

## The Use of SMS and Language Transformation in Bangladesh

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*This paper focuses on the use of SMS and its impact on the transformation of formal language in the Bangladeshi context. In particular, it discusses: a) patterns of SMS usage among Bangladeshi youth; b) the factors contributing to the transformation of language due to SMS usage; and c) gender and institutional differences of the SMS language influence among University of Dhaka and private university students of the country. A random sample of 300 youth studying in different faculties of Dhaka University and nine private universities responded to self-tailored questionnaires. The results reveal that Bangladeshi youth are significantly affected by current trend of SMS communication. The youth practice code-switching, and code-mixing; break grammatical rules; use abbreviations and short forms, symbols and emoticons, and use abusive words; and form new slang words. The study found major gender and institutional differences in several aspects of SMS use.*



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The use of short messaging service (SMS) using mobile phone has become common among youth in Bangladesh. It has changed social interaction patterns, and thus, the current socio-cultural scenario. The total number of mobile phone subscribers in Bangladesh had reached 45.75 million at the end of March 2009 (BTRC, 2009). Bangladesh is one of Asia's fastest growing cellular markets, with a mobile penetration rate of around 29.73%. Currently, six mobile phone operators are running actively in the Bangladeshi telecom market. They are CityCell, GrameenPhone, AKTel, Banglalink, TeleTalk, and Warid Telecom Bangladesh.

The widespread adoption of SMS among people, particularly among the young, has given rise a new sub-culture. This sub-culture of SMS language helps in innovation of new words and expressions in young people's vocabulary and daily language usage. New slogans like 'jotil vab', 'abar jigai', 'ajaira pechal', 'jhakkas', 'fatafati' and the like have emerged and gained popularity among the young. Bangladeshi youths frequently use abbreviated words such as 'bcz', 'luv u', 'gd Ng8', 'Kmn', 'I'm bg', 'lol' and numerous others. They also have a tendency to mix Bengali words with English, Hindi and other languages such as 'Abar Jigs', 'Shombhability', 'Hum tum', 'Pyar' etc.

Among teens, SMS is the most preferred form of mediated interaction, surpassing instant messaging, e-mail, and phone calls (Ling, 2005). SMS has in fact transformed the nature of social interaction. Emoticons, such as :- ( , :- ) and :- ) are a representation of body language, which would otherwise be missing from non face-to-face communication (Cadhain, 2005). These can change the meaning of a text message just as much as body language can change the meaning of verbal communication in spoken discourse (Cadhain, 2005). Texters may also make use of different phonetic spellings in order to create different types of verbal effects in their messages such as 'hehe' for laughter (Cadhain, 2005).

However, almost no empirical research has been conducted on the pattern of SMS language usage among Bangladeshi people in general and young people in particular (with the one exception being Aminuzzaman's [2005] study). Most important, to our knowledge, no empirical research has addressed the linguistic aspect of SMS usage in the Bangladeshi context. Rahela Banu, an Associate Professor of the Institute of Modern Language, Dhaka has worked on *Code Switching in Bangladesh* (2001) which emphasizes the intermingling of English and Bangla in socio economic contexts.

The aim of the present paper is therefore, to explore the evolution of language in SMS-mediated communication among Bangladeshis, particularly among university students.

## 2.0. Previous Studies of Mobile Text Messaging

### 2.1. Linguistic Pattern of Mobile Phone Use

Linguistic analysis of mobile texting has only been addressed in a small proportion of studies. According to Döring (2002) and Hård af Segerstaad (2005), SMS messages have not received the same linguistic attention. Grinter and Eldridge (2001) report that the reasons teenagers prefer to text one another are that it is quicker, cheaper, more convenient than other communicative methods. Among stylistic features noted are abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, misspellings, and omission of vowels, subject pronouns, and punctuation (Ling & Baron 2007). 'You' is the most commonly used word for both males and females (Ling 2005).

Linguistic analyses of texting have appeared for several languages (e.g., German: Döring, 2002; English: and Thurlow & Brown, 2003; Crystal, 2008; Norwegian: Ling, 2005; Swedish: Hård and Segerstad 2005. Bodomo and Lee (2002), Kasesniemi (2003) and Thurlow and Brown (2003) report similar findings of linguistic features that are characteristic to language in SMS, as well as various ways in which language is reduced and shortened:

- Shortenings, contractions
- Acronyms and initialisms
- Letter/number homophones
- ‘Misspellings’ and typos
- Use of spoken spellings
- Omission of punctuation and word spacing
- Exclamation marks and question marks
- Emoticons (or smileys)
- Capitals or small letters only (whole messages)
- Inflectional endings reduced
- Long words in native language with foreign shorter ones

## **2.2. Shortening of Words**

Research suggests that the use of short words will have undesirable effects on teenagers’ spelling abilities and language as a whole (Crystal, 2008). SMS dictionaries provide a multitude of shortened forms including known terms such as ASAP (“as soon as possible”), and more idiosyncratic expressions such as BYKT (“but you knew that”), and CntTAKMyiisOFFaU (“can’t take my eyes off of you”) (Grinter & Eldridge, 2003). These studies demonstrate several mechanisms for deriving these shortened forms, including the use of abbreviations or acronyms, other “made up” words during the course of the communication, and the use of numbers and letters to represent sounds (Grinter & Eldridge, 2001). In addition, teenagers use shortened words that are concerned with practical matters such as meeting up at the bus stop rather than the more complex expressions offered by SMS dictionaries (Grinter & Eldridge, 2001). In particular females write longer and more complex messages (Ling 2005). The use of short forms may thus help users to enhance the feeling of directness, effortlessness, informality of language, and natural spontaneity (Hård af Segerstad, 2005).

David Crystal (2008) analyzes how texting has transformed the patterns of language usage among young people. He calls it ‘textspeak’ or language of texting, which characterized by its distinctive graphology. Its key feature is rebus abbreviation, where words are formed by representation of letters as syllables, as used in ‘b’, ‘b4’, ‘NE’, ‘r’, ‘Tspoons’, ‘u’, ‘ur’, ‘xcept’; and is made of logograms, such as numerals and symbols, as seen in ‘&’, ‘@’, ‘2’, ‘abbrevi8’, ‘b4’, ‘face2face’, and ‘sum1’ (Crystal, 2008: 80-81). Textspeak has its own range of direct-address items, such as ‘F2T’ (free to talk?), ‘PCM’ (please call me), ‘MMYT’ (Mail me your thoughts), ‘RUOK’ (are you OK?), ‘SWDYT’ (So what do you think?), ‘BTDT’ (Been there, done that), and ‘YYSSWW’ (Yeah, yeah, sure, sure, whatever) (Crystal, 2008: 80-81). Textspeak has two dimensions: while it has dyslexic tendency, leading to ‘poor spelling and mental laziness’; it is ‘communicatively adept’ having ‘linguistic creativity’ and a ‘robust sense of play’ (Crystal, 2008). In this process, we see an evolution in language usage among youth.

