nigerian texters completely avoid any 'Nigerianness' in their succinct messages, preferring standard (British) English and, even in their personal texts, avoiding Nigerian English and other indigenous languages (Chiluwa 2008). In her study, Spilioti (2009) provides an account of graphemic representations in Greek texters' alphabet- choice and code-switches. While these and other studies certainly attest to some important cultural variability, it is telling we think that so much

research still covers English and other dominant/national European languages and, to some extent, languages like Japanese and Arabic. This imbalance no doubt mirrors patterns of wealth distribution as well as the symbolic marketplace of academia.

2.4. Metalinguistic contexts

In spite of the growing body of scholarly research on texting, public and policy-level discourse about texting continues to fixate on its deleterious impact on literacy and standard language use – especially that of young people (Thurlow 2006, 2007). No review of the literature on texting would be complete, however, without briefly considering this broader metalinguistic framework. In this regard, research addresses two closely related types of public commentary: first, the general influence of texting on the standard languages and on popular notions of 'good communication'; second, concerns about the specific influence of text messaging language on conventional literacy. Invariably, these metalinguistic - or language ideological - debates prioritize the belief that text messaging language has a negative impact. These are issues addressed by researchers writing/working in various languages (e.g. in German: Androutsopoulos and Schmidt 2002; Dürscheid 2002; in French: Anis 2007; in Nigerian English: Chiluwa 2008). While a few scholars insist that texting has a negative influence on standard writing, spelling and grammar (Siraj and Ullah 2007), most empirical studies focused on this issue maintain that texting does not pose a threat to standard English teaching and learning. These scholars usually argue that, although there may be some diffusion of texting style into 'formal' writing (e.g. school work), texters almost always recognize that language is context specific (Dürscheid 2002; Chiluwa 2008), though they do not necessarily view computer-mediated communication as 'writing' (Lenhart, et al. 2008). By the same token, other scholars challenge the idea that the influence of texting on standard language practices is necessarily a bad thing. Androutsopoulos and Schmidt (2002), for example, propose that the loosening of prescriptive norms for texting may be made understandable. They note the following features and their implications: 1) 'orthographic negligence reflects the reduction of cognitive resources allocated to spelling; 2) transgression of orthography implies deliberate discrepancies; 3) neography is an alternative orthography' (p. 95). Other research (Shortis 2007a) suggests that the linguistic creativity of texting poses little threat to standard spelling. Some of the most explicit (and conclusive) research on the issue of standard literacies comes from Plester and her colleagues, which reveals a *positive* relation between texting and literacy (Plester, et al. 2009b; Plester et al. 2008; Plester et al. 2009a). (One instant messaging study also suggests that new media language does not interfere with standard literacy: Tagliamonte and Denis 2008). What Plester's research confirms is that, not surprisingly, young people (like older texters, no doubt) are inherently aware of key pragmatic considerations such as context, relationship and communicative intent (see also Lenhart et al., 2008; Tagg 2009).

3. The pragmatics of texting: A case study

One early example of empirical research published on texting was our own study (Thurlow 2003). [Note 3] Based on a corpus of *actual* text messages, this study presented a direct challenge to the kinds of largely unfounded claims being made in the media; it also offered a more properly discourse analytic perspective on texting (for an overview of discourse analysis and its relation to pragmatics see Jaworski and N. Coupland, 2006). A number of the studies reviewed above – especially those with a specifically (socio)linguistic focus – have used this original study as a

stimulus for extending scholarly understanding of the 'language' of texting. We review the study here in order to demonstrate – and reiterate – the quintessentially *pragmatic* nature of texting.

3.1. Linguistic form and language play

While much is made (in the media and elsewhere) about the technologically imposed need for brevity in texting, texters seldom seem to use the space available. As others have also found, the average word length of text-messages in our own study was approximately 14 and the average character length of messages was only 65, although with quite a lot of variation (SD = 45). (Recall that the standardized limit on text messages in 160 characters.) As such, the length and abbreviated linguistic forms of texts would seem to be more a function of the need for speed, ease of typing and, perhaps, other symbolic and pragmatic concerns such as a preference for more dialogic exchanges (see also Döring, 2002a; Hård af Segerstad, 2005; Kasesniemi, 2003; Ling, 2005; Ling and Baron, 2007; also Zelenkauskaite and Herring 2008). In this sense, therefore, texting immediately takes on the character of interactive written discourse as in other new media genres like instant messaging. Texters are able from the outset to infuse an ostensibly asynchronous technology with a certain degree of synchronicity – or dialogicality. The technology is thereby co-opted and exploited to serve people's underlying needs for intimacy and sociability. Elsewhere, we have called this the 'communication imperative' (Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic 2004), a fundamental human drive which usually prevails over the mechanical limitations of technologies.

