

SHORTENING DEVICES IN TEXT MESSAGING: A MULTILINGUAL APPROACH

ABSTRACT

In this article I summarise a comparative study on the range of shortening devices resorted to for mobile phone communication via text messaging. Those devices are described, exemplified and arranged by means of the analysis of data gathered from three languages: English, French and Spanish. It is hypothesized that, out of a common core of shortening methods used for text messaging (for example, the use of initial letters, clipped forms of words, letter and number homophones, respelled forms, symbols, or abbreviations), each language tends to favour particular devices on the grounds of a variety of factors such as the origin of the language, the complexity of its inflectional system, the correspondences between spelling and pronunciation, or even phonotactic constraints. This could explain why, for example, initialisation is more popular in English whereas letter reduction (i.e. abbreviation) and respelling are preferred in Spanish and French respectively. Therefore, after displaying the general tendencies observed in the three languages as regards shortening preferences, I attempt to provide a reasoned explanation for their choice in the light of the principle of 'linguistic idiosyncrasy'.