Institute of Letters and Languages
Department of Foreign Languages
Section: English Language

The Impact of Computer-mediated Communication upon Written English

The case of EFL master students at Mila University Center

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements of the Master's Degree in
Didactics of Foreign Languages

Presented by: **Supervisor:**
1. Oussama Bitat   Dr. Rima Medjedoub
2. Abdelhafid Boutouha

Board of Examiners:
Chairman: Dr. Meriem Abid
Supervisor: Dr. Rima Medjedoub
Examiner: Dr. Sabah Bouguerne

Academic Year: 2021-2022

PPEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
Abd Elhafid Boussouf University Centre - Mila

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My family, namely, my dear parents, sisters and little brother,

All my English teachers who taught me from my freshman year up to my graduation year,

All my university friends, especially Lokmane, Mouad, the two Imads, Fouad, Mohammed, and Idriss,

My fellow partner, AbdElhafid, with whom I accomplished this work.

Oussama

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to:

My beloved mother, who passed away ten years ago,

My great father, who gave me a lot of love and support,

All my family members

My brothers and sisters,

Dr. Medjedoub Rima, my wonderful teacher and supervisor, who worked tirelessly to help us complete this research,

All my classmates from Master 2,

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Abdelhafid

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Abstract

Perhaps the most prominent achievements of the 20th century have been in the fields of technology and communication, namely the Internet, which is at the core of computer-mediated communication. The latter changed the world drastically and affected many fields, like the way language is taught, learned and utilized. This study aims to explore the impact of computer-mediated communication on written English among English as a Foreign Language learners. Put explicitly, we need to know whether computer-mediated communication tools impacts students' English academic writing, distort it or inhibit it. To this end, a mixed method of research was conducted using a students' questionnaire and a teachers' interview with eight teachers and 60 master students at the Department of Foreign Languages, Mila University Centre. The participants were chosen randomly. After the data analysis, it was found that all of the teachers stated that CMC causes the students to commit a wide range of mistakes; including contractions, acronyms, intended wrong spelling, and number homonyms. Yet, they also believe that CMC can enhance students' writing by taking advantage of its tools like spelling and grammar correctors. Moreover, they believe that CMC is a great source for learning new vocabulary and communicating with people who use formal English. Overall, the results indicate that both the teachers and the students stand by the fact that CMC hinders the students' academic writing if not used appropriately, like immersing oneself in social networks, but it can improve their written English when connecting to academic blogs or sites, and the like. To benefit from CMC, the present study recommends raising the students' awareness of its proper use and of the difference between formal and informal writing. The limitations of the study are volunteered at the end.

Keywords: CMC, written English, academic writing, EFL master students

List of Abbreviations

CMC: Computer-mediated Communication

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

N: Numbers

%: Percentage

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Communication is the act of transferring information from one person or group to another. Every communication involves, at least, one sender, a message, and a recipient. Computer-mediated communication (henceforth, CMC) is a type of communication where the computer and its software are the media that transmit messages. Computer-mediated communication has been around for fifty years. In the beginning, it took only the form of prototype emails, and it was not until the last 20 years that computers became less technical and specialized and more popular and personal (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004), which opened a gateway for endless possibilities for people and students to communicate digitally. They do so through instant messaging, electronic mail, social networks, virtual rooms, online groups, commenting on different news websites, writing in blogs, wikis, YouTube, and the like. Nowadays, most students spend their time communicating through CMC tools more than in-person communication. These tools have changed how people learn and have created completely new and diverse environments where students can either effectively learn new languages but get affected by some new linguistic behavior on the net that their language use is distorted. Some scholars state that the consistent use of CMC has led to a new trend in writing that is deviant from the standard language. The informal and colloquial vocabulary utilized in CMC can have enormous impacts on students' writing skills. Indeed, the influence of Internet language is so powerful that students acquire it faster than the formal language. It is this topic that this dissertation aims to check.

Aims of the Study

This study explores the impact CMCs have on English as a Foreign Language (henceforth, EFL) students' writing skill. Furthermore, it seeks to knowhow social networks influence the students' writing habits which they develop in class so that to protect them from imitating the Internet language.

Significance of Research

After the emergence of computers and the Internet, communication has become easier and faster than ever. Nowadays, people across the world can communicate and exchange, share files and negotiate ideas and meanings in different languages via CMC. The latter brought about a great impact on teaching/learning EFL by creating new opportunities for learning that were inexistent previously. It is essential to explain how CMC environments can influence the development of foreign language learners in a negative way. Only after determining the gains and losses of CMC that recommendations can be supplied to teachers and learners in the field so that to benefit from digital tools to the full.

Research Questions

In order to meet the aims stated above, the following research questions are set forth:

1. What is the impact of CMC upon the writing of EFL master students at Mila University Centre?

2. How can social networks affect students' ability to write academically?

Research Methodology

The study seeks to check the effects or effectiveness of CMC on the written English of EFL master students at Mila University Centre. Hence, the type of research employed in this study will be both quantitative and qualitative. In this study, we decided to use a questionnaire as a data collection instrument. It will take place both on the university and online, mostly through e-mail and social media websites such as Facebook. In addition, we plan to conduct a teacher interview.

Organization of Dissertation

The present study is divided into two chapters; the first of which has two sections. One of them is devoted to investigating CMC and its synchronous and asynchronous types along with its relation to written English. The other section is concerned mostly with academic writing and its features and stages along with the possible negative impact of CMC on it. The fieldwork and the approach used by the researcher during the study are presented in Chapter two. Globally, the latter comprises the research method, sample, description of the data collection tools, data analyses and results. It is wrapped up by the limitations and recommendations of the study.

Chapter One: Computer-mediated Communication and Written English

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Introduction

  Computer-mediated communication has not only revolutionized the way people communicate, but also the way they learn languages. Linguists are still researching the effects of this type of communication on one's language and how they are interconnected. In the first section of this chapter, an overview of CMC is supplied by tackling its definitions and types, namely those relevant to synchronous and asynchronous. In addition, much focus will be placed on the effects of those types on language learning.

  The second section is devoted to focusing attention on writing skills in general and academic writing in particular. In this regard, many aspects related to writing will be highlighted, amongst which the definition of the writing skill, the relationship between writing and speaking, in addition to its characteristics and different stages, and ultimately, the impact of technology on writing. Academic writing is given much more attention concerning its definition, characteristics, and types. Besides, the importance of academic writing as well as its difficulties are discussed.

Section One: Computer- mediated Communication

1.1.1. Defining Computer-mediated Communication

  At the outset, the term CMC refers to both task-related and interpersonal communication operated by computers (Ferris, 1997). This implies communication both to and through a computer; this includes asynchronous communication via email or through the use of an electronic bulletin board and synchronous communication, such as chatting or retrieving information. Indeed, CMC is a generic term that is frequently used for a variety of techniques that allow one to communicate with other individuals via computers and networks. On his part,

December (1996) defined CMC as the procedure by which communities create, exchange and perceive information using networked telecommunication systems (or non-networked computers) that enable encoding, transferring and decoding messages. From the above definitions, we conclude that CMC is the use of computers for communication purposes, be it synchronous or asynchronous.

It is worthy to note that CMC lies at the intersection of many fields. Bodomo (2010) maintained that:

Computer science, information technology, communication studies, linguistics, literacy, education, business, ethics, and law are just a few of the topics covered by CMC. Given the breadth of the subject, any single volume would be unable to cover all aspects of CMC in any meaningful depth. As a result, one or the other of these branch disciplines must be focused on (p. 11)

Therefore, we delimited our research by focusing on academic writing in relation to CMC.

Needless to say that the employment of new technology, such as CMC, has advanced human communication. Contribution to the evolution of social communication is one of the most important functions of CMC. Individuals can use CMC to extend their socialization beyond regular communication methods. For example, it can allow people to meet strangers online with common interests and increase the likelihood of mass communication (e.g., emails); restrict information (e.g., anonymity on online forums); manage dependencies (e.g., Google Calendar); archive one's past (e.g., saved emails); or help establish identity (individual or group) through naming (e.g., having one's title within their email address) (Resnick, 2002 as cited in Duart, 2009).

1.1.2. Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication

One of the major distinctions that have been made in CMC has been between synchronous and asynchronous communications. Synchronous means real-time communication between parties and necessitates immediate response. An asynchronous situation is one in which two or more people can communicate without having to be present at the same time.

1.1.2.1. Synchronous Communication. Synchronous communication encompasses instant messaging, video conferencing, and phone calls, to name a few.

*1.1.2.1.1. Instant Messaging***.** Instant messaging is an Internet-based protocol application that allows one-to-one communication between users employing various devices. The most prominent form of instant messaging is chatting, where brief, text-based messages are transmitted among computers. With technologies such as Wireless Application Protocol and the popularity of handheld instruments such as mobile phones, Short Message Service added a new height to instant messaging integration (Gupta, Dass, Malhotra & Katyal, 2002).

Being such a popular form of communication over the Internet, Instant messaging is developing into a substitute for e-mail. Unlike e-mail, instant messaging lets users know if a certain friend or coworker is available. If someone on the user's list of correspondents connects to the Internet, the Instant Messaging service will notify the user. In addition, unlike e-mail, instant messaging allows for two-way communication in real time (Pinto, 2014).

Mobile instant messaging has turned into the most favored media for young people to communicate. Mobile instant messaging apps commonly come with countless features that teachers may leverage to improve student learning. However, it is unclear to what extent and in what ways it can encourage student engagement (Tang & Hew, 2022). Instant messaging has

become one of the most used means of communication, especially for university students. It replaces traditional communication like phone calls.

1.1.2.1.2. Video Conferencing. Video conferencing is described as interactive and synchronous speech, video, and data transmission between two or more points over communication lines (Gough, 2006, as cited in Karal, Çebi & Turgut, 2011).

Videoconferencing has been widely utilized as a learning tool by educators and students to facilitate proper communication between learners and teachers or between learners and their peers, particularly when face-to-face communication is not possible (Al-Samarraie, 2019).

Interaction between students-to-students and students-to-teachers in videoconferencing settings has unlocked further opportunities for advancing the delivery of lessons (Campbell, 2006, as cited in Al-Samarraie, 2019).

1.1.2.2. Asynchronous Communication. Asynchronous CMC encompasses discussion forums, text and video messaging, and email.

1.1.2.2.1. Discussion Forums. Online discussion forums (also known as World Wide Web forums, bulletin boards, or message boards) appeared in the mid-1990s. Thus, it allows users to post and respond to messages over the Internet. Discussion forums have grown in popularity ever since. They include discussions around sports, health, and business, as well as current affairs, money, and entertainment (Discussion Forums, 2022).

Numerous organizations, including companies and educational institutions, have adopted discussion forums. Many college professors, for example, began using online forums as a learning aid in the late 1990s. Students were encouraged to discuss class topics in specific forums set up by the college or professor. Individuals seeking information made up the largest group of discussion forum users (Discussion Forums, 2022).

As for education implementation, Sherry (2001) stated that students can collaborate on projects in small groups, take part in continuous conversations about class topics, and present group projects to the rest of the class via the online discussion forum. All of this is done regardless of where the students are located or when they participate in the discussion forum. This is done through an independent website for online courses.