There are other technological constraints in texting which are similarly leveraged by users for interpersonal gain; this is especially evident in the linguistic and typographic form of text messages. Just as message length may easily be accounted for in pragmatic terms, so too are most of the supposedly distinctive, novel and/or unorthodox linguistic forms, such as shortenings (i.e. missing end letters), contractions (i.e. missing middle letters) and G-clippings and other clippings (i.e. dropping final letter), acronyms and initialisms, letter/number homophones, 'misspellings' and typos, non-conventional spellings, and accent stylizations.

What was most noticeable about the non-standard items in our own study was how so few of them were especially new or especially incomprehensible. (The media and other commentators often like to play up the 'hieroglyphic' unintelligibility of young people's texting – see Thurlow 2007). In practice, very few of text messages we looked at were semantically 'unrecoverable', even in isolation from their original, discursive context and even to outsiders such as ourselves. Much of what texters type in their messages would not be out of place on a scribbled note left on the fridge door, the dining-room table or next to the telephone – where the same brevity-speed imperative would apply. In this sense, therefore, claims (both academic and lay) for the impenetrability and exclusivity of texting language are greatly exaggerated and belie the discursive significance of situated language use. Like the fridge-door note-maker, texters surely recognize the obvious need also for intelligibility – in Gricean terms, for example, quantity and manner (Grice 1975; cf also Lenhart et al., 2008; Plester, et al. 2008; Tagg 2007b). One of the best examples of this, in terms of abbreviation, is the use of consonant clusters (e.g. THX), which rely on the premise (and metapragmatic awareness) that consonants in English (as with many other languages) usually have more semantic detail/value than vowels. In addition, many of the non-conventional spellings found in texting are widespread and pre-date the mobile phone, in any case (Crystal, 2008; Shortis 2007a). Examples of this include the use of z as in *girlz*, the k in *skool*, as well as phonological approximations such as Americanized forms like *gonna*, *bin*, and *coz*, as well as g-clippings like *jumpin*, *havin*.

Our own corpus did demand one important caveat regarding the issue of non-standard orthography. The text-messages we looked at revealed only about three abbreviations per

message, which meant that this supposedly defining feature of texting style accounted for less than 20% of the overall message content analyzed (see also Bieswanger 2008). This initial finding certainly appears to run counter to popular ideas about the unintelligible, highly abbreviated 'code' of texting. In the same vein, relatively few typographic (as opposed to alphabetic) symbols were found throughout the entire corpus, almost all of which were simply kisses or exclamation marks, usually in multiple sets (e.g. *xxxxxx* and *!!!!!*). Emoticons (e.g. ☺), too, were noticeable by their absence. Moreover, in spite of their notoriety in media reports and despite the title of Crystal's (2008) book about texting, relatively few examples of letter-number homophones (e.g. *Gr8*) were found. Like many of the paralinguistic and prosodic cues found in older CMC technologies such as IRC (see Werry 1996), a more frequent type of language play were 'accent stylizations' and 'phonological approximations', such as the regiolectal spelling *novern* for 'northern' (for parallels in languages other than English, see Ling, 2005; Hård af Segerstad, 2005). In addition, we found a range of onomatopoeic, exclamatory spellings (e.g. *haha!*, *arrrgh!*, *WOOHOO!*, *rahh*, *ahhh*) and a handful of other typographical-cum-linguistic devices for adding prosodic impact (e.g. *quick quick*, *wakey wakey* and *yawn*) and, therefore, communicative immediacy. Indeed, as researchers like Shortis (e.g., 2007b) have shown, the non-standard orthography of texting almost always expresses the generally creative, playful and friendly tone intended by texters (see also Hård af Segerstad, 2005). And herein lies the crux of texting.

3.2. Communicative intent: Maximizing sociality

Relationship-building and social intercourse are both central to, and strongly facilitated by, technologies for communication, even though popular opinion still feeds on the once-popular scholarly idea that computer-mediated communication is necessarily asocial and/or antisocial (see Thurlow et al., 2004, for more on this). Perhaps even more so than the landline telephone, the mobile phone and texting are clearly 'technologies of sociability' (Fischer 1988).