## **2.3. Talking vs. Texting**

Although the mobile phone was initially designed for voice communication, SMS soon became more important, particularly among the young (Baron & Ling, 2007). Ito, Okabe, and Matsuda (2005) assert that the social reasons why talking on mobile phones in public spaces in Japan was largely

replaced by texting. In contrast, talk culture in America supported use of voice functions over texting on mobile phones (Ling & Baron, 2007). American college students are more than twice more likely to use their mobile phones for talking than for texting (Baron & Ling, 2007).

SMS has proved to be a popular means of communication, despite the awkwardness of typing on the tiny keypad of a phone that contains only 12-keys, and its small screen (Hård af Segerstad, 2005). The first studies of SMS usage came from Scandinavia (Kasesniemi & Rautiainen, 2002; Ling & Yttri, 2002). In a sample of British teenagers, Grinter and Eldridge (2003) found that teenagers do not have many simultaneous multiple conversations via text messaging; they end most text messaging conversations by switching to another medium.

Most text messages are composed all of a piece and sent as single transmissions (Ling & Baron, 2007). The asynchronicity of SMS allows writers sufficient time to compose and edit messages before sending them, and this type of communication does not require immediate response like spoken interaction (Hård af Segerstad, 2005). As far as frequency of use is considered, more than 85% of teens and young adults report sending SMS messages on a daily basis (Ling, 2005). Popularity of texting in Europe and Asia has been especially high among teenagers and young adults: texting is cheaper for them than voice calls (Ling & Baron, 2007).

With SMS, teenagers can avoid the time and cost of all the various conversational protocols required before they can ask a question or get to the reason why they called. SMS allows users to eliminate the transient, *'hello how are you...nice day, isn't it...anyway the reason I was calling was...thanks a lot...talk to you soon,'* and get straight to the point *'what time r we meeting @2morrow\*'*. This can prevent the other person from going 'off topic' and making the conversation even longer than planned. Again, the character limit forces both sender and respondent to stick to the topic (Cadhain, 2005). The busy life of modern civilization can be held responsible for the abruptness of text messaging.

#### **2.4. SMS and Capitalization**

In the case of capitalization, there are three levels of use, i.e. SMS messages with (1) no capitalization, (2) first letter only capitalization and (3) "multiple" capitalization wherein the writer manually capitalizes names, proper nouns, and at the beginning of secondary sentences, etc (Ling, 2005). Examination of the corpus shows that 82% of messages have no capitalization. It also shows that 11% only have "first letter" capitalization, often the default setting for mobile phones (Ling, 2005). The SMS messages written by females are significantly more likely to have complex capitalization (4.9% for males vs. 8.5% for females) (Ling, 2005).

#### **2.5. Use of Emoticons:**

In SMS language, body language or facial expression comes in as the form of Emoticons or Smileys. The difference is that it is not easy to predict the real tone of the SMS sender by only looking at the emoticon. A smiling face at the end of the message can carry a sarcastic or ironical tone that the reader has to understand by analyzing the whole message carefully.

#### **2.6. The Social Context**

Texting, as one of several ways of using mobile phone technology, promotes the social relationships of teenagers (Hård af Segerstad, 2005). Research conducted in Finland reveals the influence of mobile phone technology on language and, most notably, the written expression of teenagers (Kasesniemi 2003). Similar populist

concerns and ‘moral panic’ about language use and language change are found in the Swedish media (Hård af Segerstad 2005).

Rich Ling (2005) observes that at the linguistic level, language in SMS seems to be a kind of *trans-linguistic dragqueen*: It has features that are characteristic of both spoken and written communication. That is, the sender and receiver exhibit a high degree of insight into each other’s lives (Hård af Segerstad 2005). Nevertheless, because most SMS communication is interpersonal in nature where people who know each other, one may be brief when relying on pragmatic and shared background knowledge; this makes otherwise rude behaviour completely acceptable (Hård af Segerstad 2005).

### 3.0. Bangladesh perspective

As mentioned earlier, there is lack of empirical research on SMS use and its socio-cultural and linguistic aspects in the Bangladeshi context. However, a few studies can be found that focus on the social and cultural implications of the introduction and use of mobile phones in Bangladesh (Aminuzzaman 2005). In his study, Aminuzzaman (2005) points out that mobile phone users have developed their own symbols, slang, codes and unique and uncommon vocabulary to communicate. Drawing from an empirical survey of 500 respondent-students from Dhaka University, he found that 34% of the respondents have been using mobile phone for 3 years or more, and 66% have been using it for at least two years. In addition, he found out that females started earlier using compared to male students. In addition, students of urban areas start using mobile phones earlier than the students of rural areas.



The study also sketches the use of SMS among Bangladeshi students. It asserts that 94 percent of respondents use SMS. Also, SMS are sent to classmates/ friends/ boy friends/ girl friends/ would be husbands/wives. Students consider SMS as cost-effective, safe and an expressive mode of communication. One of the female respondents replied, “I feel comfortable in SMS. I can write whatever I feel. I can hide my *lajja* (shyness) and be straightforward.” In addition, it is interesting to note that 85 percent of respondents regularly make use of missed calls to pass a symbolic message to the recipient (Aminuzzaman, 2005). With the widespread use of mobile phones, the pattern of relationship with the opposite sex has changed. Finally, a new language of communication has emerged through the mobile-mediated interaction among students.

## 4.0. The Present Study

However, there is a lack of empirical research on the transformation of language due to mobile phone usage in Bangladeshi context. The few researches that have been conducted focus on code-switching.