1.1.2.2.2. Text and Video Messaging. The language of text messages is referred to as texting. Texting is viewed as an interdisciplinary area of CMC that investigates mobile and computer-mediated channels and their impact on communication, social activities, and information dissemination and exchange (Tagg, 2009, as cited in Altohami, 2020).

According to Altohami (2020), texting language includes heavy use of abbreviations and acronyms, the omission of vowels, the use of emoticons, insufficient grammatical structures, little use of punctuation marks, respellings, and unconventional openings and closures. Most of these linguistic features are justified by the technical limitations of texting as well as common background knowledge among texters.

Video messaging is an asynchronous communication technique in which brief video messages are exchanged. It supports instant messaging (sending and receiving brief text messages) but uses video rather than text. Recipients do not need to be online to read the message when it is sent. You can record a video and send it whenever possible, and recipients will consume and reply to it when they can. The video has an advantage over text because it allows one to catch facial expressions, gestures, and voices. Considering that people speak faster than they type, video messaging allows individuals to rapidly deliver information and enables

them to communicate complex and subtle thoughts without feeling the tension of having to write

a lot (Zaric, 2022).

   1.1.2.2.3. Email. In computer science; e-mail is an abbreviation for electronic mail; a

technique of sending data, text files, digital photographs, or audio and video files from one

computer to another via the intranet or the Internet. In other terms, computer users can

communicate messages and data using e-mail over a local area network or the Internet. In the

1990s, e-mail became widely used, and it has since become a significant advancement in both

commercial and personal communication (E-Mail, 2009).

   Dürscheid and Frehner (2013) stated that email did not become a widely used mode of

communication among the public until the latter half of the twentieth century, when it quickly

advanced to become the most widely used Internet application. Since email became available to

the public in the early 1990s, estimates for email usage have steadily increased. However, the

rapid increase in email usage can be followed by an equally rapid decline. Newer and more

synchronous services, such as various forms of instant messaging and the countless social

networking sites, the most popular of which are Facebook and Twitter, have begun to compete

with email.

   1.1.2.2.4. Blogs. A blog is a frequently updated website that consists of dated entries

called posts (which can include text, photographs, media objects, and data) that are arranged in

reverse chronological order, with the most recent entry appearing first. There are three essential

properties that any post can have: title, link, and description (Brownstein & Klein, 2006).

   Azizinezhad and Hashemi (2011) contended that blogs are weblogs that are updated

regularly by their authors. They can include information associated with a specific topic.

Sometimes blogs are used as daily diaries of people's personal lives, political opinions, or

societal commentary. The truth is that blogs can be molded into anything the author wants them to be. Users are familiar with blogs because they have a large presence on the Internet. Teachers are aware of this as well, but they do not appreciate them as an educational tool.

1.1.3. Social Networks

The use of social networking sites has become popular on the Internet. Social networking encompasses interacting with family, friends and people who have common interests using social media sites and applications such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Nations, 2020).

EL-Jarn (2014) argued that users of social networking sites such as Facebook can reveal personal information, photographs and messages. According to the author, High or low privacy settings might limit the information that is visible to a certain group of users or provide open access to anybody who uses the Internet. Users can, however, construct an alias identity by providing fake data that bears no relation to their own. Personal information, images and statements might be exaggerated or false in order to improve one's reputation or professional identity in the eyes of other users.

The Internet has increasingly been a creative arena, and it is getting more so every day as new intercommunication possibilities emerge with an ever-increasing breadth. The growing popularity of social networks provides fascinating indicators of social engagement and collective influence (Duart, 2009). From an educational perspective, Duart (2009) emphasized that the university, as a vital institution in the information and knowledge society, must encourage the creation of creative spaces. Creativity is the foundation of the university as an institution, as it generates knowledge. The construction of a creative space is not exclusively dependent on technological or Internet connectivity. Spaces for creativity are created and managed because of institutional strategic planning. Universities should consider how to leverage the social network phenomenon and creativity as part of their institutional function rather than as an add-on to their

instructional activities. The web and its creative potential should extend beyond technological

departments and serve as the foundation for proactive institutional policy.

     1.1.3.1. Facebook. Facebook, which was founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004, has 55

percent of the global audience (ComScore, 2011, as cited in Halim & Marros, 2014). It has one

asynchronous messaging function, among many others, like status updates, which adhere to the

microblogging notion (Köbler et al., 2010, as cited in Halim et al., 2014). This function allows

users to send short messages to their friends that express their feelings, thoughts, whereabouts,

inquiries, or any other information they want to share. In the status box, users can also upload

photographs, videos, or links. When users publish a status on their wall, it will appear on their

friends' news feed. This will allow them to 'like' the status by clicking the 'Like' button or

leaving a comment on what has been posted. Users can also 'tag' friends in their status updates

and posts. Friends that are tagged will get a notification that links to the post. This will make

such posts accessible to be reflected on or commented on by their friends (Halim et al., 2014).

     Since most Facebook status updates are a tool to convey people's feelings and thoughts,

users may use the language as they prefer. Thus, it is expected to see informal and less accurate

language, with many abbreviations, acronyms, spelling mistakes, and also emojis. According to

Herring (2001, as cited in Halim, et al., 2014), such practices stem from the users' intent to

"economize on typing effort, mimic spoken language features, or express themselves creatively".

And, since that many assume that the language of the Internet is English (Crystal, 2001, as cited

in Halim, et al., 2014), there is a high possibility for the users to switch between codes. Here,

bilingual Facebook users have the tendency to use more than one language in their status posts.

While some favor employing only one variety, others prefer to communicate in both languages

(Halim et al., 2014).

1.1.3.2. WhatsApp. According to new research, WhatsApp is the most widely used instant messaging application for smartphones. The tremendous volume of messages that are exchanged via WhatsApp every day unlocks the prospect for linguists to study a very dynamic format of written language (Vandekerckhove, Fišer & Hilte, 2018). WhatsApp makes it easier for individuals to communicate with each other as it has valuable features such as group chats, broadcast messages, and phone and video call functions. WhatsApp does not ask its users to pay to use the application. This reason led people to leave the classic short message service as it charges people for messages (Resende et al. 2019, as cited in Roslan, Mahmud & Ismail, 2021). Su, Hasniza, Hassan and Bahtiar (2018, as cited in Roslan, et al., 2021) suggested that using WhatsApp for instruction helps to improve the students' social skills and enrich the students' and teachers' creativity. Teachers and students can use the functions in WhatsApp like sending voice messages, transmitting photos and videos, as well as making phone and video calls. Therefore, teachers can deliver an interactive learning experience that may encourage students to learn (Roslan et al., 2021).

1.1.3.3. Instagram. Instagram was first created in 2010 as a photo-sharing platform, but as time passed on, other new features such as video, texting, and story sharing were introduced, which considerably contributed to its growth (Ellison, 2017, as cited in Erarslan, 2019).

In terms of language learning, Handayani (2016, as cited in Erarslan, 2019) claimed that Instagram can be used as a source for several activities in language classrooms, like digital storytelling, grammar activities through photos, role plays, and reading, speaking activities through videos, etc.

Erarslan (2019) remarked that one of the amusing results of the interviews he conducted in his PHD thesis is that the learners declared that Instagram as a language learning tool stopped

them from wasting their time and made them concentrate on their lessons through exposure. They asserted that the routine of checking the updates or following the posts of their friends was the major factor preventing them from allocating time to studying. Yet, the use of Instagram with linguistic content for language learning objectives kept them on the path in terms of language learning.

By allowing students to generate ideas for the writing exercises using contextually relevant content, Instagram helps to revolutionize the language classroom. Moreover, it provides them with fun (Al-Ali, 2014). Another trend in Instagram use that flourished among English language students was to follow and use particular Instagram pages dedicated to English language development, like 'BBC Learning English' (Gonulal, 2019).

1.1.4. Written English and Computer-mediated Communication

The Web is an eclectic media, which is known by its multilingual accessibility. It does not only provide home for different linguistic forms inside a language, but it also provides home for all languages—once their populations have access to computer technology. Given its beginnings in the US, the Internet sites were completely in English (Erickson, 1998, as cited in Crystal, 2004). Crystal (2004) believed that there needs to be immense progress in Internet linguistics, especially in semantics and pragmatics, and also in graphology and typography.

Technology integration in language classrooms has been largely embraced since it can improve language learners' linguistic and digital competencies as well as improving the language learning process and motivating learners. However, linguists believe that electronic communication breaks the grammar of the correct language. Grammar in online languages should be regarded as linguistic drift, despite the fact that many linguists believe otherwise (Nisphi & Armanto, 2020). They also stated that typography, orthography, morphology, and

syntax are influenced and altered by the Internet's non-standard language. The online language's syntax is telegraphic and fragmented when it deviates from normal syntax. Sentence ineffectiveness, such as plenary, ambiguity, the vagueness of primary sentence elements, cumulative prepositions and words are common in CMC's casual style.

Crystal (2004) believed that both students and teachers can benefit from the Internet's vast resources. Whatever complaints there may have been in the past about the lack of authentic materials, there must now be a widespread satisfaction that so much genuine written data is readily available. The Web can connect learners to up-to-date information about a language, particularly through the use of online dictionaries, usage guides, and other similar resources.

In the last 30 years, the use of computers in language instruction has shifted dramatically. Previously, computers in language classrooms could only teach the text. There were a lot of simple simulations and exercises, mostly gap-filling and multiple-choice drills. Computer technology may now be more thoroughly integrated into the language learning process thanks to technological and pedagogical advancements. Students can be immersed in rich environments for language practice using multimedia packages that incorporate speech-recognition technologies. Moreover, students can use language-concordance software with vast language corpora to examine language use in real-world situations. The Internet provides a variety of options for communicating in the target language, accessing textual and multimedia information, and publishing for a global audience (Warschauer & Healey, 1998).

Fadil (2021) presumed that the negative impacts of social media on language outnumber the positive effects. This suggests that language is changing linguistically, that speech is changing quickly, and that the social media realm is not the real world. When a word becomes popular on social media, for example, everyone tries to use it, but this does not improve the

language because not all trendy words are used correctly. When new terms are used on social media, existing language is used less. Because of these negative effects of social media altering language, acquiring written English is becoming more difficult, vocabulary is deteriorating. Worse than that, it seems that there is a potential for returning to communicating through symbols rather than correct English.

Section Two: On Writing

1.2.1. Definition of Writing

Learning any language requires the mastery of four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Due to its significance in both communication and academic life, achieving good writing has been a topic that brought about a heated debate among scholars and linguists. As a result, many definitions were given to writing. Writing can be defined as a skill whereby people communicate with each other. Before the invention of writing, people used to communicate through speaking. Nowadays, writing has become crucial to contemporary culture. In this regard, Ong said that:

> Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaging with writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form. More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness (1982, p88).

Obviously, Ong related thinking to writing and considered the invention of writing as being important to the extent that writing has changed the human consciousness.