For anything other than analytical convenience, it is practically impossible to separate relational intent neatly from transactional intent – or, to put it another way, 'doing sociability' from information exchange (Jaworski 2000:113). However, the text messages we collected were overwhelmingly and, for the most part, quite apparently *relational* in their orientation, ranging from sending friendly salutations, to making social arrangements, to substantial friendship maintenance. Explicitly transactional messaging accounted for only 15% of all the messages analyzed. Even these ostensible information exchanges (e.g. hyper-coordinated, practical arrangements) invariably served more social concerns, such as finding a friend during a night out or courteously letting someone know that the texter was running late. The predominantly solidary, often phatic function of texting was expressed also in the persistent use of humour and the 'gifting' of chain messages (e.g. stock sentiments or saucy jokes).

In this sense, it is clear that much texting epitomizes small-talk – which is not to say that it is peripheral or unimportant. On the contrary; as J. Coupland (2000) reminds us, small talk is, interactionally speaking, *big* talk regardless of its brevity, informality or apparent topical superficiality. For example, as Androutsopoulos (2000) has demonstrated in the case of fanzines, non-standard orthography can be a powerful but also playful means for texters (and young texters especially) to affirm their social identities by deviating from conventional forms; in doing so, they differentiate themselves (from adults, for example) and align themselves with each other. To this, we would add the opportunity to personalize and informalize their messages. Accordingly, most of what happens in/with everyday texting can – and should be – explained in the context of texters' self-evident drive to connect with one another and to maximize sociality (see also, from above, Androutsopoulos and Schmidt 2002; Igarashi, et al. 2005; Ito and Okabe 2005; Kasesniemi 2003; Ling 2005; Rivière and Licoppe 2005; Schmidt and Androutsopoulos

2004; Spilioti 2009). In these terms, texting presents itself in the broadest terms as a social technology *par excellence*.

One technologically afforded pragmatic phenomenon in our 2003 data was the openly sexual tone of many messages. Texting facilitates an interesting mix of intimacy and social distance, not unlike various other genres of CMC (e.g. instant messaging and, to some extent, email); this also complicates traditional boundaries between private and public (cf H. Lee 2005; also Zelenkauskaite and Herring 2008). The technical rapidity and ephemerality (it is seldom stored or recorded) of texting seem to bring with them a *relative* anonymity, even though the sender and receiver are invariably known to each other and/or revealed to each other through caller/number display. This kind of 'recognized anonymity' might explain the relative licentiousness or 'flame'-tendencies of some texters (for more on anonymity see Johnson 2001; also Thurlow et al. 2004). [Note 4] The face-saving capacity of this type of anonymity likewise accounts for texters who send messages to say something they would ordinarily avoid having to say face-to-face, such as breaking up with a romantic partner or, in the case of our own study, discussing an unexpected pregnancy.

Related to this sense of recognized anonymity, and as another example of how text-messagers capitalize on technological affordances, our corpus revealed instances where the sender and receiver were apparently within viewing distance of each other. Texting nicely facilitates this kind of co-present exchange, allowing texters to interact covertly in an immediate and potentially very intimate form of communication – what some have referred to as the 'culture of concealed use' (Ling and Yttri 2002:164). Texting evidently *enhances* communication in ways which allow for multiple or even parallel communicative exchanges (including face-to-face interaction), offering an attractive combination of mobility, discretion, intimacy and play. This combination of immediacy and intimacy drives the underlying need for sociality and, for the most part, explains the linguistic form – or style – of texting.

3.3. The 'maxims' of text message style

Assumptions – especially in the media – about the ubiquity, consistency and homogeneity of texting style are, in practice, always confronted with a great deal of linguacultural, social and personal variation. This is apparent from the variable findings of the studies we reviewed above which show noticeable national, gender and, to some extent, age differences (see, in particular, Bieswanger 2008; Deumert and Masinyana 2008; Dürscheid 2002a; Kim, et al. 2007; Ling, Julsrud and Yttri 2005; Spilioti 2009). The fact is that no two texters necessarily text in the same way, although friends and peer groups no doubt establish their own local stylistic norms. Nor, of course, does the same texter necessarily make the same stylist choices for all messages (cf Androutsopoulos and Schmidt 2002; Spagnolli and Gamberini 2007). This is not, however, to imply that texting is without its stylist curiosities; indeed, the 'language of text-messaging' is simultaneously remarkable and unremarkable in its relative unconventionality.