Therefore, this study tries to provide empirical basis in understanding the transformation of language in Bangladesh. In particular, the research explores the following questions:

### 4.1. Research Questions

1. In what manner do Bangladeshi youths (students) use language in SMS communication?
2. What do the youth prefer most between calling and sending SMS? What are the reasons behind it?
3. What are the main purposes of sending SMS?
4. Do the young invent linguistic constructions on their own (intermingling Bangla and English words, breaking rules of grammar and capitalization) while SMSing?
5. To what extent do the youth use SMS language for other purposes?
6. What is the ratio of using abbreviated words among the youth of DU and private universities? What are the reasons behind using abbreviations?
7. What is the percentage of using emoticons among the youth?
8. How many of the youth are familiar with Djuice language and what are the reasons behind using Djuice language?
9. How many new slang words do the youth pick up?
10. Who are more proactive in the transformation of language due to SMSing? Male students or female students?
11. What are the underlying factors leading to the transformation of language due to SMS usage?
12. To what extent does SMS language influence L1 and L2 of the SMS users?

## 5.0. Methods

### 5.1. Sample

In this cross-sectional research, a total of 300 respondents were selected by using the random sampling technique. The respondents were from Dhaka University, the largest state university of Bangladesh, and nine other private universities (see appendix 1) located in the capital city Dhaka, Bangladesh. The majority of the respondents (55.3%) were from Dhaka University, and the rest (44.7%) were from private universities (see Table 1). The male-female ratio was evenly distributed, as 50% of the respondents were male and the other 50% of the respondents were females (see Table 1). The respondents were drawn from four major faculties, namely the faculties of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Sciences, and Business Administration (see Table 1).

### 5.2. Measures

The participants responded to a Likert-type questionnaire, which was specially constructed for the purpose of the current study. The four-page self-tailored survey instrument consisted of 23 items; each item represented a topic relevant to the linguistic pattern of mobile phone use. The questionnaire combined 18 multiple-choice close-ended as well as six open-ended questions. The questionnaire also asked for demographic characteristics such as gender, subject of study, institution, and occupation of respondents.

### 5.3. Procedure

The survey was conducted over in a period of six months from April 2007 to October 2007 in the campuses of the University of Dhaka and other nine private universities. Initially, about 400 questionnaires were distributed among respondents. Participation in the study was voluntary. However, many respondents did not return their questionnaires. In the end, 300 completed questionnaires were returned to the researchers. Therefore, the analysis of the study results is based on the final sample of 300 respondents. Respondents were given briefings about the objectives of the research prior to the distribution of the questionnaires. Each questionnaire took about 12-15 minutes to complete. The questionnaires filled out by the participants were coded, and the data was analyzed using SPSS 13.0 for Windows®, which included computation of percentages, mean scores, standard deviations, and  $\chi^2$ -test.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics**

<i>Institutions</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
University of Dhaka	166	55.3
Private Universities	134	44.7
Total	300	100
<i>Gender</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Male	150	50
Female	150	50
<i>Faculties</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Social Sciences	82	27.3
Arts and Humanities	105	35.0
Sciences	33	11.0
Business Administration	80	26.7

## 6.0. Findings and Analysis

The results, summarized in Table 2, indicate that the majority of respondents (69.7%) send 1-5 text messages (SMS) on an average each day, followed by 22.7% who send 6-10 SMS per day. Only 2.6% of respondents sent more than 20 SMS per day. The results also illustrate their institutional differences: students of University of Dhaka send fewer SMS compared to private universities.

It can be observed that the respondents prefer to make a phone call rather than send SMS in both University of Dhaka (DU) and other private universities (see Table 3). Majority of respondents (70%) prefer making phone calls compared to sending SMS (30%). Perhaps most of the respondents choose making a phone call more than sending an SMS because the mobile phone operators such as Grameenphone, Banglalink, Aktel are in competition with each other to come up with the cheapest calling rates and new schemes such as “Eid special offer”, “Special reduced calling rate during a

special time of the day”, “Lower rate in all the university zones,” “Special rates on coupled SIM card” (only the mobile operator called Aktel has introduced it) etc.

**Table 2**

The average number of SMS sent and received each day

<i>No. of SMS</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU*</i>	<i>% within Private*</i>
1-5	209	69.7	77.1	60.4
6-10	68	22.7	17.5	29.2
11-20	15	5.0	3.6	6.7
More than 20	8	2.6	1.8	3.7

\* DU = Dhaka University

\* Private = private universities

**Table 3**

Preference for calling or SMSing

<i>Variables</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
SMS	90	30.0	28.3	32.1
Talking on phone	210	70.0	71.7	67.9

The results summarized in Table 4 demonstrate the reasons for students' preference for making a phone call rather than sending an SMS. A large number of the respondents (43.3%) mentioned that they could express themselves better by talking on phone than by sending SMS, followed by those who stated that 'it saves time' (24.7%). In addition, 17.7% of respondents mention that 'it is convenient'. Besides, these are no significant institutional differences in terms of their preference for making a phone call.

**Table 4**

Reason for preferences on calling

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
It is convenient	53	17.7	13.9	22.4
It is cheaper	43	14.3	13.9	14.9
I can express myself better	130	43.3	48.2	37.3
It saves time	74	24.7	24.0	25.4

The results summarized in Table 5, illustrate that Bangladeshi youths send SMS more for personal purposes (78.7%), than for business (1.0%) and mere communication purposes (20.3%). However, there are no significant institutional differences in terms of their purpose of sending SMS. Students of all universities almost equally prefer to send SMS for personal (78.9% vs. 78.4%) and other purposes (see Table 5).

**Table 5**  
Purpose of sending SMS

<i>Purposes</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
Business	3	1.0	1.8	.0
Personal	236	78.7	78.9	78.4
Communication	61	20.3	19.3	21.6

Table 6 indicates that most young people (49.7%) mix up Bengali and English (known as *Benglish*) languages (also, Hindi and other languages) while typing SMS on their mobile phones. In addition, a significant percentage (38%) of respondents use mixed languages in their SMS, although a small minority (12.3%) do not. Marginal institutional differences exist in this context. Students of University of Dhaka intermingle Bengali and other languages slightly more (53.6%) than students of private universities (44.8%).

**Table 6**  
Intermingling of Bengali and English (*Benglish*) language in SMS

<i>Intermingling</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
Yes	149	49.7	53.6	44.8
No	37	12.3	9.6	15.7
To some extent	114	38.0	36.8	39.5

Results summarized in Table 7, demonstrate the use of capitalization (usage of capital and small letters properly) in typing SMS, according to the grammatical rules. Most respondents (64.0%) do not follow the rules of capitalization while typing SMS, although the rest 36% do so. In addition, institutional differences exist in following capitalization. Students of University of Dhaka follow rules of capitalization slightly more strictly (40.4%) than students of private universities (30.6%).