In the same vein, Petelin (2021) gave a more detailed and clear definition of writing. She said: "Writing is a process in which thinking and learning take place. This process is known as the "writing-thinking-learning connection" (2021, p. 2). It is a process that results in a

communicative product that conforms to grammatical, syntactic, mechanical, and genre conventions. Importantly, writing also performs recognizable social functions that have increased in importance with the rise of social media. We live in what has been called a "participatory society, where social media consistently provides us with opportunities to interact in global conversations" (Petelin, 2021, p.2). Clearly, Petelin (2021) did not only link writing to thinking but also to its social functions and to its use online. She also mentioned its requirements: syntax, mechanics, and genre conventions.

In addition, writing is essential for our understanding of the world. Consequently, when people write about something, they will learn about it and, as a result, understand it better.

According to Nunan, writing can be defined in terms of a series of contrasts. For him, writing is a physical act that involves committing words or ideas to a certain medium. It can be either hieroglyphics inked onto a parchment or an e-mail message typed into a computer. However, writing is not that simple; rather, it is a mental task that encompasses creating ideas, organizing them, transforming them into meaningful expressions, and producing them in the form of statements or paragraphs in a clear manner (Nunan, 2003).

In the same vein, Byrne (1988) postulated that writing is the act of forming graphic symbols, i.e., letters or combinations of sounds, which relate to the sounds we make when we speak. Though writing is more than producing graphic symbols just like speaking is more than producing sounds, symbols have to be arranged to form words, following certain conventions, and words also have to be arranged to form sentences. In other words, writing is the production of a sequence of sentences arranged in a particular order and linked together in certain ways. He added that most people, especially professional writers, would agree that writing is neither an easy nor a spontaneous activity. In contrast, it requires some conscious mental effort due to the

fact that any writer needs to prepare his/her sentences before combining and arranging them in certain ways; he/she needs to reread what he/she writes as a stimulus for further writing; he/she makes notes, revises, and even writes different versions before being satisfied with the result; simply because he/she writes for a reader. That is, writing involves an encoding message and reading involves a decoding or a translation of that message (Byrne, 1988).

1.2.2 Writing and Speaking

According to Weigle (2002), the relationship between writing and speaking is important for language testing. In this context, Grabe and Kaplan (1996 as cited in Weigle, 2002) pointed out that linguists and educational researchers have historically held contradictory positions about the relationship between writing and speaking: traditional linguistic inquiry argued that speaking is primary and writing is merely a reflection of the spoken language, whereas educational research took the position that the written form of the language is more correct and, consequently, should be more highly valued than the spoken language. However, a consensus has been achieved between the two positions: neither oral nor written language is inherently superior to the other, despite the differences between the two forms in terms of textual features, sociocultural norms, and patterns of use, as well as the cognitive processes involved in text production and comprehension (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, as cited in Weigle, 2002).

1.2.3. Characteristics of Writing

Brown (1994) provided a list of the characteristics of the written language. They are mentioned below.

1.2.3.1. Permanence. As soon as a writer produces something and releases it in its final form, he may cede a certain power, that is, power to rectify, to clarify, to recall. Thus, it is in that way that writing is considered a scary operation, especially for students. As a result, teachers

need to help students refine and revise their copies before the final submission in order to give them confidence in their work.

1.2.3.2. Production Time. Giving enough time can help a writer develop efficient writing processes for achieving the final product. However, most educational contexts require students to write within time limits or "write for display." To help students deal with time limitations, teachers should train their students to pay attention to the processes of writing and to budgeting their time accordingly.

1.2.3.3. Distance. Anticipating the audience is a critical problem that writers can face. This anticipation ranges from general characteristics to how specific words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs will be interpreted. In this regard, the distance factor considers cognitive empathy, which is how a good writer can read their own writing from the perspective of the targeted audience's mind. Writers are hereby required to know their audience knowledge, cultural and literacy schemata, specific subject matter knowledge, and most importantly, their social and professional status.

1.2.3.4. Orthography. Orthography refers to the letters and symbols used to produce something, that is, a written work. In the event that students are non-literate, educators need to begin with the fundamentals of reading and writing. However, if students are literate and the system of their native language is non-alphabetic, new symbols have to be produced. Some attention has to be paid if their native language has a different phoneme-grapheme from that of the foreign language.

1.2.3.5. Complexity. Writers need to learn how to combine sentences, how to make references to other elements in a text, how to create syntactic and lexical variety, and most importantly, how to avoid redundancy.

1.2.3.6. Vocabulary. Written language emphasizes the use of vocabulary more than does speaking. Therefore, good writers should learn how to take advantage of the richness of English vocabulary.

1.2.3.7. Formality. When producing any form of written work, the conventions of each form are strictly respected. An example of that would be academic writing, where skills such as describing, explaining, comparing, contrasting, illustrating, defending, criticizing, and arguing are highly recommended.

1.2.4. Stages of Writing

According to Harmer (2004), writing is a process that goes through different stages before the final written form is produced. He added that this process can be affected by the content (subject matter) of writing, the type of writing (letters, emails, essays, reports), and the medium of writing (a pen and a piece of paper, a computer word file, live chat, etc). Harmer (2004) suggested that this process consists of four main elements.

1.2.4.1. Planning. Initially, writers plan what they will write. In other words, experienced writers decide on what it is that they are going to say before starting to write or type. For example, they may begin by making detailed notes or simply scribbling some words (Seow, 2002). Some may do all the planning in their heads without writing anything down. During planning, writers need to consider three main issues. Firstly, they need to account for the purpose of their writing as this will have an impact on the type of text they want to produce, the language they use, and the information they wish to include. Secondly, writers are required to consider the audience they are writing for, and this is mainly due to the influence it may have on both the shape of writing and the choice of language. Thirdly, the structure has also to be taken into

consideration by writers at this stage. In other words, writers should decide on the best possible way to sequence the facts, the arguments, and the ideas that they have decided to include.

1.2.4.2. Drafting. A draft is the first version of any piece of writing, and it is done on the assumption that it will be amended as the process of writing proceeds into editing. At this stage, many drafts may be done before attaining a final version.

1.2.4.3. Editing (reflecting or revising). After producing a draft, writers usually read through what they have written in order to check if they need to add or change something (Seow, 2002). They may, for example, find that the order of the ideas is not clear, or there might be some confusion or ambiguity. Subsequently, they may decide to re-write the introduction, change the form of words in a sentence, or even change the order of the paragraphs. It is worth noting that experienced writers look first at issues of general meaning and overall structure before focusing on detailed aspects such as syntax, grammar, vocabulary, and the like.

Other writers or editors can also help at this stage with their comments and suggestions. That is, others' reactions towards any piece of writing would be helpful to the author in making necessary revisions.

1.2.4.4. Final Version. After revising their draft and making necessary changes, writers produce the final version, which may look different from the original plan and the draft in the way that many things have been changed during the editing stage. Ultimately, the writer is ready to send his written work to the intended audience.

Harmer (2004) postulated that writing is a recursive process and not a linear one. That is, writers plan, draft, and edit, but again they re-plan, re-draft, and re-edit. In some cases, they change their minds when they get to what they think is the final draft. He argues that some writers may have a kind of "stream of consciousness" which allows them to start writing without

too much planning, i.e., the stages of re-planning, drafting, and editing may mingle into a final version of a text.

1.2.5. Impact of Technology on Writing

Weigle (2002) stated that technology has changed the way we think about writing and our way of writing as well. The traditional distinction between writing and speech has become unclear due to the widespread use of electronic mail in business, schools, and other fields. Besides, the overwhelming practice of offering online courses can also be a contributing factor in this process, especially since chat rooms and online discussions are becoming indispensable elements in university courses. As a result, writing started to be influenced by some aspects traditionally associated with speaking, such as: shorter, less complex, incomplete sentences, lack of attention to accuracy, and less formal language. In other words, writing has become more speech-like because of the expansion of technology. In contrast, Baron (1998, as cited in Weigle, 2002) argued that the vast use of composing online may reinforce the transformation from a no to a process approach to writing; thus, the written language may be more speech-like in the future. He suggested that, because of the dominance of American English on the Internet, "It seems likely that American writing styles, as represented by computer mediated communications, are destined to influence written norms both in other English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries as well" (Baron, 1998, as cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 232).

Another outcome of the rapid advance of technology is the use of hypertext, or texts that are connected by links to help the reader explore the text. Weigle (2002) maintained that the styles that are created via hypertext may be more like poetry and fiction, and may not be as relevant for writing assessment as other traditional genres.

The way writing is taught is also influenced by technology. As a result of the use of networked classes, most teacher-student and student-student interactions take place on-line rather than face-to-face. Moreover, the use of networked classes led to an increase in writing time in class. Although there is no evidence that the increase in writing time leads to an improvement in writing quality, some researchers suggest that it is the case (Palmquisit et al., 1998, as cited in Weigle, 2002). In the same line of thought, Braine (1997) posited that the increase in student-student interactions that resulted from networked classrooms fosters language acquisition and thus can assist better writing skills (Braine, 1997, as cited in Weigle, 2002).

1.2.6. Academic Writing

Undeniably, academic writing is that style of formal writing which is utilized in books, journal articles, dissertations, essays. It has various components, requirements, types and is assessed following specific criteria.

1.2.6.1 Definition. Academic writing can be defined as a special genre of writing which has its own set of rules and practices and which complies with traditional conventions of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. It differs from other types of writing in a way that it is concise, precise, clear, focused, structured, and supported by evidence. In this regard, academic writing does not require long and complicated sentences, and its vocabulary is simple since its purpose is to help understanding instead of making ideas difficult and complex.

For Oshima and Hogue (2007), academic writing is the kind of writing used in high school and college classes. Academic writing is different from creative writing, which is the kind of writing you do when you write stories. It is also varied from personal writing, which is the kind of writing you do when you write letters or e-mails to your friends and family. Creative writing and personal writing are informal, so you may use slang, abbreviations, and incomplete sentences. However, academic writing is formal, so you should not use slang or contractions.

Additionally, you should take care to write complete sentences and to organize them in a certain way (Oshima & Hogue, 2007).

  1.2.6.2. Characteristics of Academic Writing. Academic writing's main purpose is to inform the reader; it gives factual information on a given subject. Consequently, there is no place for repetition and deviation from the subject. Any academic writing should have a main idea and a central theme, so that the writing piece should be structured around this main idea and every part of it should provide arguments that support the theme. In addition, off-topic information should not be found and only the standard form of the English language is allowed to be used. Furthermore, in academic writing, the text should be correct and its words used in a precise and accurate manner. According to Mytekah (2013), academic writing in English has different characteristics. They are mentioned below.

  1.2.6.2.1. Complexity. The standard form that is used in academic writing in English differs from the one used in speaking in terms of complexity of style and grammatical structures. Varied sentence types are used, including passive forms and subordinate clauses. Additionally, in academic writing, a variety of vocabulary is used, unlike in conversations.

  1.2.6.2.2. Formality. Formality, like complexity, is extremely important in academic writing; colloquial expressions are strictly prohibited. In other words, the language of academic writing is formal.

  1.2.6.2.3. Precision. Academic writing should be very precise, i.e., no room should be left for interpretations. It should also provide arguments, figures, or charts to support the main idea when necessary and appropriate.

