

## Research Article

### TXTSM: FEATURES OF NET SPEAK IN COLLEGE STUDENTS' SMS AND FACEBOOK MESSENGER

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Received 04<sup>th</sup> February 2025; Accepted 05<sup>th</sup> March 2025; Published online 14<sup>th</sup> April 2025

#### ABSTRACT

**Aims:** This study explores the linguistic and non-linguistic features of textism in SMS and Facebook Messenger exchanges among Filipino college students. It investigates how students use digital language creatively and strategically, shaped by cultural norms, communicative intent, and platform-specific affordances. **Study design:** The study employed a descriptive-qualitative research design. **Place and Duration of Study:** The research was conducted at St. Peter's College, Iligan City, Philippines, from January 2024 to March 2024. **Methodology:** A total of 100 screenshots from actual SMS and Facebook Messenger conversations were collected from student participants. Data were thematically coded following Drum's (2015) classification of textism, supplemented by Crystal's (2008) theory on digital discourse and Ignacio and De Jesus's (2021) insights on multilingual texting in the Philippines. Textisms were categorized as linguistic (e.g., code-switching, abbreviations, phonetic spellings) or non-linguistic (e.g., emojis, punctuation, capitalization), with two emergent types identified under a new category. **Results:** Code-switching was the most frequently observed linguistic feature, followed by abbreviations, culturally grounded expressions, and creative spellings. Non-linguistic features included emojis, visual stylizations, and expressive punctuation. Two emergent categories—stylized phrasing or phonetic adaptation (e.g., "ay gatchu") and phonetic approximation (e.g., "latch" for "halata")—were identified as innovative non-linguistic forms that simulate speech and reflect in-group identity. Four major themes emerged: balancing efficiency and expressiveness, adaptability across contexts, cultural expression and identity, and the interplay of linguistic and non-linguistic features. Facebook Messenger supported more multimodal, expressive forms of textism, while SMS constrained expression due to technical limitations, encouraging abbreviation and compression. These patterns revealed that students made deliberate, context-sensitive choices in managing tone, efficiency, and social presence in digital communication. **Conclusion:** The findings affirm that textism is not indicative of linguistic decline but represents an adaptive, culturally situated strategy of communication. The integration of linguistic and non-linguistic features, including newly identified forms, demonstrates students' multimodal fluency and their ability to construct socially meaningful, emotionally expressive, and efficient digital messages in everyday interaction.

**Keywords:** textism, code-switching, digital language, Facebook Messenger, SMS, Philippine English, phonetic approximation, stylized phrasing.

#### INTRODUCTION

The increasing reliance on digital platforms for interpersonal communication has given rise to distinct linguistic phenomena, one of which is textism. Crystal (2008) characterizes textism as a hybrid form of written and spoken discourse shaped by technological affordances. It reflects the way users blend oral spontaneity with the structural limitations of written messaging. Drum (2015) further classifies textism into linguistic and non-linguistic forms, emphasizing their intentional and expressive nature. Meanwhile, Ignacio and De Jesus (2021) underscore the influence of regional and cultural contexts on the texting practices of Filipino users, particularly how multilingual realities shape digital communication styles.

Building on these established definitions, this study defines textism operationally as the linguistic and non-linguistic modifications used in digital messaging, including abbreviations, code-switching, emojis, unconventional punctuation, and creative spelling variations. These features serve functional purposes such as expressing tone, conveying emotion, and enhancing message efficiency, particularly in informal digital exchanges.

In the Philippine context, where multilingualism is prevalent, digital language use reflects the interplay of English, Filipino, and regional

languages such as Cebuano and Maranao. As such, the manifestation of textism among Filipino users is shaped by linguistic diversity and cultural specificity. The everyday communication of students reveals how these forms are adapted creatively and meaningfully across different platforms.

Despite the prevalence of textism, it is often misinterpreted as indicative of linguistic deterioration. This study seeks to challenge that notion by exploring the linguistic and non-linguistic features of textism in actual digital communication within a multilingual academic context. The investigation centers on the text messages and Facebook Messenger exchanges of one hundred (100) college students from St. Peter's College, Iligan City, Philippines, who voluntarily submitted screenshots of their conversations. Through a descriptive-qualitative approach, the study identifies the salient features of textism employed by participants and their usage within the broader discourse of Philippine English and digital communication practices.

This study explores the linguistic and non-linguistic features of textism in SMS and Facebook Messenger exchanges among Filipino college students. Drawing from naturally occurring digital messages, the analysis identifies and describes the salient characteristics of textism as used in a multilingual academic context. The findings contribute to the broader understanding of digital language practices in the Philippines and provide insights into how informal communication reflects evolving norms within Philippine English.