**Table 7**  
The use of capital and small letters in SMSing according to grammar

<i>Variables</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
Yes	108	36.0	40.4	30.6
No	192	64.0	59.6	69.4

Table 8 points toward the reasons for breaking rules of grammar and punctuation. A significant portion of students (38.3%) break rules of punctuation because 'it looks nice that way', followed by 'for convenience/ ease' (22.0%), and 'to highlight the important part of the SMS' (20.7%). In addition,

14.0% of the respondents break rules of punctuation for no specific reason (maybe just as a trend), and only 5.0% do so 'to emphasize' any word of their SMS in particular. However, marginal institutional differences exist in reasons for breaking the rules of punctuation in one case, since students of University of Dhaka do so due to the fact that 'it looks nice that way' (41.6%) compared to the students of private universities (34.4%).

**Table 8**

Reasons for breaking rules of punctuation

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
To emphasize a word	5.0	5.4	4.5
To highlight the important part of SMS	20.7	19.9	21.6
It looks nice that way	38.3	41.6	34.4
No specific reason	14.0	10.8	17.9
For convenience/ ease	22.0	22.3	21.6

Results summarized in Table 9 indicate the extent of use of SMS language in writing Email. Some of respondents (32%) use SMS language in writing emails.\*\*\*\*\* while others do not (38%). Still other respondents (30%) sometimes use SMS language in writing emails. However, marginal institutional differences exist in respondents' use of SMS language in writing email. Students of University of Dhaka use of SMS language in writing email is less (28.9%) than the students of private universities (35.8%).

**Table 9**

The use of SMS language in writing Email

<i>Variables</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
Yes (Frequently)	96	32.0	28.9	35.8
Sometimes	90	30.0	27.7	32.8
Not at all	114	38.0	43.4	31.4

Table 10 reflects respondents' use of SMS language in academic and/or other situations. As expected, most (73.7%) use SMS language in writing text messages. Some students use SMS language in taking class lectures (13.7%) and writing notes (12.6%). However, there are no significant institutional differences in terms of their use of SMS language in academic and/or other matters between students of private universities and students of University of Dhaka.

Results summarized in Table 11 highlight respondents' use of abbreviations such as (*gr8*, *ASAP*, *LOL*) in writing SMS. As expected, most respondents (67.7%) use abbreviations in writing SMS, while some (32.3%) do not. However, marginal institutional differences exist in respondents'

use of abbreviations in writing SMS. Students of Dhaka University use fewer abbreviations in writing SMS (64.5%) compared to students of private universities (71.6%).

**Table 10**

Use of SMS language in academic/ other matters

<i>Use of SMS language</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
Taking lectures in class	38	12.6	12.0	13.5
Writing notes	41	13.7	15.1	11.9
Writing messages	221	73.7	72.9	74.6

**Table 11**

Use of abbreviations (like *gr8*, *ASAP*, *LOL*) in writing SMS

<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
Yes	203	67.7	64.5	71.6
No	97	32.3	35.5	28.4

Table 12 illustrates the reasons for using abbreviations in SMS, which most respondents do (67.7%). The major reasons given for using abbreviations in SMS include, 'it expresses a lot in short' (44.3%), 'it is quicker' (29.4%), and 'screen capacity is for 160 characters' (24.0%). Additionally, 2.3% of respondents do so because 'it is the universal way'. However, marginal institutional differences exist in respondents' reasons for using abbreviations in writing SMS in one case, since at least half of the students of University of Dhaka think 'it expresses a lot in short' (50.0%) compared to 37.3% students of private universities .

**Table 12**

Reasons for using abbreviations in SMS

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
Screen capacity is for 160 characters	24.0	24.7	23.1
It expresses a lot in short	44.3	50.0	37.3
It is a universal way	2.3	3.0	1.5
It is quicker	29.4	22.3	38.1

Results summarized in Table 13 reflect respondents' use of smileys or emoticons in writing SMS. The majority of the respondents (42.3%) use smileys or emoticons in writing SMS, while 29.0% of respondents do not. Additionally, 28.7% of respondents 'sometimes' use smileys or emoticons in writing SMS. However, there are no statistically significant institutional differences in terms of emoticons use.

**Table 13**  
Use of smileys /emoticons in SMS

<i>Emoticons</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
Yes	127	42.3	44.6	39.6
No	87	29.0	30.7	26.9
Sometimes	86	28.7	24.7	33.5

Table 14 shows the extent of respondents' familiarity with Djuice language used by young people in Bangladesh. The majority of the respondents (64.7%) are familiar with Djuice language used by young people, while 35.3% of the respondents are not. However, there are no statistically significant institutional differences in terms of their familiarity with Djuice language.

**Table 14**  
Familiarity with the Djuice language used by young people

<i>Familiarity</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
Yes	194	64.7	67.5	61.2
No	106	35.3	32.5	38.8

Results summarized in Table 15 demonstrate the reasons for use of Djuice language in SMSing and/ or calling. Most of the respondents (79.7%) use Djuice language in their daily SMS communication because 'it is fun to do so'. Others use it because 'it is a symbol of being fashionable', 'because my friends use it', and 'older people don't understand it' (9.0%, 7.7%, and 3.6% respectively). Although no statistical differences between institutions exist in this respect, the reason "It is fun" vary slightly among respondents (83% in DU vs. 75.4% in private universities).

**Table 15**  
Reason for use of Djuice language in calling/ SMSing

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
It is a symbol of being fashionable	27	9.0	6.6	11.9
Because my friends use it	23	7.7	7.3	8.2
It is fun	239	79.7	83.1	75.4
Older people don't understand it	11	3.6	3.0	4.5

Table 16 reveals the number of new slang words (e.g., *Jossh! Abar Jigai*) that respondents picked up from SMS language. Most respondents (83.0%) pick up 1-5 new slang words from SMS communication per day. In addition, 9.3% of the respondents pick up 6-10 new slang words and 7.7% respondents pick up more than 10 new slang words. However, no statistically significant institutional differences exist among respondents in terms of initiating new lingo.

**Table 16**Number of new slangs (words, e.g., *Jossh!*) picked up from the SMS

<i>Words</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>% within DU</i>	<i>% within Private</i>
1-5	249	83.0	84.9	80.6
6-10	28	9.3	7.8	11.2
More than 10	23	7.7	7.3	8.2

Finally, Table 17 reveals respondents' perception regarding opposite gender's word usage in SMS. Female respondents perceive that males use more words in SMS (20.7%) than females (7.3%). However, male perception towards the opposite gender's word usage is not statistically significant.