Based on our own corpus of real text messages and some of the research findings reviewed above, it is possible to think of the typographic/orthographic practices of texting being underpinned by three key pragmatic 'maxims' (cf. Grice 1975) all serving a general 'principle' of sociality. [Note 5] Accounting for almost all of the language play we see in texting, the maxims are:

(1) brevity and speed;
(2) paralinguistic restitution; and,
(3) phonological approximation.

The first of these maxims, the two-fold maxim of brevity and speed, is manifested most commonly in (a) the abbreviation of lexical items (including letter-number homophones) and (b) the relatively minimal use of capitalization and standard, grammatical punctuation (e.g. commas and spaces between words). Importantly, and as we have already suggested, the need for both brevity and speed appears to be motivated less by technological constraints, but rather by pragmatic demands such as ease of turn-taking (i.e. back-and-forth exchanges) and overall fluidity of social interaction. (From the research review above – e.g. Ito and Okabe 2005; Laursen 2005) – it appears that there is some variation in texters' expectations of reciprocity and response time.) In terms of the second and third maxims, paralinguistic restitution understandably seeks to redress the apparent loss of such socio-emotional or prosodic features as stress and intonation, while phonological approximation (e.g. accent stylization) adds to paralinguistic restitution and engenders the kind of playful, informal register appropriate to the relational orientation of texting. On occasion, the second and third maxims appear to override the brevity-speed maxim (see also Spilioti 2009), but in most cases all principles are served simultaneously and equally. Thus, for the sake of paralinguistic restitution, capitalization (e.g. *FUCK*) and multiple punctuation (*what??!!!*) may be more desirable for texters. Lexical items such as *ello* ('hello'), *goin* ('going'), and *bin* ('been'), meanwhile, serve both the need for abbreviation and phonological approximation.

Even though many 'linguistic puritans' (Thurlow 2006) nowadays like to exaggerate the 'death' of punctuation, the use of question marks (?) and full-stops (.) can be surprisingly persistent – especially given the additional effort and time it takes to punctuate (again, cf Spilioti 2009). In fact, with the loss of typographic contrastivity (e.g. italics, bolding, underlining), the use of capitalization and punctuation can become more useful, with ostensibly grammatical marks being co-opted for other less standardized effects (e.g. *LATE*, *wow!!!!* or *No wait*…). Another example of paralinguistic restitution in graphical form is the famous emoticon – a direct borrowing from older new media genres such as IRC and a feature which appears to be similarly unpopular and, therefore, relatively infrequent – in spite of its exaggerated depiction in the media. (In a follow-up to our study, Ling and Baron, 2007, found a similar result; cf also Hård af Segerstad, 2002.)

The notion of standardness in written language is itself a convention and always an abstraction from spoken language (see Cameron 1995; and Shortis 2007a, on texting in particular). In this sense, therefore, like the fridge-door note and the phonetic transcriptions of expert linguists, many of the typographic practices of texting offer *more* 'correct', *more* 'authentic' representations of speech to begin with. As Jaffe (2000) puts it:

> The use of non-standard orthography is a powerful expressive resource. … [which] can graphically capture some the immediacy, the 'authenticity' and 'flavor' of the spoken word in all its diversity. … [and] has the potential to challenge linguistic hierarchies… (p. 498)

In their messages texters 'write it as if saying it' to establish a more informal register, which in turn helps to do the kind of small-talk and solidary bonding they desire for maximizing sociality. The language texters use is, therefore, invariably appropriate to the context of interaction (see Lenhart, et al. 2008; Plester, et al. 2008; Tagg 2007a). Sometimes there is also evidence of texters' reflexive (often playful) use of language and their inherent *meta*pragmatic awareness (Verschuren, 2004), as in this second example with its stylized performance of drunkenness and its tongue-in-cheek misanthropy:

> *Example message*

hey babe.T.Drunk.Hate all luv.Have all men.Fuck
them.how r u?We're ou utery drunk.im changing.
Now.Ruth.xxx. Hate every1

This same metapragmatic awareness may also account for texters' (admittedly variable) use of such apparently clichéd forms as letter-number homophones and emoticons, which can be used with ironic effect and/or self-consciously to enact or playfully perform 'text messaging'. In other words, in a Hallidayan sense (Halliday 1969/1997), texting always fulfils both an interpersonal and textual function as people send messages not only for the kinds of communicative functions outlined above (e.g. relational bonding and social coordination) but also to be seen to be texting. Texting (and mobile phones) carries cultural capital in and of itself – as a lifestyle accessory and a ludic resource. Irrespective of message content, the act of texting itself has cachet (to follow the cliché, the medium is also a message) and necessarily communicates something about the sender/user. And part of buying into the cachet of texting means drawing on – or rejecting altogether – symbolic resources such as ringtones, keypad covers, and popularized linguistic markers like initialisms, clippings and letter-number homophones. It is precisely this kind of metapragmatic awareness and (life-) stylistic variation which is typically overlooked in the print media's own metapragmatic commentary (or rather complaint) about texting (see Shortis 2007a; Thurlow 2006, 2007).

