

ABSTRACT

JOEL IRA SCHNEIER. *Sociolecting in Texting: Social and Relational Negotiation through Text-Messaging*. (Under the direction of Professors Walt Wolfram and Susan Miller-Cochran.)

The prevalence of text-messaging as part of the sociolinguistic ecology offers an ideal opportunity to explore how style- and register-shifting patterns are presented in mediated *and* mobile discourse. The overwhelming majority of research on “texting,” however, has focused on chronicling the unique literacy-based features and its apparent diffusion amongst literate populations, particularly youth (e.g., Thurlow, 2003). While these “textism” features do warrant attention—as do all unique linguistic features—such studies are often a reaction to negative portrayals of text-messaging in the popular media. And despite the critical research that has taken place as a result of the media outcry, particularly in the area of cognitive and neurological processing, there is no evidence that the cultural capital of texting has been altered in any way.

This study attempts to account for how texting features are performed as part of an ongoing negotiation of social and relational identities afforded by text-messaging. It examines over 2,000 text-messages from a corpus of 18-22 year-old college writing students in the Mid-Atlantic. These text-messages were obtained as part of a repeated elicitation experiment with 98 subjects, as well as naturally occurring text-message discourse extracted from the mobile devices of participating subjects (i.e., text-messages that were not originally composed as part of a research study).

Both qualitative and quantitative evidence demonstrate how “textisms” function as part of discursive strategies for social, relational, and interactional accomplishments through texting. The strategic shifting between particular texting styles and registers as indicated by “textisms” therefore marks these strategies. These findings further confirm that Brown & Levinson’s (1987)

politeness strategies extend to electronically mediated and mobile discourse (see also Spilioti, 2011). It is further argued that the strategies present in texting serve as a highly relatable discursive subject matter to instruct developing language and writing students about meta-linguistic phenomenon as well as socio-cultural perceptions about various literacy practices (Kucer, 2009).