**Table 17**

Perception of gender difference in who is using more slang words in SMS

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Male	22.0%	24.0%
Female	20.7%	7.3%
Both	57.3%	68.7%

## 7.0. Discussion and Future Direction

The core objective of this research was to explore the evolution of language due to SMS-mediated communication among Bangladeshi youths, particularly among university students. The findings (also see Appendix 2) suggest that Bangladeshi university students are affected significantly by current trend of SMS communication, which has been transforming daily language usage. It has been found that most young people send 1-5 text messages (SMS) each day. However, it is surprising to observe that most respondents (70%) prefer calling to sending SMS (30%). Thus, the findings clearly contradict research on SMS conducted in other countries which found that youth prefer to send SMS than call (Grinter & Eldridge, 2001; Ling & Yttri, 2002; Taylor & Harper (2002); Grinter & Eldridge, 2003; Ling, 2005; Ito, 2005; Ito, Okabe, & Matsuda (2005); Baron & Ling, 2007; Only one of the studies support the fact that mobile users prefer making a phone call to sending SMS (Ling & Baron, 2007).

The conflicting findings can be understood in the context of the Bangladeshi corporate sector as well as our socio-cultural milieu. In Bangladesh, mobile phone call rates are cheaper than sending SMS. At present, each of the mobile operators is in competition of introducing cheaper call rates than the other operators. Banglalink to Banglalink calling rate is 0.29 taka/min while Citycell to Citycell calling rate is 0.25 taka per call. This economic reason may influence young people to prefer calling over SMS. However, this does not mean that they do not like to send SMS. Rather, the demand for sending SMS is high as it reflects a form of individualized culture, even after giving priority to phone calls. SMS is also suitable for situations like the classroom or meetings, where receiving phone calls would not be possible. SMS communication also reduces the chances of being disturbed. Moreover, Bangladeshi youths send SMS mostly for personal purposes.

## 7.1. The sociolinguistics of SMS usage

The word SMS has become a verb itself, as we often say, “SMSing” instead of “He/she is writing an SMS”. Beside this many other linguistic changes have been occurring in our language due to SMS usage.

### 7.1.1. Code Switching:

The findings of our study also show that most young people blend Bengali and English (or Benglish) words (also, Hindi and other languages) while typing SMS on their mobile phones. These examples taken from our survey show that participants mix up Bangla and Hindi in the same sentence.

Example: 1

- (i) *Kire Keysa hai to, Honae work korechis. Gale taratari ay*
- (ii) *Khaise, life fena fena, jindegı borbad*

Example: 2

*You know, ami tomake koto miss kori!*

Example 2, on the other hand, shows code switching from English to Bangla.

### 7.1.2 Code Mixing:

Students have come up with many new words that have actually emerged from the mixing of Bangla and English.

Example 1: *Abar Jigai* and “*Bhaab*” are new words to which they have added the English suffix ‘S’ and have made “*Abar Jigs*” and “*Bhaabs*”

Example 2: “*Khetuist*”= “*Khet*” (someone with bad taste or style) + “*ist*” (from English)  
*khacchor-esque* = *Khacchor* (someone who is dirty) + *esque* (From English)

### 7.1.3 Breaking grammatical rules:

In addition, most young people do not follow the rules of capitalization when typing SMS, while a few of them do. The reasons for breaking the rules of grammar and punctuation include ‘it looks nice that way’, ‘for convenience/ ease’, and ‘to highlight the important part of SMS’. The use of SMS language in writing Email is also common among Bangladeshi youth. Most of them use SMS language in writing text messages, while a few others use it only for recording class lectures and writing notes.

### 7.1.4. Using abbreviations:

Most young people use abbreviations in writing SMS, although a few of them do not.

Example 1: *Gr8* (Great), *lt8r* (Later), *ASAP* (As Soon as Possible), *W8* (Wait) *LOL* (Laughing Out Loud), *TC* (Take Care) etc.

Some of these abbreviations are also used in emails (LOL, ASAP). However, young people sometimes use abbreviations and punctuation which are not comprehensible to someone outside their friends' circle.

Example 2: *Come at K.D. today, see u at B,city*

The key reasons for using abbreviations in SMS according to our survey include, 'it expresses a lot in short', 'it is quicker', and 'screen capacity for 160 characters' and because 'it is the universal way'.

#### **7.1.5 Use of Emoticons and symbols:**

Most of them use smileys or emoticons in writing SMS, although a few of them do not. Use of "@" while mentioning a place and at the end of the message while giving the sender's name is quite unique.

Example 1: *C u @ campus*

Example 2: *Take care. Onik...@*

#### **7.1.6. Use of abusive words:**

The offensive words used in SMS have become slang words for many young people of Bangladesh. Moreover, these words emerge in the SMS they exchange amongst themselves.

Example 1: *Balchit, Kopa Samsu, Kopa, Haramzadi, Madarchod, Khanki*

Interestingly, such abusive words are mostly used by male SMS users humorously. If we look at this usage from the perspective of Sigmund Freud, we can definitely say that it is a way of letting out their suppressed "ids". Female participants use much fewer abusive words while sending SMS. Not surprisingly, such usage originates from the daily spoken conversations of young people.

#### **7.1.7. Formation of New Slangs:**

Most young people pick up 1-5 new slang words from SMS communication everyday.

##### **(a) Influence of Hindi Words:**

Example 1: *Dost keisa he*

Example 2: *Abe Saleh!*

Example 3: *Yaar! Teri yaad ati hai.*

##### **(b) Influence of Bangla Words:**

Example 1: "*Kothin*" and "*Jotil*" literally means "hard/difficult" and "something difficult to solve". However, young people use these words while complimenting someone or to say something positively. These word are thus being used both positively (e.g. *Kothin Sundor*) and negatively (e.g. *Jotil Maal* – characterizing some girl as sexy and seductive). The literal meaning of *Maal* is "Luggage" or a "Thing/Object". This expression is negative because women are being compared to

things with an indication that they are "sexy". Such direct comments and indications pressed in public are not acceptable in Bangladeshi culture. The word "sexy" is a taboo word in our culture, this new coinage *Jotil Maal* is used by the youth instead.

Example 2: *Jossh!* (Literal meaning is "Enthusiasm")

It has become a way of appreciating something enthusiastically.