1.2.6.2.4. Objectivity. Objectivity is a paramount characteristic of academic writing. The writer should, by all means, avoid being subjunctive or getting involved in a personal manner. The writer's focus should be on the main idea and any information about it.

1.2.6.2.5. Explicitness. The author should make his/her academic writing explicit and clarify the connection between the different parts of his/her text; he/she should also demonstrate how they are relevant to the main idea through the use of signaling words.

1.2.6.2.6. Accuracy. Accurate use of vocabulary is a crucial factor in any piece of academic writing. Thus, the author should pay full attention while choosing words to convey specific meanings.

1.2.6.2.7. Hedge. Hedging is a technique used by some academic writers to decide how to approach a certain subject and how strong their claims are.

1.2.6.2.8. Responsibility. The academic writer should be responsible for everything he/she states. He/she should also provide proof and justification to support his/her claims. Assumptions are not allowed and sources should be mentioned.

1.2.6.2.9. Organization. It is important for the academic writer to organize his/her ideas in a logical sequence in order to get a good writing piece. To achieve organization of ideas, the academic writer can use different methods, including: logical division of ideas, order of importance, chronological order, and comparison or contrast.

1.2.6.2.10. Cohesion and Coherence. Cohesion and coherence are two important factors in ensuring a smooth reading experience in any writing piece. Cohesion refers to the connection of words, sentences, and ideas together using cohesive devices (linking words or connectors) in order to make a writing piece as clear and smooth as possible. Coherence, on the other hand, refers to the connection between ideas in a text or a writing piece. In other words, coherence is

related to the connection of ideas and the unity of a text or a writing piece vis-a-vis the content of writing.

    1.2.6.3. Types of Academic Writing. According to Raising Edmonton (2021), academic writing has four main types. They are: descriptive, persuasive, analytical and critical. Each of the aforementioned types has certain characteristics and purposes, and they can be used all together in many academic texts. In an empirical thesis, for example, critical writing can be used in the literature review, whereas descriptive writing is mostly found in the methods section, where the writer describes the method being used to collect and analyze the data. In the results section, both descriptive and analytical types of writing can be used since the writer comments on the data collected. The discussion section can involve analytical and persuasive writing as the writer relates his findings back to the research questions and proposes interpretations and explanations for those findings.

    1.2.6.3.1. Descriptive Writing. Descriptive writing is considered the simplest type of academic writing, and its purpose is to provide facts and information. An example of descriptive writing would be a report on the results of an experiment. In this type, the academic writer can use a set of instructions for a thoroughly descriptive assignment, such as: record, report, summarize, define, etc. It is worthwhile to note that no academic writing is entirely descriptive. For instance, descriptive writing is usually included in analytical writing.

    1.2.6.3.2. Analytical Writing. The purpose of analytical writing is to re-arrange facts and information being collected and group them into parts, types, and relationships or categories. An example of analytical writing would be the comparison between two theories where the writer can break it into several parts or relationships, i.e., how each theory deals with the social context, how each theory is related to language learning, and how each theory can be implemented in

practice. In this context, the academic writer should devote too much time to planning, gathering and grouping facts into different patterns, parts, similarities or differences using, for example, flow charts, tree diagrams, or tables. For the sake of making his/her text more analytical, he/she should also give a name to each of these relationships and categories and build each section or paragraph around one of the analytical parts. In addition, he/she should use topic sentences and an introduction in order to make the structure of his/her paper more clear to the reader. To achieve the purposes of an analytical assignment, the writer can use a set of instructions such as: compare, relate, contrast, examine, etc.

   1.2.6.3.3. Persuasive Writing. Persuasive writing includes almost all of the characteristics of analytical writing, but it also includes the writer's point of view, at least at the discussion or conclusion. The writer's view point can be an interpretation of the findings, an argument, or even an evaluation of someone else's work. However, each claim or opinion needs to be supported by evidence, like referring to research findings or providing published sources. In this type, the writer may use instructions like: discuss, argue, agree, take a position, and the like.

   It is worthwhile mentioning that before the writer gives his/her point of view, he/she should read about other researchers' standpoints on the topic. He/she should also decide on the strong evidence and look for its several interpretations and implications in real life; besides, he/she ought to select the most beneficial ones. Moreover, an academic writer needs to be aware of the different reasons behind his/her points of view and how they resemble or differ from those of other researchers' points of view. Ultimately, he/she should make sure that he/she develops coherent texts where the claims work together to support his/her theses and that his/her reasoning for each claim is clear to the reader.

1.2.6.3.4. Critical Writing. While persuasive writing requires the writer to give his/her point of view on an issue, critical writing requires him/her to consider at least two points of view, including his/her own. He can, for example, present another researcher's interpretation of a given topic and evaluate the merits of the argument or give his/her own interpretation. Critiques of journals or articles and literature reviews of existing research are examples of critical writing assignments.

The kinds of instructions the writer can use in this type include: critique, debate, disagree, evaluate, etc. A critical writer needs to summarize all the parts of the work, including identifying the main interpretations, assumptions, and methodology. It is also necessary that he/she provides an opinion about the work through pointing out its negative aspects, proposing an alternative approach, and defending it against the critiques of others, as well as providing evidence for his/her views, depending on the discipline and scientific assignments. Examples of evidence are logical reasoning and reference to authoritative sources and/or research data.

In conclusion, it is of salient importance to note that critical writing requires strong writing skills. Hence, a critical writer needs to thoroughly understand the topic at hand and develop an essay or a paragraph that enables him/her to analyze different interpretations and present his/her own arguments supported by evidence (Raising Edmonton, 2021).

1.2.6.4. Importance of Academic Writing. Some may claim that knowledge is more important than the expression of that knowledge. That's why many students may underestimate academic writing in spite of its central importance in academic life all over the world. In this context, Klimova (2012) stated that writing is important since it helps to, express one's personality, foster communication, develop critical thinking, prepare and receive feedback as well as make logical and persuasive arguments an prepare for school and employment. Hence,

academic writing is important because it is utilized to assess a student's abilities in a systematic manner. So, it is required for students in order to get a diploma after completing a successful course. Nowadays, most schools and universities have procedures whereby they ensure that scholars and students engage with their peers and teachers and share information in the written mode. In other words, academic writing enables students to demonstrate their thoughts and knowledge. For these reasons and because of its significance for both one's academic and professional careers, students and scholars are required to develop their skills in academic writing. Below are some points that illustrate the importance of academic writing.

The main focus of academic writing is to present information in a clear and precise manner through which the writer's critical reasoning is manifested. This is why getting good test marks and writing excellent academic texts are two crucial conditions for being successful in school or university. To get the highest marks, students are also required to fully understand the task and avoid all sorts of slang, informal language, and contractions. They also need to master the art of paraphrasing and summarizing, use correct in-text references, write grammatical sentences, and respect all the mechanics of writing.

Besides its importance as far as getting good marks is concerned, academic writing plays a major role in improving one's thinking process and contributes to developing critical skills. The fact that an academic writer needs to research, critically evaluate other researchers' points of view, give his/her opinion on an issue, defend a thesis using a strong argument, and present ideas in a clear and concise manner, are all reasons that make academic writing of paramount importance.

It has been proven that writing requires doing a lot of research work in order to deal with a particular problem. Therefore, academic writing can improve learning due to its reflective and analytical nature.

According to Walsh (2010 as cited in Blanka, 2012), writing is important because it's used extensively in higher education and in the workplace. Actually, academic writing is beneficial for students seeking to pursue their post-graduation studies. Academic writing is essential for PHD students and professors who need to present their research and scientific discoveries in an understandable manner, as well as those who want to become good academic writers. Moreover, being a good academic writer is essential for writing a CV or a cover letter in a thorough way, which gives you the opportunity to research a potential employer and convey your skills and abilities in the best possible way (Why academic writing is important, 2020).

To sum up, academic writing is of salient significance when it comes to being successful at college or university and to developing analytical and critical thinking as well.

1.2.6.5. Difficulties of Academic Writing. Academic writing is, by all means, a task which requires a lot of effort, skill, and experience. That is why students encounter a lot of difficulties, mainly due to lack of time and overload, i.e., they have to do a large number of writing assignments in a short period of time. In this context, Bayan Mohammad (2018) stated that the findings of his research on EFL students' difficulties in academic writing revealed that students experience a set of difficulties including, finding relevant references, paraphrasing, referencing and citation, coherence and cohesion, using conjunctive cohesive devices appropriately, in addition to difficulties in language use and choosing a significant topic. Hence, academic writing difficulties can be classified as follows.

1.2.6.5.1. Vocabulary and Spelling. Indeed, students may experience lexical difficulties. Proper linking of words and phrases is not that easy for most students since writing academically requires linking one argument to another and realizing coherence within a paragraph. Of note, even experienced academic writers may need professional proofreading and editing services.

1.2.6.5.2. Grammar. Thornbury (2000) defined grammar as "the set of rules that govern the form of language sentences." In the same line of thought, Close (1982) defined English grammar as the system of syntax that organizes the order and patterns of words in sentences. As a result, mastery of English grammar is crucially required for good academic writing. It is not surprising to state that errors in grammar are widely common among ESL students, the things that result in using wrong words, confusing conjunctions and prepositions, missing auxiliary verbs, etc. In this regard, Ellis (2008) contended that grammar difficulties can be classified into two types: the first type is related to the difficulties that students encounter while trying to understand and expand a grammatical feature, whereas the second type is due to the difficulties that students face in internalizing that grammatical feature and, subsequently, using it fluently and automatically in communication.

1.2.6.5.3. Structure. Structure is a fundamental feature of academic writing due to the fact that it helps the reader find the content of any academic text easily. Students find it exhausting to elaborate on a structure that may hold all the parts of their writing piece together. In other words, students may encounter difficulties while attempting to relate various parts of their text to each other in a way that each section should serve a specific purpose. As a result, students may not achieve cohesion between different parts of their writing piece.

1.2.6.5.4. Capitalization and Punctuation. Obviously, the proper use of capitalization and punctuation is a paramount factor for good academic writing in the sense that it helps the

reader to appropriately grasp how words, sentences, and paragraphs are coherently connected. As a result, using punctuation properly means conveying pauses, stresses, and intonations that enable the reader to comprehend any piece of the text. Similarly, capital letters are also required in sentence initials, the beginning of important words, in topics, headings, etc. However, most students may encounter difficulties and commit errors when using capitalization and punctuation. For instance, they may replace a period mark with another or use a capital letter in the middle of a sentence. In this regard, Byrne (1988) stated that the difficulties and problems of punctuation are due to the fact that punctuation has never been standard to the extent of spelling. Likewise, the rules of capitalization are not universal, and students may find it difficult to distinguish between proper nouns and common ones.

    1.2.6.5.5. Plagiarism. According to Brian Martin (1984), plagiarism is defined as taking and using of other people's thoughts, writings and inventions as one's own. He stated that plagiarism is widely common among students than recognized. Clearly, students may borrow passages from books, websites, or blogs and pass them off as their instead of endeavoring to get their thoughts and ideas down on paper. In this case, they are accused of plagiarism because they do not know how to properly incorporate quotations into sentences. Thus, students are required to learn how to properly cite a non-plagiarized text or paper.