3.4. Texting as a distinctive genre?

In her well-known paper on the language of email, Baron (1998) grappled with the idea that email might herald a new linguistic genre; her conclusion was ultimately that email language instead represented a creolizing blend of written and spoken discourse. Like email, and indeed most new media discourse, text-messages have much the same hybrid quality about them – both in terms of the speech-writing blend and in terms of their mixing of old and new linguistic varieties. As Rössler and Höflich (2002) put it, texting is 'email on the move'. In its transience and immediacy, however, texting is as much like instant messaging as it is like email – and, for that matter, speech. In keeping with Herring's (2001) proposals, therefore, we are more inclined to view texting in its own terms; whatever formal similarities it may bear to other CMC genres or modes, the linguistic and communicative practices of text-messages emerge from a particular combination of technological affordances, contextual variables and interactional priorities. The kinds of orthographic (or typographic) choices that texters make in their messages are motivated primarily by pragmatic and communicative concerns. Once again, this is not to say that text-messages are without character or distinction.

Example message
Safe Hi babe!Angie + Lucy had words last nite-stood
there arguing 4 ages,loads of people outside cobarna.Bit
obvious they……werent gonna fight tho cos they were
there 4 so long!I was a bit pissed (woh!) Good nite tho!Spk
2u lata xxBeckyxx

Removed from its original technical context (i.e., transferring it from the small screen of the mobile phone), the extract above is somehow clearly a text message. How is this? Does this not imply a particular 'language of texting'? Yes and no. While so much research focuses on the linguistic (and orthographic) *form* of texting (see our review above), the defining feature of text-messages is ultimately their sociable *function*. Text-messages are thus communicative events (i.e.

genres) only superficially recognizable from their look; their real significance (in both semantic and social terms) lies primarily in their discursive content and communicative intent. So, for example, while a text-messages may well appear informational or content-focused, it will more often than not be serving a relational purpose – so much so, that this solidary function is a far more useful genre-defining feature of texting than, say, its length or the use of abbreviations, letter-number homophones, etc..

The golden rule of pragmatics is, of course, that form and function are mutually dependent. If the distinctive (albeit not necessarily unique) nature of texting is to be pin-pointed in any way, it must hinge on a *combination* of the following broadly defined but typical discursive features:

(a) the *comparatively* short length of text-messages;
(b) the *relative* concentration of non-standard typographic markers; and
(c) their *predominantly* small-talk content and solidary orientation.

Key qualifications here are 'combination', 'comparatively', 'relative' and 'predominantly'; none of these generic and stylistic features is sufficient individually to characterize texting. Compared with a formal letter or an academic essay they are most likely shorter (constrained in part by the mechanical affordance of a 160 character limit), contain more language play and are more chatty. This obvious distinction starts to fall away, however, when compared with greeting card messages, fridge-door notes, and so on. Increasingly, with the convergence of new (and old) media, the technological boundaries and generic distinctiveness of instant messaging, texting, emailing are becoming blurred. Notable examples of this are to be found in micro-blogging (e.g. *Twitter* and status updates on *Facebook* – see, C. Lee, forthcoming) as well as the multi-functionality of smart-phones (e.g. *BlackBerry*) and, to some extent, Apple's *iPhone*. These changes serve to remind us that, like language in general, the language of text messaging is constantly changing. No sooner have scholars had the chance to pin-point (and publish about) the character of new media language than the media change again (see Thurlow and Mroczek, forthcoming). What remains unchanged, however, is people's determination and capacity to rework technologies (both mechanical and linguistic) for maximizing sociality – in other words, for communication.

4. Conclusion: New Directions

We started this chapter by referring to the decision by US President Barack Obama and his campaign organizers to announce his vice-presidential running mate in August 2008. According to an Associated Press report at the time, his campaign aides wanted to attract additional supporters by soliciting their cell phone numbers and email addresses. Undoubtedly, the choice was a strategic and practical one. However, whether intended or not, the medium was also a powerful message in itself. This was a presidential candidate promising to be a man of change and of participatory democracy. Like any successful presidential candidate of recent times, Obama had to impress upon the country that he was also a man of the people. 'I'm asking you to believe. Not just in my ability to bring about real change in Washington …I'm asking you to believe in yours.' Attainable or not, true or not, what better way to *implicate* his vice-presidential announcement with a message of novelty, interactivity and, especially, sociability than to text it. As an act of synthetic personalization (Fairclough 1989), a text message like this offers only the *appearance* of sociability and is far removed from the embedded, interpersonal exchanges which characterize texting.