Example 3: *Chorom, Bapok* (Literal meaning is negative and indicates something, "Excessive")

These words are used to express appreciation for something or someone.

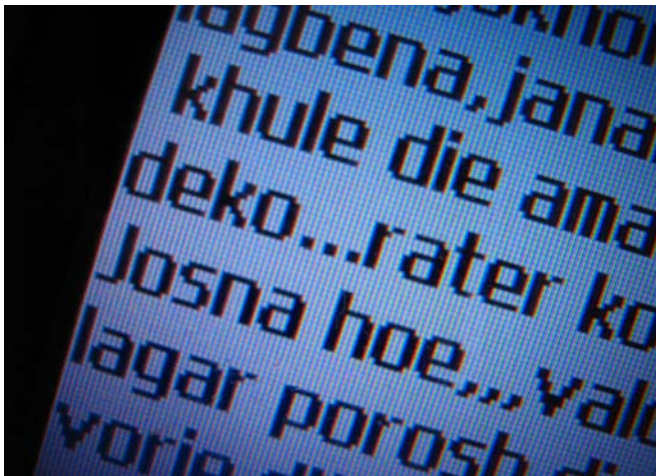
Example 4: *Pankha Pola*

Literally, "Pankha" means a handmade fan. But in SMS language, it is used to denote someone being naughty. It is both as a compliment among friends and also to denote negative.

Example 4: *Mama, Mamar vigna, Jotil Mamu*

Usually, young males of society use "Mama" to call their friends whereas its literal meaning is "Maternal Uncle". This usage from daily life has also entered into the sphere of SMS.

Though it is not mentioned in the data of the research, some young people have the tendency to write Bangla poems while writing to their friends by way of repartee through SMS. In this case, Bangla pronunciation is written using Roman letters.



**(c) Words picked up from Djuice advertisements:**

Example 1: Xtra khatir, Jotil Vab, Fatafati, Chorom, Bapok, Abar Jigai, Ajaira Pechal etc

All these examples reflect the influence of Djuice commercial advertisements accessed on TV and seen on billboards.

e.g: On Djuice billboards one comes across "Fatafati Offer", "Bapok Moja", "Darun Offer", "Ajaira Pechal".

Djuice also has created catchy visual advertisements by painting Cats and Fish on billboards along with captions such as "Cat Cat Fish Fish". The sentence in Bangla means "Continuous talking and whispering". Interestingly, the pronunciations of these Bangla words were produced on billboards in English spelling of "Cat" (referring to the picture of cat on the billboard) and "Fish" (referring to the picture of "Fish") rather than using the simple "Kat Kat Fis Fis". Readers of this caption were amused

to see the paradox of using pictures and spellings that did not compliment the original Bangla meaning at all.

*Xtra Khatir* is a special offer of Djuice in which the Djuice mobile subscribers get a card and can get discounts in Star Cineplex Movie theatres, Ecstasy, Diesel and OG shops, American Burger outlets, Jordana Cosmetics Shops and many other places after showing the card. It is written with the same shortened spelling (Xtra instead of “Extra”) everywhere in Djuice advertisements.

Moreover, most of the young generation use Djuice language in their daily SMS communication because ‘it is fun’ to do so. Others use it because ‘it is a symbol of being fashionable’, because their friends use it, and ‘older people don’t understand it’.

**7.2. Institutional differences**

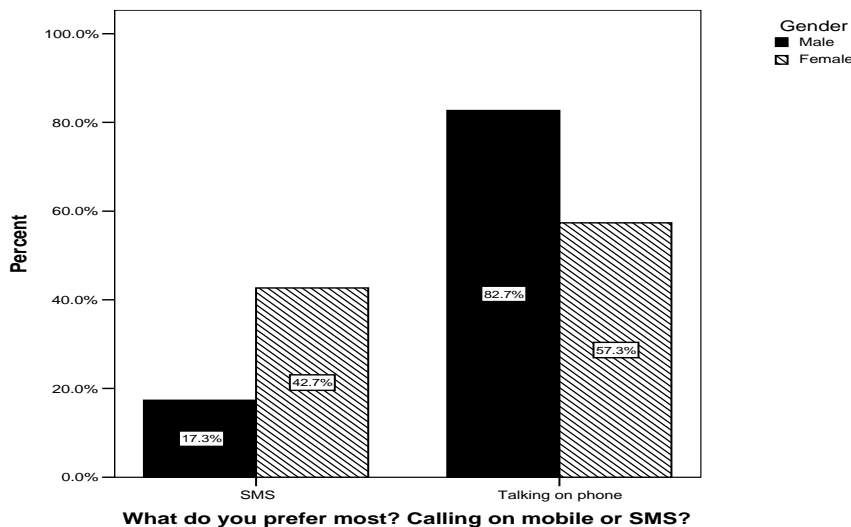
The students of the University of Dhaka send fewer SMS compared to those in private universities. Students of the University of Dhaka also mix up Bengali and other languages slightly more than students of private universities. They tend to follow the rules of capitalization slightly more than students of private universities do. In addition, students of the University of Dhaka use fewer abbreviations in writing SMS compared to students of private universities.

**7.3. Gender differences**

Gender differences exist in three instances, in respondents’ preferences for SMS or for making phone calls, use of emoticons in SMS, and use of more slang words in writing SMS (table 17). Young females prefer to send SMS more than the males (Figure-1). Similarly, there are gender differences in the use of smileys or emoticons in SMS, as females use emoticons in SMS more than males do (Figure-2). Finally, it is the young females’ perception that males use more words in SMS than females.