    In brief, the aforementioned problems are quite common among EFL students today, and the best way to overcome them is to make them aware of those points, push them to do further reading, and help them to practice writing.

    1.2.6.6. Assessing Written English. At the outset, Erwin (1991, p. 15) advanced that: "Assessment can be thought of as the systematic basis for making judgements about the learning and development of students. It is the process of defining, selecting, designing, analyzing,

interpreting, and using information to increase students' learning and development." This definition implies that assessment is a fundamental factor in the teaching and learning process. In this context, Ewell (1988) considered that assessment is intrinsic to education. It would be helpful here to distinguish between the two types of assessment, namely: formative assessment and summative assessment. Formative assessment refers to the type that teachers may use to check on the progress of their students as well as how far they have mastered what they should learn. Based on this information, teachers change or adapt their teaching plans. Informal tests and quizzes are examples of formative assessment. Summative assessment, on the other hand, is used at the end of a term, semester or year and it seeks to measure what has been achieved by groups and individuals as well. Formal tests are widely used in this type of assessment. When we look back to the 20th century, we can see that assessing writing ability was fundamentally characterized by the wide use of objective tests that aimed to measure writing via multiple choice questions. Later on, a subsequent movement arose, led by a new generation of teachers who aimed to measure writing through impromptu essay tests. Again, another teacher-led movement emerged as a reaction to the 'one-shot' testing, but this time it was directed towards the use of portfolios to assess writing.

Nowadays, the rapid advancement in technology and increasing global communication have brought about radical changes in how writing is used and tested. As a result, issues such as who to test, what to test, how, when, and how test results are to be used have led to a growing awareness of the sociopolitical aspects of assessment among educators, theorists, and assessment specialists.

The ability to write effectively assists individuals from different cultures and backgrounds to communicate. Due to the reason that writing is found in reporting analyses of

current events in newspapers or web pages, composing academic essays, business reports, letters, or e-mail messages; it is recognized that writing plays a vital role not only in conveying information but also in transforming and creating knowledge. Consequently, the assessment of the writer's ability is of critical importance. Employers, academic instructors, and English language teachers should evaluate potential students and employees based on their ability to communicate in writing. In this regard, Hughes made an assumption that "the best way to test people's writing ability is to get them to write" (Hughes, 1989, p. 83). Based on this assumption, Weigle (2002) argued that a writing test involves two components at a minimum: the first one is about giving test takers one or more writing tasks or instructions; and the second one is about the method of evaluation whereby the writing samples are going to be scored. Designing a writing test requires more than thinking of a topic for the test takers to write about. Hence, before designing writing tasks and deciding on the scoring procedures, a number of key questions need to be taken into consideration. They are as follows:

 a. What are we going to test? This depends on how we define "writing." That is, are we interested in whether or not test takers can form grammatical sentences? Do we want to know how well they can write for communicative purposes?

b. Why do we want to test the ability to write? What will we do with the information gathered from this test? **c.** Who are the test takers? What do we want to know about them in order to design tasks that allow them to perform at their highest ability?

d. Who will score the test? What criteria and standards will be used? And how can we guarantee that test raters apply the scoring standards in a manner that is consistent?

e. Who will use the information that the test provides? In which form is this information most useful?

f. What are the obstacles that hinder the amount and quality of information we can gather about test takers' writing ability? (Time, money, materials, etc.).

g. What do we know about testing in order to make a valid and reliable test?

Weigle (2002) also emphasized the social value of writing assessment; that is, assessment of writing can promote social goals such as increasing access to education, diagnosing areas of strength and weakness, and certifying professionals' writing ability. Ultimately, for an assessment method to fulfill its functions well and to be accepted as a beneficial social tool, the prospects of the stakeholders need to be addressed in the processes of developing, administering, and communicating about the test.

Conclusion

Drawing on what we have mentioned so far, we can assume that CMC can indeed impact one's language. Scholars were divided between the two sides. Some of them argue that these modern tools are altering students' language skills and making them deviate from standard English. Others believe they have provided an environment which can aid students of all styles and abilities to excel and take full advantage of the opportunities and the new communication technologies which can facilitate the learning of the English language. Of the most popular social media apps are Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. Usually, students interact with each other on them in English.

Let us shift now to academic writing. Doubtlessly, it is of paramount importance and it is distinguished from other types of writing in a way that it has specific conventions, grammar rules, and vocabulary. Additionally, academic writing requires using formal language; that is, informal language, slang, abbreviations, acronyms, and contractions are not acceptable. Furthermore, academic writing is important for both students and scholars in their careers and

academic life, although students may find it hard to produce an academic writing piece. In this context, difficulties in vocabulary and spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, plagiarism, and structure can hinder students' attempts to improve their skills in academic writing. Therefore, if done appropriately, assessment of the writing ability can be an effective way to evaluate and promote the students' writing proficiency. Substantially, assessment provides feedback to teachers, students, and stakeholders so that it helps improve the students' achievement of the instructional outcomes and meet the intended goals of the curriculum.

Chapter Two: The Effects of CMC on EFL Students' Writing

Chapter Two: The Effects of CMC on EFL Students' Writing

Introduction

The use of CMCs in learning a foreign language in general, and in developing writing skills in particular, may be a double-edged sword. Hence, our research aims at demonstrating the potential effects of social media and electronic communication tools on students' academic writing at Mila University Centre. Fieldwork was carried out to realize the objectives of this study. In general, this chapter provides an overview of the method, sample, data analyses and results, limitations and recommendations of the study.

2.1. Method

The current study investigates the impact of CMC upon EFL master students' written English at Mila University Centre. For this purpose, this research is subscribed within the descriptive exploratory design. The mixed method is adopted.

2.2. Population and Sampling

2.2.1. Population

As mentioned earlier, the population of this research is master students of English at the University Centre of Mila; they are estimated to be 300.

2.2.2 Sample

The current study was conducted on 60 students out of a population of 300 EFL master 1 and 2 students at the University Centre of Mila. Most of them have difficulties in writing in English, essentially academic writing. This is evident in their scores in many modules. Besides, eight EFL teachers at the Department of English at Mila University Centre took part in this study by answering the interview questions. Of note, all the participants were selected randomly.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

For the sake of answering the research questions, we chose two different data-gathering tools: a questionnaire and an interview. We decided on the use of the questionnaire since it is a quick and easy way to obtain data from a potentially large sample. As for the interview, it permits the collection of in-depth information from EFL teachers to portray a clear picture of the issue. Indeed, the interview we designed is more of a qualitative nature: many questions are open- ended; hence, it helped to probe the respondents' opinions. The data collected is the total sum of the students' answers to the questionnaire as well as the teachers' responses to the interview. In short, the two research methodologies are complementary.

2.4. Students' Questionnaire

2.4.1. Description of the Students' Questionnaire

We used a quantitative study technique, a questionnaire, to investigate the impact of CMC on EFL master students' written English since it is simple to perform and produces rich and huge volumes of data in a short period of time. A questionnaire with 18 questions was designed for 300 EFL master students, and 60 of them responded. We created it with Google Forms and shared it on social media, primarily Facebook.

2.4.2. *Analysis of the Students' Questionnaire*

Section One: General Information

Question 1: How long have you been learning English?

Table 2.1

Years of Studying EFL

Options	N	%
1-10 years	12	38.70%
11-20 years	19	61.29%
Total	31	100%

Table 2.1 illustrates that approximately half the students (38.70%) have been learning English for 1 to 10 years. While 61.29% of the students fit into the category of 11 to 20 years, this implies that the majority of the respondents have been studying English for a long period. Hence, they should be aware of the characteristics of good academic writing.

Question 2: What do you think of your level in writing in English?

Table 2.2

Students' Level in Writing in English

Options	N	%
Poor	1	1.7%
Average	23	38.33%
Intermediate	28	46.66%
Advanced	8	13.33%
Total	60	100%

Students' answers reveal that 46.66% have an intermediate level in English language and 38.33% have an average level whereas the other choices (a) and (d), which stand for poor and

advanced, have a very low percentage of 1.7% and 13.33%. Although the master students have studied English for a long time, their mastery of the writing skill is not satisfactory at all.

Question 3: How many years have you been using the Internet?

Table 2.3

Years of Use of the Internet

Options	N	%
Less than 5 years	8	13.33%
5-10 years	26	43.33%
More than 10 years	26	43.33%
Total	60	100%

As table 2.3 clearly illustrates, students' answers affirmed that 43.4% of them have been using the Internet for 5 to 10 years and 43.3% have been using it for more than 10 years. The rest of the students, who represent only 13.3%, have been using the Internet for less than 5 years. Overall, all the participants have been exposed to the Internet for quite a long time which means that they are more likely to be influenced by the language used in CMC.

Question 4: Which technological tool do you use the most?

Table 2.4

The Most Commonly Used Technological Device Among Students

Options	N	%
Mobile phone	50	84.7%
Computer	9	15.3%
Total	59	100%

As table 2.4 shows, 84.7% of the students use their mobile phones as a means to communicate, while only 15.3% of them declare that they use computers more than mobile

phones. At any rate, whatever means the students possess, the essential idea is that they make use of CMC in the age of technology. The fact that the majority of them use mobile phones suggests that they are more likely to be most of the time connected to the net as these devices permit multi-tasking. By contrast, the computers require someone to be seated at a desk.

Section Two: CMC and the English Language

Question 5: Do you use the Internet as a medium to communicate?

Table 2.5

Students' Use of the Internet as a Medium to Communicate

Options	N	%
Yes	60	100%
No	0	0%
Total	60	100%

Table 2.5 indicates that 100% of the total sample confirmed that they use the Internet as a medium to communicate. On the other hand, no one among the students stated that they do not use it. This shows that all the students are familiar with CMC. This information confirms those deduced from questions three and four.

Question 6: How often do you use the Internet as a medium to communicate?

Table 2.6

The Frequency of Using the Internet as a Medium to Communicate Among Students

Options	N	%
Never	0	0%
Sometimes	16	26.7%
Often	11	18.3%
Always	33	55%
Total	60	100%

The information in table 2.6 show how frequently students use the Internet to communicate. More than half of the students (55%) said that they always use it. Besides, 26.7% of them say that they sometimes do and 18.3% do connect to the Internet often. Again, the results sustain those obtained in the previous section. The fact of frequently sending and receiving messages and data on Web 2.0 has certainly an influence on one's language use.

Question 7: Which CMC environment are you most active in?

Table 2.7

The CMC Environment which the Students are Mostly Active in

Options	*N*	*%*
Email	2	3.3%
Discussion Forums	1	1.7%
Social Networks	52	86.7%
Blogs	1	1.7%
Other	4	6.7%
Total	60	100%

According to the obtained results, 86.7% of the respondents are mostly active on social networks. Only 6.7% reported being active in other CMC environments, and 3.3% chose email. Moreover, only one student (1.7%) claimed he or she was mostly involved in discussion forums, and the other student (1.7%) indicated to be mostly active on blogs. This demonstrates that the vast majority of the students favor social networks. Unfortunately, the latter have negative effects on one's academic writing as mostly informal language is predominant there. This justifies, to some extent, the students' poor writing, according to their confessions in question two. Moreover, this illustrates that their long exposure to CMC is mainly useless.