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## METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research design, participants, data collection procedures, and analytic framework used to explore the linguistic and non-linguistic features of textism in digital communication. The study was conducted in a naturalistic context and employed qualitative strategies to interpret patterns emerging from authentic language data. Emphasis was placed on preserving the contextual integrity of participants' digital messages while ensuring ethical research practices throughout the process.

### Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-qualitative research design to identify and analyze the linguistic and non-linguistic features of textism in SMS and Facebook Messenger messages. The approach focused on the contextual, functional, and stylistic elements of naturally occurring digital communication, allowing for in-depth thematic analysis of patterns and categories.

### Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at St. Peter's College in Iligan City, Philippines. Participants were 100 college students selected through purposive sampling. These participants voluntarily submitted screenshots of their personal digital conversations via SMS and Facebook Messenger. Ethical considerations were observed by anonymizing all names, contact details, and sensitive content from the data.

### Data Collection

The data set comprised 100 screenshots of naturally occurring digital conversations submitted by college students from St. Peter's College. The majority of messages were sourced from Facebook Messenger, with additional samples from SMS, reflecting the dominant messaging platforms used by participants. Participants were asked to submit informal conversations representative of their everyday communication habits. Only messages written in English, Filipino, Cebuano, Meranao, or code-switched combinations of these languages were included in the analysis. Prior to coding, all identifying information was removed to ensure participant anonymity and maintain ethical research standards.

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic coding based on Drum's (2015) classification of textism, which distinguishes between linguistic and non-linguistic forms. Crystal's (2008) model of digital discourse informed the broader linguistic framing, while Ignacio and De Jesus (2021) provided contextual grounding in Philippine digital communication practices. Textisms were categorized into linguistic features (e.g., code-switching, abbreviations, phonetic spellings) and non-linguistic features (e.g., emojis, visual stylization, punctuation). Two additional categories were identified during analysis—stylized phrasing or phonetic adaptation and phonetic approximation—and were grouped under emergent types. Codes were cross-checked for consistency, and excerpts were interpreted in relation to communication purpose, audience, and platform norms.

### Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and students were briefed on the purpose and scope of the study. All identifying information in the screenshots was redacted to ensure privacy. The research was conducted in

accordance with the ethical standards of academic inquiry at St. Peter's College.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the linguistic and non-linguistic features of textism identified in the digital conversations collected from Filipino college students. The analysis was guided by Drum's (2015) classification of textism, supported by Crystal's (2008) theory on digital discourse, and contextualized through Ignacio and De Jesus's (2021) study on Filipino multilingual texting practices. The features were categorized as either linguistic or non-linguistic, with two emergent forms grouped under a third category labeled *Others*. The classification reflects how students creatively adapted language to suit social, cultural, and platform-specific contexts.

**Table 1. Frequency of Textism Categories Identified in Digital Communication**

Categories of Textism on Facebook Messenger and Text Message			
Textism Category	Facebook Messenger	SMS	Total Frequency
<b>Linguistic Features</b>			
Code-switching	174	1	175
Cultural Linguistic Expressions	66	–	66
Abbreviations	46	2	48
Purposefully Misused Spelling	40	–	40
Purposefully Misused Capitalization	36	4	40
Slang/Colloquialisms	29	–	29
Neologisms	26	–	26
Acronyms	19	–	19
<b>Non-linguistic Features</b>			
Emoticons and Emojis	89	–	89
Purposefully Misused Punctuation	5	–	5
<b>Others</b>			
Stylized Phrasing / Phonetic Adaptation	1	–	1
Phonetic Approximation	1	–	1

### Linguistic Features

Linguistic textisms included code-switching, abbreviations, cultural expressions, acronyms, intentional spelling alterations, neologisms, and colloquialisms. Code-switching was the most frequently observed feature, used to express tone, enhance relatability, or maintain in-group identity. For instance, a message like "Gege bai pa disturb sa HAHHAHA" combines English ("gege"), Cebuano ("bai," "pa disturb"), and expressive laughter. This intrasentential switching exemplifies multilingual competence and aligns with Poplack's (1980) typology, as well as Ignacio and De Jesus's (2021) findings on purposeful linguistic alternation among Filipino youth.

Abbreviations such as "pls," "idk," "btw," and acronyms like "LOL" or "TMI" were employed for efficiency, especially in time-sensitive or space-constrained interactions. Similarly, purposefully misused spelling (e.g., "gudnyt," "sori," "lablab") and cultural expressions (e.g., "hala," "ambot," "grabe") carried local meaning and emotion beyond their literal translations. Also, neologisms, or newly coined terms created from existing language material (e.g., "lowbat," "lag," or "textmate"), reflected the adaptive evolution of language in digital

spaces. Slang and colloquialisms such as “*lodi*,” “*char*,” and “*petmalu*” were frequently used to express humor and trend awareness, often serving as social markers of generational identity.