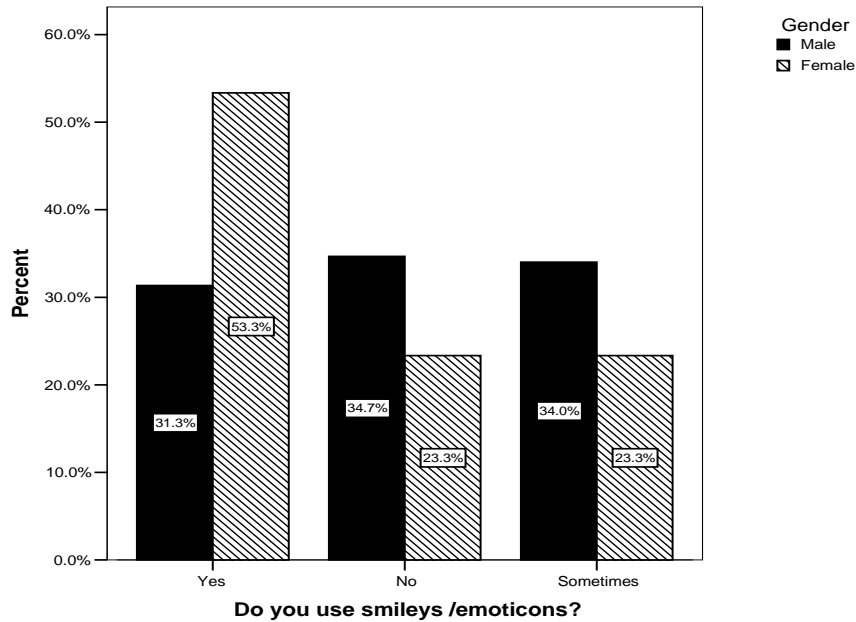
Figure 1 shows that female respondents prefer to send more SMSs (42.7%) than the male respondents (17.3%). In addition, regardless of gender, respondents may prefer to make phone calls more than send SMS, but female respondents call less (57.3%) than male respondents (82.7%).

**Figure 1:** Respondents’ preference for making a phone call or SMS



However, there are significant gender differences in respondents' use of smileys or emoticons in SMS (see Figure 2). Female respondents thus use emoticons in SMS more (53.3%) than male respondents do (31.3%).

**Figure 2:** Respondents' use of emoticons



**7.4. SMS Language is not a language yet:**

SMS cannot be called a language yet, for the following reasons:

**a) Different spellings of same word:**

- Example: (i) Bcoz, becos, bec  
 (ii) Vab, Bhaab, Bhab

A language has to have uniform spelling system and grammatical rules that SMS language does not.

**b) Not comprehensible by all:**

The language is mostly understood only by users of SMS. Older people will not be able to understand the new words and abbreviations at all. It cannot be called a language, as it does not have universal acceptability yet.



## 8.0. Conclusion:

It must be stressed that our study has several limitations. The data for this study was obtained from a cross-sectional study of a sample of students from the University of Dhaka and a few other private universities. The study was conducted in Dhaka, and may not reflect the opinions and responses of other university students from other parts of Bangladesh. In addition, it did not include youths who are not currently students. The results obtained from this study may not be representative of all the students in Bangladesh, and thus the generalizations based on the findings might be somewhat limited.

Similarly, this study focuses only on the initial aspects of the transformation of language in SMS and does not attempt to predict the outcome or long-term consequences. Therefore, future research should use more heterogeneous and a larger representative of random samples of youths from all over Bangladesh. However, the inclusion of non-student segment of the youth in the sample may provide a different picture. In addition, the use of ethnographic fieldwork and longitudinal participant observation in public places in the process of data collection may be useful in obtaining a holistic picture of the phenomenon. Longitudinal method of investigation could also be adopted to determine long-term effect of SMS on language.

Many people tend to make unintentional mistake by using abbreviations in formal writing or examinations. This perhaps is an outcome of the frequent use of shortened version of language in SMS and emails. No one, however, will be able to slow down this phenomenon as every language goes through transformation over time. The hectic pace of contemporary life makes most people prone to adopting quicker and easier ways of conveying messages. The older generations of Bangladesh term this change as “distortion of language” and want to preserve its formal version. But the massive popularity of SMS language makes it hard for them to succeed. English has changed a lot from the

time of Shakespeare, and Bangla has changed immensely from the time of Charyapada. Perhaps in another hundred years, the abbreviations and spellings of SMS language will be analyzed and it will establish itself as a uniform code of variety in Bangladesh. It will not be surprising if one day we end up holding a book titled “The Dictionary of SMS Abbreviations” in our hands.

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### **Appendix – 1**

List of Private Universities of Dhaka from where data was collected:

1. University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB)
2. North South University (NSU)
3. BRAC University
4. Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB)
5. London College of Legal Studies (LCLS)
6. Presidency University
7. State University of Bangladesh (SUB)
8. American University of Bangladesh (AIUB)
9. Eastern University.

### **Appendix - 2**

#### ***Transformation of spelling in writing SMS***

When respondents were asked about the transformation of spelling in the language used to write SMS. They both positive and negative reactions towards this phenomenon.

#### ***Positive reactions***

- Short, simple and sometimes interesting
- It comes naturally
- Not bad; convenient
- I create them in short to write SMS
- It's okay as it saves time
- It's not bad, saves money
- It's attractive and unique
- It's all about communicating. Doesn't matter how the spellings are
- It is comfortable
- Good. It saves space
- It's an innovation and can express our views in short
- Short and doesn't consume time and energy
- I like it as it's creative and time saving
- If a spelling can express my emotion, it should be used

- It's good for quick communication
- Nothing bad as language is always changing
- I think this is absolutely fine. I always try to express myself in a better way
- It doesn't matter. I use SMS for personal use, it's an interpersonal thing and not a national one

*Negative reactions*

- Its disgusting
- One kind of cheating with language
- Spelling capability is reduced
- Very bad because it destroys the original purpose of language
- It is negative because sometimes it creates confusion and doesn't express meaning fully

***The intermingling of Benglish language***

Respondents were asked whether they use Bangla, English, and Hindi words in SMS frequently, and if they do so, to provide examples. The following are some affirmative responses:

- Benglish
- Bangla and English. But not Benglish
- Sometimes I use Benglish, but mostly English
- Bangla and Hindi
- Not frequently. Maine kuch nehi kiya
- Yes I do, easily and all time
- Yes, Kmon asos,amr obstha shes,kono mote jibito asi
- Thik hay? TC (Take Care), Khobor Ki?
- Kamon achen,tumi ki amake kal somoy dite parbe
- Kire kothay tui?Keya khabar apka? Are you Ghumaitasis?
- Kya korteso?
- Ja re sms ja, meri dost ki pass ja.Busy hai to kuch mat kar. Free hai to happy birthday bol na
- R kotha bolar tym nai, gelam,alvida
- Yaad hai pehle hum kaha mili thi? Train ruki, khidki khuli, nazaan mile our apne kaha aua ke nam pe kuch day de baba
- W8, I'm comin/Hindi-Shabba Khair
- I use Bangla words. Esho, Jabo na
- I try not to mix up these things. Mostly use English
- Bangla, English and Duetsch
- Dosto, khobor, jilapi, giringi, Moj-masti, kya, khamosh, main-tum
- Koi tui?, Who r u
- Kothai geli! Phone dhorle hath bhenge jabe!?!
- You know, ami tomake koto miss kori!
- Ami Bhalo, Tomar Khobor ki?
- Ami tomake bhalobashi
- Ya, Khayega, Jayega
- Mama, Kya haal hai?
- Bangla words, Taratari aai, Kemon Acho
- Bhalo thakis, Dost keisa he, H r u, Wz ur name? I LU, F U, S U