Question 8: Do you communicate in English when using CMC environments?

Table 2.8

The Use of English in CMC Environments

Options	N	%
Yes	47	78.3%
No	13	21.7%
Total	60	100%

As indicated in table 2.8, we can clearly notice that most of the students who took part in this study (78.3%) claimed that they communicate in English when using CMC environments. Contrarily, just 21.7% of the sample declared that they do not use the English language within the CMC framework. We deduce that most EFL students do practice the target language on the Internet sites. This English is, however, distorted is we bear in mind the results of question eight (86, 7% of the respondents are majorly active on social networks).

Question 9: With whom do you communicate online in English?

Table 2.9

Parties with Whom the Students Communicate in English

Options	N	%
Teachers	17	28.3%
Friends	39	65%
Family members	2	3.3%
Other	2	3.3%
Total	60	100%

The majority of the students (65%) stated that they communicate online in English with their friends i.e.; they are free to use colloquial language, emoticons, abbreviations and the like.

About the third of them (28.3%) communicate with teachers. Perhaps communicating with teachers might force these students to use a more correct and structured language. Furthermore, only two students (3.3%) communicate with family members, and other two ones (3.3%) converse with other parties that were not mentioned.

Question 10: Does communicating in English through a smart device improve your writing skills?

Table 2.10

The Effect of Using English on Smart Devices on the Improvement of the Writing Skills

Options	*N*	*%*
Yes	53	88.3%
No	7	11.7%
Total	60	100%

Most of the students (88.3%) who answered question 10 declared that using a smart device improved their English writing, while only 11.7% of them said the contrary. In spite of the fact that they are most of the time connected to social networks with friends (where informal language is dominant), the majority of the learners think that CMC has boosted their writing. The explanation for these seemingly contradictory answers is supplied in the response to question eleven.

Question 11: In what ways does digital communication in English help or hinder your writing, i.e.; what are its benefits and drawbacks?

We asked this question to students so we could get information about how digital communication in English helps or hinders their writing. Some students think that CMC communication can be positive in improving their English language skills, while others believe it has some drawbacks. On the one hand, many students said it helps them practice writing and try

out new words and proverbs, as well as share their ideas and thoughts with others, also expanding their vocabulary. Some students declared that to communicate with teachers, they should write a correct and clear message without misspellings. By doing this several time, their writing skills improved. Students split on the tool of auto correction. Some of them consider it a positive thing since it obliges them to learn to spell on their own. Others say it does the work for them, making them lazy and not reflecting on their real writing skills. Some other students believe that CMC helps improve their pronunciation and allows them to discover their writing style. On the other hand, there are a large number of students who esteem the language of online communication to be different, i.e., they use slang words and casual abbreviations so often that it affects their academic writing. Others think its negatives are grammar mistakes, code switching, and uncompleted statements. Some students assume that writing with the phone's keyboard is very distinct from writing an academic essay on a paper, and that the habit of writing using a keyboard renders it difficult to hand-write.

Question 12: Which of these areas is most affected positively by the use CMC?

Table 2.11

The Aspects of Writing Which are Positively Affected by CMC

Options	*N*	*%*
Spelling	44	73.3%
Punctuation	3	5%
Grammar	10	16.7%
Tenses	1	1.7%
Capitalization	2	3.3%
Total	60	100%

Table 2.11 reveals that 73.3% of the students believe that spelling is the most positively affected aspect by the use of CMC. In addition, 16.7% of respondents thought that CMC improves grammar; 5% and 3.3% of them said that it boosts their mastery of punctuation and capitalization, respectively. Only one student (1.7%) believed that CMC helps in the mastery of tenses. Interestingly, the EFL students' answers to this question illustrate in detail how CMC contributes to their learning. Spelling and grammar are on the top of the list of the language aspects that areameliorated thanks to CMC.

Question 13: Which of these areas is most negatively affected by the use of CMC?

Table 13

The Aspects of Writing which are Negatively Affected by CMC

Options	*N*	*%*
Spelling	12	20.68%
Punctuation	19	32.8%
Grammar	17	29.3%
Tenses	4	6.9%
Capitalization	4	6.9%
Structure	1	1.7%
All of them	1	1.7%
Total	58	100%

Table 2.12 reveals that 32.8% of the participants believe that punctuation is the most negatively affected area by the use CMC. Moreover, CMC affects the correct use of grammar according to 29.3% of the respondents. Twelve students (20.68%) announced that CMC pushes them to spell words in a wrong way. The proper use of tenses and capitalization is also hindered by CMC, according to 6.9% of the respondents. Finally, only one student (1.7%) revealed that the structure of their sentences, paragraphs or essays is affected negatively due to the overuse of

CMC, and all of them. It seems that CMC inhibits the proper acquisition of mostly punctuation and grammar. Obviously, this is quite natural as their communications on social networks comes in the form of short messages, not in full sentences and paragraphs.

Question 14: How do you assess the English used in CMC environments?

Table 2.13

The Quality of English in CMC Environments

Options	*N*	*%*
Poor	1	1.7%
Average	20	33.3%
Good	29	48.3%
Very good	4	6.7%
Full of code-switching	6	10%
Total	60	100%

From table 2.13, it is seen that 48.3% of students revealed that they communicate online with users who use good English. Besides, 33.3% of them declared that they communicate with people who have an average level of English. Some students (6.7%) believed that the computer mediated English is very good. Yet, one respondent (1.7%) thought that the English utilized in CMC is poor, while 10% of the learners find that the English they are exposed to is used in combination with other language(s)/dialect(s) i.e.; code switching is practiced by Internet users. In general, the students think that Internet language is good. It can be the source they imitate.

Question 15: Do you think that the language you use to express yourself in online communication is good?

Table 2.14

The Quality of the Language Used by the Students to Express themselves in Online Communication

Options	*N*	*%*
Strongly Disagree	1	1.7%
Disagree	10	16.7%
Agree	45	75%
Strongly agree	4	6.7%
Total	60	100%

This particular question aims to explore the quality of the language used by the students to express themselves in online communication. The obtained data reveals that the majority of the participants (75%) agree that they communicate in a good English language, and 6.7% of them strongly agree on that as well. From this, we believe that a considerable number of students think that they have good English. The rest of the students are divided between those who disagree with the statement (16.7%) and those who strongly disagree with it (1.7%). Overall, most of the respondents deem their language in online communication to be good. We should not forget that they estimated their academic writing to be average at the beginning of the questionnaire. We think that it is the short chunks of language they use online that makes them find it easy to communicate in digital environments.

Question 16: Do you think that the mistakes you make in your academic writing are due to your CMC practices?

Table 2.15

The Relation of Academic Writing Mistakes to CMC Practices

Options	N	%
Yes	20	33.3%
No	40	66.7%
Total	60	100%

Table 2.15 manifests that 66.7% of the students think that the mistakes they make in their academic writing are not due to communication in technological tools, whereas 33.3% of them admit that CMC is the cause of their academic writing mistakes.

Question 17: Do you believe that teachers should raise students' awareness of the differences between Internet language and academic writing?

Table 2.16

Students' Opinions about whether Teachers should Raise Students' Awareness of the Differences between Internet Language and Academic Writing

Options	N	%
Yes	56	93.3%
No	4	6.7%
Total	60	100%

Teachers should raise students' awareness about of the contrasts between internet language and academic writing, according to 93.3% of students. Only 6.7% of them believe that this is not the teacher's task.

Question 18: What can be done in order to improve your academic writing vis-à-vis your constant use of CMC?

We asked the students to tell us how they could improve their academic writing in light of their frequent use of CMC. Students believe that the two are affected by each other and that awareness of the norms of each is the most important thing to take into consideration. Learning the differences between the two and not confusing the academic language with the language one uses for online communication can help improve one's language. Others suggested separating the slang language from formal writing. They stated that communicating more with friends and natives via social media who care about their language style and stick to writing without code-switching can also do the job. Moreover, some of them suggested to take advantage of software, electronic books and the like in order to improve one's writing proficiency.

2.4.3. *Discussion of the Students' Questionnaire Results*

The current study collected data using a questionnaire in order to see how CMC affects students' written English, if at all, and how this can help them improve their writing skills. We divided this questionnaire into two sections: one for collecting the students' background information, and the other one for revealing their perceptions about the relationship between CMC and the English language.

To begin with, the findings of the first section, labeled "background information," show that our sample has an average level of English and uses this language as its primary means of communication when connecting to internet sites, particularly social networks. Besides, the majority of the students have been using the internet on their mobile phones for 10 years or more. Accordingly, our sample has a solid background on how to use the internet.

In section two, the data collected reveals that most of the students communicate through social networks with their friends most of the time, which sometimes leads to the use of informal language, which is characterized by abbreviations. This habit can affect their English writing negatively. Furthermore, students are more likely to focus on the content rather than the correct use of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Unexpectedly, the analysis reveals that most of the students communicate with CMC users (mostly friends) who have a good level of English and some of them communicate with English teachers. Perhaps, these are two factors that help improve their English.

In this line of thought, it is interesting to note that 87% of the students state that CMC tools assist them in improving their English language proficiency. According to them, those tools allow them to practice writing and try out new words and structures, as well as share their views and ideas with others. They mostly help them enrich their vocabulary, terminology, idioms, etc. Some students pointed out that in order to interact with teachers, they need to write a message that is correct and clear, with no misspellings. Their writing skills increased as a result of doing this each time. Other students claim that CMC has helped them improve their pronunciation and discover their writing style.

2.5. Teachers' Interview

2.5.1. Description of the Teachers' Interview

In order to elicit data from the informants, we utilized a mixed methodology namely semi-structured interview. The interview was conducted over a period of ten days with eight teachers at the Department of English, University Centre of Mila. The participants were interviewed individually using face-to-face interviews. The interviews were recorded after gaining the consent of the respondents, and they were summarized via taking notes. For

confidentiality purposes, we didn't use the respondents' real names; pseudo names (e.g., teacher 1, teacher 2, etc.) were used instead.

2.5.2. Analysis of the Teachers' Interview

Section One: Background Information

Question 1: How long have you been teaching English at the university?

The teachers' experience in teaching varies from one teacher to another. There are four teachers with 10 years of experience or more, while two teachers have less than 10 years of teaching. There are also two novice teachers with less than two years in the domain. Apparently, the teachers' experience is a crucial factor in our study because it enables us to elicit information from different levels of experience, varying from the well-experienced teachers to the novice ones.

Question 2: According to your experience, how do you evaluate the students' writing level?

In response to this question, five teachers view that the students' writing level is average, whereas three teachers evaluate it as poor in spite of the fact that all teachers agree that some students have a good level of writing. This implies that the level of students' writing differs from one student to another. The answers to these questions reflect the difficulties (section one) the students face when they are asked to hand a piece of writing. Additionally, these answers echo those provided in the students' questionnaire.