Purposefully misused capitalization was also employed to amplify tone or dramatize emotion. Rather than following conventional syntax rules, students intentionally typed phrases like “OKAY NA” or “SHEEEEEESH” to signal excitement, frustration, or humor. This visual cue mimicked prosodic stress and aligned with observations by Archibido and Mones (2017) on emotional stylization in youth digital language.

### Non-Linguistic Features

Non-linguistic textisms included emojis, expressive punctuation, and visual stylizations. Emojis such as ☹️, 😊, 🙄, and 🤔 were frequently used not merely as decorative symbols but as semantic tools to convey affect, manage tone, or reinforce intent. For example, messages like “*Okay lang ko ☹️☹️*” used repetition to intensify emotional content. This aligns with Halliday’s (1978) interpersonal metafunction, wherein language (and its visual supplements) is used to manage social roles and express emotion.

Purposefully misused punctuation included repeated question marks (e.g., “*Whaaaat???*”) or ellipses (“*Don’t worry...*”), often used to mimic intonation or signal hesitation and sarcasm. These forms further underscored how users bend language to serve novel communicative functions.

### Others

Two textism forms emerged that did not fit neatly into established categories. The first, stylized phrasing or phonetic adaptation, includes examples like “*ay gatchu*”, a creative spelling of “I got you” phonetically stylized in a humorous or affectionate way. The second, phonetic approximation, includes invented forms such as “*tatch*” (from “*halata*”), simulating how the word sounds in informal conversation. These expressions were used among peers to create intimacy, signal in-group knowledge, or convey humor. Though unclassified in prior literature, their frequent use highlights the evolving multimodal strategies employed in youth digital discourse.

### Thematic Patterns

A synthesis of the features revealed four key themes:

**Balancing Efficiency and Expressiveness:** Students used abbreviations and emojis in tandem to maintain brevity while expressing tone or emotion. For instance, “*plss ☹️*” conveys urgency and pleading using both linguistic and visual cues.

**Adaptability Across Contexts:** Students adjusted their textism usage depending on the platform, audience, and message purpose. Facebook Messenger allowed more visual creativity, while SMS constrained expression to abbreviations and compressed forms.

**Cultural Expression and Identity:** Code-switching, slang, and local expressions were used to signal familiarity and embed cultural identity within digital talk. Terms like “*grabe*,” “*hala*,” and “*ambot*” were powerful emotional markers tied to regional linguistic identity.

**Interplay of Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Features:** Textisms were rarely used in isolation. Messages like “*GUTOM NAKO DAM ☹️☹️☹️☹️☹️*” demonstrated how capitalization and emojis work together to construct tone and meaning.

These themes confirm that textism is not a random or degraded form of language but a dynamic, purposeful, and culturally grounded digital communication system.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the linguistic and non-linguistic features of textism in SMS and Facebook Messenger exchanges among college students from St. Peter’s College. Through descriptive-qualitative analysis, it was found that textism encompasses a range of deliberate and context-sensitive strategies that reflect both communicative efficiency and cultural expressiveness. Code-switching, abbreviations, emojis, and localized expressions were among the most frequently observed features, revealing how students navigate multilingual realities, social dynamics, and platform constraints.

The emergence of two previously undocumented categories—stylized phrasing and phonetic approximation—further demonstrated the evolving nature of digital language practices. These forms highlight how students creatively adapt written communication to simulate speech, signal identity, and convey a nuanced emotional tone. Four overarching themes—efficiency, tone and emotion, identity, and creativity—underscored the sophisticated interplay between linguistic and non-linguistic cues in digital communication.

Rather than diminishing language, textism represents a modern reconfiguration of communication norms, shaped by technological affordances and sociocultural context. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of Philippine English in informal digital settings and reaffirm the value of recognizing youth digital language as a legitimate, evolving discourse.

### Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the student participants from St. Peter’s College who willingly shared their digital communication samples and insights for this study. Special appreciation is extended to the panel members and thesis adviser for their guidance throughout the research process. No external funding was received for this research. The design, data collection, analysis, and writing were independently undertaken by the authors.

### Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

### Authors’ Contributions

‘Author 1’ conceptualized the study, collected the data, conducted the initial analysis, and drafted the manuscript. ‘Author 2’ served as the thesis adviser and supervised the research process. ‘Author 3’, ‘Author4’, and ‘Author 5’ provided critical insights, reviewed data interpretations, and contributed to the refinement of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

### Ethical approval

This study was conducted in accordance with institutional guidelines for ethical research. Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of St. Peter’s College prior to data collection. All participants provided informed consent, and anonymity was maintained throughout the study.

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