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Cell Phones: Text Messaging as a Second Language

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Recent news stories have reported a phenomenon that most knew existed: there is a gap in the use of text messaging between younger and older cell phone owners. Reports vary but indications are those 12 to 30 years of age account for 80% of text messaging usage.

Because of the instantaneous nature of texting and the tiny keypads and screens on a cell phone, an entire language has developed around text messaging. For those cell phone owners who do not make use of text messaging, the intricacies of this language can make messages almost incomprehensible. This language is abbreviated for speed and ease of use. It is a rather phonetic language where single letters or numbers may stand for entire words, such as "Y" for "why" or "8" for "ate". Vowels may be omitted to further reduce keystrokes, such as "btwn" for "between" and capitalization and punctuation are rare. Acronyms are used for phrases and whole sentences such as "ADBB" for "all done, bye, bye". Symbols are also common in text messaging language.

Non-verbal communication such as facial expression and tone of voice have been said to express more meaning than words themselves in a spoken message. In any form of written communication this is lacking. This is particularly true in text messaging. Knowing whether the phrase "thts gr8t" (that's great), is expressing something positive or sarcastic is important when communicating. Texting allows the user to create "emoticons" or "smileys" to add the tone to a comment. For instance, "thts gr8t :)" would give the statement a positive meaning while typing "THTS GR8T" would indicate a shout for excitement.

Because of the uniqueness of the communication, those who do not make use of messaging on their cell phone are at a loss then for understanding or communicating in this texting language: the language of their children, grandchildren, younger co-workers, and many others. Certainly knowing the language of those with whom there is a need to communicate is a tremendous advantage.

Text messaging with a cell phone can offer other advantages that non-users might want to consider as well. Text messaging is less expensive than talk time and allows the user to communicate basic messages without incurring unnecessary expense. Text messaging can also be a great way of remaining accessible without creating a disturbance. Obviously, when taking a cell phone call in a meeting or in a crowded area, all those nearby are disrupted as the call is answered and conversation ensues. With text messaging others are seldom aware that an interruption has even occurred. One other distinct advantage of text messaging over voice calling can be the ease of communicating via cell phone with a person who has hearing impairment.

There are a number of ways to dive into the world of cell phone texting. One method used by many parents is to consult a child who is a habitual user of text messaging. However, for those on their own in the endeavor there are many resources to consult. Online, netlingo.com and webopedia.com provide references to assist cell phone owners in learning the vocabulary of text messaging. Another site, lingo2word.com offers a translator to assist cell phone owners in composing a text message or to translate a text message they receive into plain English. Other sites can assist with texting in other languages such as Transclick.com which, for a fee, will translate text messages in real time. A visit to the local bookstore or to Amazon.com will also reveal a number of reference books that can be invaluable for beginners.

Certainly, use of text messaging can be a challenge for those who are unaccustomed to what at first glance appears to be a more impersonal method of communication or for whom it may merely be a foreign or unnecessary concept. However, learning and using text messaging can certainly open the doors of communication to a broader audience just as learning any second language.

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