Section Two: The Influence of CMC on EFL Academic Writing

Question 3: What kind of mistakes students generally commit when writing?

One hundred percent of the teachers' view that students generally commit mistakes in grammar, intended spelling mistakes, punctuation, capitalization, and vocabulary when producing a piece of writing. Some teachers view that students violate grammar and writing

mechanics in their written productions either because of their unawareness of the grammatical, punctuation, and capitalization rules, or they make intended mistakes.

Question 4.a: According to you, are there any mistakes that are due to the use of CMC?

In response to this question, a hundred per cent of teachers agree that there are mistakes that are due to the use of CMC. Mistakes in grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling are frequently noticed by teachers when they correct their students' written productions. These mistakes are mainly due to the vast use of social media. Once more, these results mirror those in the students' questionnaire (see question 13).

4.b: If yes, which kind of mistakes?

All the participants believe that students make mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, smileys, homonyms, and contractions when using CMC. That is, students commit all types of mistakes because they frequently use those symbols and number homonyms when chatting and communicating with friends and family. They are the very things that affect their way of writing, on their either tests and exams or when writing an essay or a research proposal.

Question 5: What is to be done in order to minimize the negative effects of the use of CMC's on students' academic writing?

Concerning this question, the teachers share the point of view that emphasizes the teacher's role in raising the students' awareness of the academic writing rules and conventions; orienting students' attention to reading that is beneficial; and encouraging them to rely on digital academic sources rather than social networks. Moreover, students, in their turn, are required to practice academic writing and avoid using informal English and slang. That is, students should avoid bringing the habits they formed through chatting on social media into their university classes.

Question 6.a: The fact of finding instances of ill-use of English in students' formal writing is partially caused by: (a) their lack of awareness of the academic rules and (b) unawareness of formal and informal styles. Do you agree with this statement?

Responding to this question, 100% of the respondents agree with the previous statement but with varying degrees. This opinion is explained more in the answers provided to the questions that come.

6.b: To what extent?

All the teachers strongly agree with the aforementioned statement, except for one teacher who partially agrees with it. According to that teacher, the ill-use of English is, to a great extent, due to the students' unawareness of academic writing rules and conventions. Most students do not distinguish between formal and informal styles. Hence, they use contractions, abbreviations, symbols, numbers, homonyms and slang is the classroom in spite of the fact that they are not accepted in academic writing.

6.c: Can you give other reasons?

In addition to the reasons mentioned above, teachers add other ones that cause the ill-use of English such as: lack of interest in that students study for the sake of getting marks–although high scores reflects good essays, forming bad habits of using informal language when writing, lack of motivation to read academic books, lack of precision and lack of feedback on the part of teachers. Thus, teachers ought to drive the students' attention to the importance of practicing writing, giving them feedback. Most importantly, they should sensitize students of the differences between formal and informal writing.

Question 7.a: Do you think that CMC (text, audio, video) can affect students' academic writing positively?

The interviewees agree that CMC can affect students' academic writing positively. All teachers believe that CMC is a two-edged sword and that technology can facilitate the learning process if it is used appropriately.

7.b: How?

Responding to this question, teachers believe that technology in general and CMC in particular can be beneficial for both teachers and students in terms of providing tools and applications that facilitate the process of learning. For instance, spelling and grammar correctors are very helpful tools. Furthermore, teachers stress the positive side of CMC. No doubt, social media and other communication tools are good sources of knowledge and vocabulary, provided that they are used appropriately. Additionally, creating chat groups to learn from each other and being exposed to videos, lectures, speeches, documentaries, audio books and articles all help students improve their academic English. Ultimately, being exposed to native speakers' videos makes students imitate the correct pronunciation, intonation, grammatical structures and idiomatic expressions that are used by native speakers.

2.5.3. Discussion of the Teachers' Interview Results

Drawing on the data analysis, it appears that the use of CMC tools has many effects on EFL master students' academic writing at the Department of Foreign Languages, University Centre of Mila. The discussion of the interview results can be presented in three main categories as stated below. All of them explain why students' level in writing is more or less average by relating that to the use of CMC.

a. Students' Lack of Awareness of Academic Writing' Rules

According to the majority of the respondents, most students show unawareness and ignorance of the features of academic writing to the extent that they do not distinguish between formal and informal styles. As a result, students frequently use informal language and slang when writing essays and paragraphs. Furthermore, structure, coherence and grammar rules are violated in students' written productions. Additionally, some respondents believe that students develop bad habits when they chat using social media and incorporate them when asked to craft a piece of writing in academic settings. For instance, they tend to use acronyms, homonyms, emoticons and smileys in their communication using CMC's. Truth be said, we should not blame students for transferring those habits from one setting to another; rather, they need be sensitized of the accepted codes that go in accordance with the situations they find themselves in: classrooms, digital environments, or else.

b. Students' Ignorance of Mechanics of Writing

Mechanics of writing are the set of rules and principles that make writing clear and easy to comprehend. Effective writing requires not only correct use of grammar but also a correct way of using writing conventions; that is, the proper use of spelling, punctuation, capitalization and abbreviations is crucially important for effective writing. In this context, all of the interviewees strongly agree on the fact that the students' inappropriate use of those elements in their writing is due to the influence of CMC. Even the students stressed this fact in their questionnaire.

c. Unawareness of the Importance of Reading Academic Books

As afore-mentioned, the majority of the interviewees share the point of view that students are unable to develop their writing level since they are demotivated to read or watch videos and documentaries that use formal language. Even though communicating with people who utilize formal English is of paramount significance, students generally devote much more time to

chatting with their friends using informal language, which may influence their writing level negatively. For remedial purposes, teachers recommend reading academic books as an effective way of developing academic writing since those books use formal language. Subsequently, giving more importance and devoting much more time to reading is beneficial for students in order to enhance their academic writing level.

The above challenges that the students face diminish their essay's grading as in assessment all the aspects which are not pertinent to academic writing detriment its value. What is intriguing is that the learners are not quite aware of those problems since in the questionnaire most of them consider CMC to be assisting them in ameliorating their writing. We think that it does but it is not so sufficient that other sources like academic articles, books and blogs should be relied on.

All in all, the findings of this research could bring answers to the research questions posed at the beginning of the journey (What is the impact of CMC upon the writing of EFL master students at Mila University Centre? and How can social networks affect students' ability to write academically?). As for the first question, we concluded that CMC can be both advantageous and disadvantageous to EFL learners. Regarding the second one, the teachers consider that social networks impede students' development while the learners' think that they are of great help. An interpretation to these opposing views could be the fact they the students are not aware of the how social networks impair their academic performance. Consciousness raising of the qualities of type of writing is due in this case.

2.6. Limitations of the Study

Like any other academic study, some constraints are recorded are summarized as follows. Firstly, given that the sample size is small, there is no way to generalize the attained results.

Other researches could be conducted so that to get more insights about the advantages and shortcomings of the use of CMC and its impact on EFL learners. Second, we had some inconsistencies and contradictions in the students' questionnaire answers, as well as some unanswered questions which might have constituted a hindrance in illuminating the subject being explored. Besides, a similar study can be carried out providing that the method is changed; for instance, longitudinal experimental investigations can bring deeper data about the topic of CMC and the acquisition of writing.

2.7. Recommendations of the Study

Based on the results of this research, a number of recommendations are advanced. Firstly, students are required to focus their attention on the effective use of CMC's and be aware of the academic writing rules and conventions. Besides, the students must be fully aware of the negative effects of the *social networks language* on their writing. They should use CMC with caution and raison in order not to fall into the trap of the internet language (skipping abbreviations, acronyms, etc.). Additionally, students should not neglect paper books as they are a primary source of academic language and can help improve one's writing. Moreover, they can rely on the videos, documentaries, speeches, and lectures that use formal English in order to brush their language.

In their turn, teachers should not only raise the students' consciousness about all the above points but also make them fully aware of the fact that form is as important as content. They can also rely on the formative and summative assessment results of the writing ability, reflect on the students' performance and do conferencing to take informative decisions on what should be done to enhance their writing and identify precisely the sources of weaknesses.

Stakeholders are also required to devote much more time to written expression sessions so that students will have more opportunities to practice writing; this will certainly help them

improve their level in academic writing. Curriculum designers are also called to add lessons that focus on the differentiation between formal and informal writing. This kind of lessons is missing.

Conclusion

The aim of the present research was to gauge the impact of CMC on students' academic writing. This study is subscribed within the mixed method; it utilizes both a questionnaire and an interview. After the data collection and analyses, the results of the questionnaire revealed that students use CMC to communicate with their friends where they generally use abbreviations, contractions, acronyms and homonyms. In other words, they utilize informal language and slang while chatting on social media. However, students believe that CMC can help them enhance their writing skills as they write e-mails to their teachers where they pay attention to the conventions and rules of academic writing. In their turn, teachers view that CMC can be a two-edged sword. On one hand, it may negatively affect the students' level of writing as a result of forming habits of using informal English while chatting and communicating with others, which is something that brings about negative effects on students' academic writing. On the other hand, teachers insist on the importance of reading academic and scientific books in addition to being exposed to videos, speeches, and documentaries, in providing students with rich lexis and vocabulary, grammar rules and structure, and academic writing conventions in general.

General Conclusion

Writing is a difficult endeavor for students since it involves a complicated cognitive

ability. Teachers say that teaching writing is a difficult undertaking since it requires mental

processes and includes a variety of sub-skills such as drafting, editing, revising, organizing, and

so on. Nowadays, the internet and CMC, in particular, have changed the ways in which students

used to learn languages. Most of the students are hooked to their mobiles and computers in an

unprecedented way. The advantage of this is that EFL learners can now access an abundance of

information, a limitless number of research articles and books, videos and lessons that are

available on various sites and platforms. Reading and listening to these materials can help boost

one's academic writing. Meanwhile, students communicate with others on social networks where

informal language is used without respecting the conventions of writing. Slang and wrong

spellings of words are more apparent in the students' compositions. In this case, the learners are

influenced by these habits and incorporate them in their writing activities.

Building on that, this research came to investigate the impact of CMC upon the academic

writing of the EFL master students at the Department of Foreign Languages, Mila University

Centre. The investigation aims at answering the two research questions: (1) what is the impact of

CMC upon the writing of EFL master students at Mila University Centre? and (2) how can social

networks affect the formality of the students' writing? In order to answer these two questions, the

mixed method is used, which combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches. In this

regard, a students' questionnaire and a teachers' interview were conducted to elicit data.

In this dissertation, research methodology, data analysis, discussion of results, limitations

and recommendations are presented in the second chapter. Since the aim of this research is to

investigate the impact of CMC on students' academic writing, the researchers opted for a students' questionnaire and a teachers' interview under the mixed method design.

The results of the questionnaire revealed that the students generally use social media to communicate and interact with their friends. They confess that they use the language of social media in their written productions, and this may affect their academic writing negatively. However, they consider that they really benefit from using social media and CMC tools when they interact with people who use academic writing, especially when they exchange emails with their teachers.