Umberto Eco (2002) notes that we are living in an age where the diminutive, the brief and the simple are highly prized in communication. Clearly, texting embodies this zeitgeist. And like

many earlier communication technologies, it evokes and/or embodies a range of projected fears and hopes. Indeed, the history of the development of so-called new communication technologies has been marked by periods of excessive hype and hysteria about the kinds of cultural, social and psychological impacts each new technology is likely to have. This is not to deny that few people, professional, academic or lay, could have predicted the extraordinary rise in popularity of the cell phone and its sister technology texting. Not surprisingly, public discourse about texting (e.g. in the media) encodes any number of metapragmatic comments about the nature of both texting and language, which are interesting in themselves. If, as Mey (2001: 5) suggests, the field of pragmatics 'is interested in the process of using language and its *producers*, not just its end-*product*, language', then the kind of everyday, metapragmatic commentary about texting is decidedly *a-pragmatic* since, for the most part, it fixates on the structures, forms and grammars of language – or the perceived lack thereof. For example, both media discourse and other popular commentary prioritize and exaggerate the *look* of text messaging language – its supposedly distinctive lexical and typographic style. Notwithstanding this, everyday talk about texting does offer important insights into people's beliefs (and concerns) about language (and technology) which, as Pennycook (2004) notes, perfomatively establishes what language itself means.

It is for this reason that the study of texting warrants continued research interest – especially from discourse analysts and other language and communication scholars. Specifically – and briefly – this research would do well to focus on situated (or ethnographic) analyses (i.e., the real, everyday contexts of texting; cf Thurlow 2009); to address the use of texting across the lifespan; to pay even more attention to non-European linguacultures; to explore different practices of transcultural style- and code-switching; [Note 6] to link with other 'short messaging' technologies such as micro-blogging (e.g. *Twitter*), which are sustained by text- and instant-messaging as well as by emailing; and, in the same vein, to undertake properly multimodal discourse analysis (e.g. use of 'pxting' in New Zealand, ring tones, wallpaper). As the technologies of texting are constantly changing, so too are the practices and meanings of texting changing; any research on texting needs to be constantly updated. As we have argued before (Thurlow & Bell, 2009; cf also Buckingham 2007: 3), it is also important that scholars lead the way in resisting a 'superficial fascination' with technology – and, in the case of texting, with fleeting linguistic curiosities – in favour of a deeper engagement with the cultural contexts and communicative practices which give both technology and language their real meaning.

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Notes

1. Source: International Technology Union's *ICT Development Index*. Available (10 April 2010) online at: <http://www.itu.int/newsroom/press_releases/2009/07.html>
2. For an interesting account of the reason behind the 160-character limit on text messages, read Los Angeles Times (2009, May 03) *Why Text Messages are Limited to 160 Characters*. Available (07 April 2010) online at <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/ technology/ 2009/ 05/invented-text-messaging.html>
3. To save space we do not repeat background information about the size and nature of our corpus other than to say it comprised 541 real text messages sent or received by a random

sample of British university students. With the exception of a few instances of Welsh, all the messages were in English.

4. 'Flames' and 'flaming' are terms sometimes used to describe openly hostile or derogatory messaging in CMC (see Thurlow, et al., 2004).
5. In their recent study, Deumert and Masinyana (2008) found that these maxims were violated by isiXhosa texters who, it seems, prefer to text without any forms of paralinguistic restitution and/or phonological approximation. By the same token, in her analysis of Greek texting, Spilioti (2009) found that texters were not always beholden to brevity, sometimes preferring to use more time-consuming foreign-language borrowings for the sake of expressivity (i.e., paralinguistic restitution).
6. In his chapter 'How do other languages do it?', Crystal (2008) makes some attempt to address the practices of texting in languages other than English. His lists of 'text abbreviations in other languages' do little, however, to move understanding beyond the stereotypical exaggeration of linguistic forms preferred by journalists. Better examples of first-hand empirical studies are, for example, Bieswanger (2006), Hård af Segerstad (2005), Ling (2005) and Spilioti (2009).

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