- 2morrow, 4ever
- Yes, Kaise ho, Kmon acho
- Dosto valo achis? Bakira sobai kamon ase. Ami khub valo nai
- Kire Keysa hai to, Honae work korechis. Gale taratari ay
- Khaiso, Dekso, Magar
- Ekhone toamar opekkhai aacchi, Dure thaka mane kebol dure thaka noy
- Ur, 4, bristir dine tomae mone pore. Tui kothai?
- Abe hala, Hij-hij huz-huz, bristir dine, Sinking sinking drinking water, Meri Dharkan

### *The use of emoticons*

Respondents were asked to explain why they used emoticons such as [:- ( , :- ) and ;- / ]. The most predominant reasons are as follows:

- To express facial expressions through SMS
- I use it to create beauty through SMS and also to wish someone
- Its amusing and an easy expressing myself
- To make SMS more precise, clear and nice
- It allows far better expression of emotion
- It's chic
- To create emphasize emotions and expressions
- It increases the beauty of sentences
- To express my emotions in a passionate way
- To make my SMS more communicative
- To create variations
- I think sometimes a single smiley can express a lot of emotion
- That's the symbol of fashion. It's fashionable.
- For attraction and also for fun
- It allows us to make sentences more meaningful

### *Construction of new words:*

Respondents create new words of their own while writing SMS, such as:

- bcz (because), Kmn (Kemon)
- dr (dear), frnd (friend), How r u?, I'm bz (Busy), stdy (Study), I lv (Love) u, gd (Good) Ng8 (Night)
- c = See
- Ektu, Chillax, tey ghey
- xpress, xm, Huq Maola
- Miss u, luv u
- Ajob, Khetuist, khacchor-esque, stupa
- Jomsey
- Pura bolod, Valo Thak, kan mola khabi
- U, ure, 4u, it'l
- R, u 2

- au revoir, esp, ni8
- 2morow
- Do, Da (the), bewll
- F9, ASAP
- XQ,F9, NYC
- Lov, frnds, My jaan
- Machotkur, Bokty, Khagol
- Kire vaigna, actually jaina, Sala bal
- Jhakkas, Abar jicks, Haorar Po
- Zimar, Kokol, Chholonamoi Juboraj
- Khakol, bitla, Madarchod, khanki magi (KM), 34/32, Pungta, Abar Koy, Chorom,

### *The novelty of new slangs*

Respondents claim that they coin new slang words (like ‘Abar Jigs’, *Jossh!*, *Jigailei Loss*, *Kothin*, *Jotil*’) regularly but confess they pickup a few slang words from others, such as:

- Jotil Vab, Abar jigai, Bapok
- bapok, nice, shei rokom boss, break mar
- U, Ur, 4U, bcoz,2U
- xtra,mr,m,yap,uopc,wh
- Jindagi jabtak hai, mai tumhare sath hoo. Miss u a lot.
- Kabhi khushi kabhi gum, when it end, na tum jano na hum
- TC, GTG, LOL
- Chipa,buzz,evs,FYI,the,b-yach,dahlin
- f’ship, b, 2b,Bzin
- Wassap, hw(how), wh(who) y (why)
- mama cholbo, marattok, Jossh, Abar jigs
- Mor sala, tor mare bap,abar bole, Mofis, modna
- Chala guli, Taka dibo haji shab
- fao, ajaira pechal, furti, Ural ponkhi, Pura djuice, chyagitasi, giringi,tashki,chomok
- Hi babs, Hi Pinks, What r u doing?
- Jotil, Kothin, Abar jigai
- Kothin, Jotil, Jhakkas, Fatafati
- Valo ace, Valo theko
- Seniorita, tiptop, nice
- Gu Kha, Ajib, Aajirs, Hoga
- Abar jigas, Kotthin, Jotil, Jossh
- Kaifa Haluka
- Xtra Khatir
- Purai bhorpur
- V.C., Aie. Bakless
- Jinish, Heavy Jotil, Mama
- Uzzal-from khola akash

- Boka chele, Abar Jigay
- Hapis, Josss!, Abar Jigai, Kopa Shamsu
- Dost, B of luck, T.c
- Gatiz, Jhakkas, Maayeshe Baap, Mamur Beta
- Vhigna, Sala, Panku, Fanta-taska, Jaina, Ghotena
- Jatil mal, Jakanaka, Bapok, Hiza
- Khaise re, jotil mal, kothin obostha, josh jinish
- Gachhili, Maal
- bcoz, b2in,im2,4u,cu,Hru, some1, Abar jigs, Bapok

### *SMS lingo in national media*

Respondents were asked what their responses would be if they see SMS lingo being used in national dailies, in national media, or in their academics fields. They showed both positive and negative reactions towards this question.

#### *Negative reactions*

- It may have a bad effect since the younger generation may end up with wrong ideas about grammar and spelling
- Terrible. Media is for all and a formal place. This is not the place to be casual.
- I think society or modern civilization will enter a decadent phase
- The effect will be negative, the pattern of language will only suit SMS
- Disastrous and unacceptable
- It's not desirable
- Though I use it in personal matters, it's not acceptable in the above cases.
- I can't accept it as there should be some limitations to using incorrect spellings
- I dislike and avoid it consciously. It will destroy our customs and traditions
- I think it had a negative impact on our mother tongue. Adults are mostly affected. Such words are not in our language
- It shouldn't be used other than for writing SMS or email; it may even be dangerous for our existence
- I don't want to find these words in our national dailies and media
- I think it will have a bad effect on students
- It won't be very good as it is the culture of young people and not for all
- It's never going to happen
- It'll hamper our society and culture
- SMS language is informal and should not be used in formal places
- I would be outraged. Everything has its own place

#### *Positive reactions*

- Good, it will change grammar
- Obviously it will bring humor to our politics
- Language is changeable
- It's enjoyable
- It makes communication quicker. So it will be good to see it in the media
- It will be very funny. Our parents would need our help to read newspaper
- It will be no big deal for youngsters as they generally use these

- It's a fashionable and modern
- It'll be seen as fun
- It's preferable for our next generation