Similarly, the teachers' interview revealed that the students' academic writing is influenced by the use of CMC. The fact that social media are widely common, and that students tend to use those media in their daily communication and interaction with family, friends and people from different cultures and social backgrounds brought about the emergence of new codes that are commonly used instead of the correct written English. Perhaps, the use of abbreviations, acronyms, homonyms and the like may lead to a potential return to communicating with symbols rather than formal language. Therefore, students are required to pay attention to the language they use when chatting on social media and avoid using informal language and slang so that they do not incorporate such habits into their academic writing.

Overall, the results demonstrate that CMC has both positive and negative effects on the learners' writing ability. Social networks, in particular, are also considered as a double edge sword. On account of these findings, several recommendations were volunteered at the end of the dissertation. To reduce the negative effects of CMC, EFL students should give much more awareness and importance to reading academic and scientific books, be exposed to videos, speeches and lectures in order to enrich their vocabulary repertoire, and increase their command

on grammar rules and organizational matters. Teachers, in their turn, can motivate students to practice writing academically through devoting much more time to written expression tutorials. Moreover, teachers should sensitize students to choose to communicate with people who write in academic English; in such a way, students may acquire good writing habits that fit in the academic context instead of forming bad habits of using symbols, contractions, abbreviations and slang.

Last but not least, this study is not without limitations. Its results are not generalizable as the sample is not that large. If the study is conducted on a sample of beginners or intermediate students, the findings could have been different, as our sample includes advanced students who seem to be more aware of the academic writing conventions and of the internet language repercussions on their classroom compositions. Hence, we call on researchers to consider these aspects as well as to employ research methods (e.g., focus group discussions) other than the ones we utilized to come up with richer data and more reliable results.

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Appendix 1: Students' Questionnaire

Dear students,

This questionnaire is designed to gather data as part of a research work carried out in the framework of a master degree. It aims at investigating the impact Computer-mediated Communication (henceforth, CMC) has on students' written English and its role in enhancing their writing skill, if any. We would be very grateful if you take part in this questionnaire. Your answers are to be kept confidential and anonymous. Please check the box (es) that best match (es) your opinion or give a full answer wherever needed. We thank you in advance for your cooperation and the time devoted to answer the questionnaire.

Section one: Background information

1. How long have you been learning English?

………………………………………….

2. What do you think of your level in English writing skill?

◯ poor

◯ average

◯ intermediate

◯ advanced

3. How many years have you been using the Internet?

◯ Less than 5 years

◯ 5-10 years

◯ More than 10 years

4. Which technological tool do you use the most?

( ) Computer

( ) Mobile phone

Section two: CMC and the English language

5. Do you use the Internet as a medium to communicate?

( ) Yes

( ) No

6. How often do you use the Internet as a medium to communicate?

( ) never

( ) sometimes

( ) often

( ) always

7. Which CMC environment are you most active in?

( ) Email

( ) Discussion Forums

( ) Social networks

( ) Blogs

( ) Other

8. Do you communicate in English when using one/many of the CMC's environments?

○ Yes

○ No

9. With whom do you communicate online in English?

○ Teachers

○ Friends

○ Family members

○ Other

10. Does communicating in English through a smart device improve your writing skill?

○ Yes

○ No

11. In what ways does digital communication in English help or hinder your writing, i.e., what are the benefits and drawbacks?

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12. Which of these areas is most affected positively by the use of computer- mediated communications?

○ Spelling

○ Punctuation

○ Grammar

○ Tenses

○ Capitalization

13. According to you, which of these areas are most affected negatively by the use of CMC?

- ( ) Spelling
- ( ) Punctuation
- ( ) Grammar
- ( ) Tenses
- ( ) Capitalization
- ( ) Structure
- ( ) All of them

14. How do you assess the English used by the CMC users you communicate with?

- ( ) Poor
- ( ) Average
- ( ) Good Very
- ( ) good
- ( ) Full of code-switching

15. Do you think that the language you use to express yourself in online communication is

good?

- ( ) Strongly disagree
- ( ) Disagree
- ( ) Agree
- ( ) Strongly agree

16. Do you think that the mistakes you make in your academic writing are due to your CMC

practices?

     ◯ Yes

     ◯ No

17. Do you believe that teachers should raise the students' awareness towards the differences

between Internet language and academic writing?

     ◯ Yes

     ◯ No

18. According to you, what can be done in order to improve your academic writing vis-à-vis

your constant use of CMC?

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Appendix 2: Teachers' Interview

Nowadays, the use of CMC tools in learning is widely common among students in schools and universities and this may have many effects on the students' learning in general and their writing in particular. In order to have more information about the effects of CMC on master students' writing at Mila University Centre, we decided to conduct interviews with teachers at the English Department. We would be very thankful if you could answer the following questions and provide as much information as they can. The answers will be kept confidential and anonymous.

Section One: Background Information

1. How long have you been teaching English at the University?

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2. According to your experience, how do you evaluate students' writing level?

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Section Two: The Influence of CMC on EFL Academic Writing

3. What kind of mistakes students generally commit when writing?

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4. a. According to you, are there any mistakes that are due to the use of CMC?

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4. b. If yes, which kind of mistakes:

  i.   Coined abbreviations and acronyms like lol,

  ii.   Letter and number homonyms like r , 2 gn8

  iii. Punctuation mistakes

  iv.   Capitalization mistakes

  v.   Contractions

  vi.   Emoticons and smileys

  vii. Spelling mistakes and clippings

  viii. Other

5. What is to be done in order to minimize students writing mistakes when using CMC?

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6. a. The fact of finding instances of ill-use of English in the students' formal writing is partially

caused by: their lack of awareness of the academic writing rules and unawareness of formal and

informal styles. Do you agree with this statement?

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6. b. To which extent?

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6. c. Can you give other reasons?

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7. a. Do you think that CMC (text, audio, video) can affect students' academic writing positively?

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7. b. How? (i.e.; What are the benefits of using CMC in enhancing students' writing)?

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION!

ملخص

قد يكون الأنترنت أهم إنجاز في القرن العشرين في ميادين التكنولوجيا والاتصال، حيث تعتبر الأنترنت في قلب ما يسمى بالاتصال المدعم بالحاسوب. هذا الأخير غير العالم بصورة جذرية و أثر على عدة مجالات مثل طرق تعليم اللغة و تعلمها، و كذلك طريقة إستعمالها. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فحص وإستكشاف تأثير الإتصال المدعم بالحاسوب على الكتابة بالإنجليزية لدى طلبة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. بعبارة أخرى، نحتاج إلى معرفة ما إذا كانت وسائل الإتصال المدعم بالحاسوب تساعد على تحسين، تشويه أو عرقلة الكتابة الأكاديمية باللغة الإنجليزية لدى الطلبة. لهذا الغرض، تم إستعمال منهجية بحث هجينة شملت القيام بإستبيان مع الطلبة و إجراء مقابلة مع الأساتذة. في هذا الإطار، شارك 60 طالبا وطالبة من بين طلبة الماستر، وكذلك 8 أساتذة من قسم اللغة الانجليزية، بالمركز الجامعي بميلة، في هذه الدراسة. حيث تم إختيار المشاركين بصفة عشوائية. بعد تحليل المعلومات التي تم جمعها تبين أن كل الأساتذة يرون بأن إستعمال الإتصال المدعم بالحاسوب يؤدي بالطلبة إلى إرتكاب أخطاء على عدة مستويات منها: الإختصار في الكتابة، إستعمال الرموز والأرقام، وأخطاء نحوية متعمدة. كما يعتقد الأساتذة أن الإتصال المدعم بالحاسوب يمكن أن يحسن الكتابة لدى الطلبة بشرط الإستغلال الأمثل للمزايا التي توفرها هذه الوسائل مثل برامج التصحيح الخاصة بالقواعد والنحو. علاوة على كل هذا، يعتقد الأساتذة أن الإتصال المدعم بالحاسوب يعد مصدرا مهما من مصادر المفردات اللغوية، كما يعتبر وسيلة من وسائل التواصل مع الأشخاص الذين يستعملون اللغة الإنجليزية الرسمية. كما أظهرت الدراسة كذلك أن كل من الأساتذة والطلبة يؤيدون الطرح الذي يقول بأن الإتصال المدعم بالحاسوب يعرقل و يؤثر بشكل سيء على الكتابة الأكاديمية للطلبة اذا لم يتم توظيفها بشكل فعال وعقلاني، وخاصة في حالة الانغماس و التأثر الكبير بوسائط التواصل الإجتماعي. لكن، لا يمكن إنكار حقيقة أن هذه الوسائط يمكن أن تساعد الطلبة في تحسين أدائهم في الكتابة بالإنجليزية، و هذا بالإتصال و الإطلاع على المقالات و المواقع الأكاديمية وما شابه ذلك. الدراسة الحالية توصي بضرورة توعية الطلبة لغرض الإستعمال الأمثل لهذه الوسائل و كذلك لفت إنتباههم إلى أهمية التمييز بين الكتابة الرسمية و غير الرسمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإتصال المدعم بالحاسوب، الكتابة بالإنجليزية، الكتابة الأكاديمية، السنة الثانية ماستر لغة إنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

Résumé

Peut-être la plus remarquable réalisation du 20ème siècle était dans les domaines de la technologie et la communication, notamment l'internet qu'est l'essentiel de la Communication Médiatisée par Ordinateur (CMO). Cette dernière a changé le monde radicalement et affecté plusieurs domaines tel que la méthode d'enseigner, d'apprendre et d'utiliser la langue. Cette étude vise à enquêter l'impact de la CMO sur l'anglais écrit parmi les étudiants d'anglais comme langue étrangère. Clairement, on a besoin de savoir si les moyens de CMO améliorent, déforment, ou bien inhibent l'écriture académique d'étudiants. Donc, on a utilisé une méthode de recherche mixte en utilisant un questionnaire avec 60 étudiants et des interviews avec 8 professeurs du département des langues étrangères, Cette Universitaire de Mila. Les participants ont été choisis au hasard. Après l'analyse des données, on a trouvé que tous les professeurs disent que la CMO cause les étudiants à commettre plusieurs fautes, notamment les l'utilisation des contractions, acronymes, ainsi que des fautes de ponctuation intentionnelles et des homonymes. En plus, ils croient que CMO peut améliorer l'écriture d'étudiants en bénéficiant de ces ses services tels que les correcteurs de ponctuation et grammaire. Ils croient aussi que la CMO est une importante source de vocabulaire et un moyen de communiquer avec les gens qu'utilisent l'anglais formel. En général, les résultats de la recherche indiquent que les deux, professeurs et étudiants, supportent l'idée que la CMO entrave l'écriture académique d'étudiants si on ne l'utilise pas d'une manière correcte, surtout en cas d'utilisation de réseaux sociaux. Mais, elle peut aussi améliorer l'anglais écrit si on connecte avec les blogs et les sites académiques. La présente étude exige aux étudiants d'être conscients de l'utilisation propre des outils de CMO et des réseaux sociaux, et faire attention à la différence entre l'écriture formelle et informelle. Les limitations de l'étude ont été mentionnées à la fin.

Mots clés : CMO, l'anglais écrit, écriture académique, langue de l'internet