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Repeated Capitalisation in a Practicum Supervisor's WhatsApp Messages to Trainee Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Repeated capitalisation is a feature found in text messages sent via social messaging applications. While capitalisation is the convention of capitalising the first letter of each sentence and the first letter of each word in most proper nouns, repeated capitalisation is the capitalising of a whole word to intensify emotions. Linguists have variously seen this repetition as a form of exploitation to express emotional reactions and responses, as 'shouting', as a form of emphasis and as paralinguistic restitution in text messages. Despite its use by texters, little pragmatic research has addressed the repeated capitalisation used between texters in asymmetrical power relations. This paper bridges this gap by studying repeated capitalisation in a corpus of WhatsApp group chats written in English by a Malaysian practicum supervisor to her trainee teachers. The results indicate that determiners (e.g., ALL) and coordinating conjunctions (e.g., AND, BUT, OR) were capitalised by the practicum supervisor and that these were usually found in her initiating request and advice messages. The analysis further suggests these repeated capitalisations were used to indicate emphasis especially to reinstate prosodic and paralinguistic features of spoken language.

KEYWORDS: WhatsApp, repeated capitalisation, text messages, practicum supervisors

INTRODUCTION

The interaction of texters sending and receiving messages on social messaging applications via mobile devices is known as 'text messaging' (Thurlow & Poff, 2013). As a subset of computer-mediated communication (CMC), text messaging language is common on online platforms such as social messaging and media applications, informal e-mails, and other modes of writing. Due to its creative use of spelling, capital letters and punctuation, text messaging language can be perceived as a form of 'textual deformation' (Yus, 2005, 2011). Linguists and researchers have variously labelled it 'Netspeak' (Crystal, 2006), 'Txt' (McSweeney, 2018; Shortis, 2007; Tagg, 2012), 'Textese' (Sánchez-Moya & Cruz-Moya, 2015), and 'Textism' (Oreoluwa & Omotayo, 2022; Shaku, 2024).

Text messaging language has the characteristics of both speech and written language, hence, the term 'oralized written text'. The absence of prosodic features in text messaging has prompted texters to use capitalisation, repetition of letters and punctuation marks (McSweeney, 2018; Yus, 2011). Supplemented with these features, text messages may sound like speech when read. Since the features do not have any of their standard forms, Yus (2005, p. 148) perceives the possibility of a "linguistic barrier" that may interrupt the flow of communication, particularly in interactions between different social groups.

Studies have generally examined the interactions in different CMC settings and among texters in symmetrical power relationships (Androutsopoulos, 2013; Baron, 2004; Crystal, 2006; Danet & Herring, 2007; McSweeney, 2018; Tagg, 2012; Thurlow & Brown, 2003). A few studies have examined the creative use of repetitive capitalisation in text messaging either to express emotions or to intensify emphasis (Darics, 2013; Heath, 2017; McSweeney, 2018; Tagg, 2012).

WhatsApp group chats provide an opportunity to examine authentic communication not only in CMC (Herring, 2004; McSweeney, 2018) but also everyday interaction (Stenström, 1994). This paper investigates the use of repeated capitalisation found in a corpus of WhatsApp chats written in English by a practicum supervisor. Practicum is a subcomponent of professional practice for trainee teachers to apply their pedagogical skills in authentic classroom settings, hence linking theory to practice (Nair & Ghanaguru, 2017).

When texters use repeated capitalisation in their messages, they type the whole word(s) in capital letters, hence, there is repeated capitalisation (McSweeney, 2018, p. 35). Text messaging language is informal and nonstandard in nature. Consequently, some researchers have maintained that when spoken language is written, meaning that is made through voice modulation is reconstructed in text messages through punctuation and capitalisation (Heath, 2017; McSweeney, 2018). They are used to emulate "increased volume" (Vandergriff, 2013, p. 3). However, the use of repeated capitalisation can be interpreted as "loudness" in text messages or the equivalent of a high tone in speech.

Teacher-student communication involves asymmetrical power. Managing one's tone in such interactions is crucial. The teacher's tone enables them to attract their students' attention when communicating face-to-face. A speaker's voice could be loud or soft, particularly when "shouting suggests either anger or determination" (Harmer, 2015, p. 36). In WhatsApp exchanges, as in other forms of CMC, formality and power-distance may be maintained through the appropriate use of

language (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2016) as well as politeness strategies (Eshghinejad & Moini, 2016) on the students’ part.

This paper contributes to research on two understudied areas in CMC: the pragmatic functions of text messaging language features and CMC interactions between texters in asymmetrical power relations in an academic setting. It examines the use of repeated capitalisation by a Malaysian practicum supervisor in her text messages sent to her trainee teachers in a WhatsApp group chat. The research questions are:

1. In what speech act class does the repeated capitalisation appear in the practicum supervisor’s WhatsApp messages to her trainee teachers?
2. What kinds of words does the practicum supervisor capitalise in her WhatsApp messages to her trainee teachers?
3. What are the possible functions of the repeated capitalisation in the practicum supervisor’s WhatsApp messages to her trainee teachers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Text Messaging Language

Many studies have examined nonstandard orthographic forms used to create text in CMC (Crystal, 2006; McSweeney, 2018; Shortis, 2007; Shortis, 2001; Thurlow & Brown, 2003; Thurlow & Poff, 2013). Among the earliest work on text messaging language, Shortis (2001) presents a preliminary analysis of how short messaging service (SMS) regulates the use of language. As SMS texts are limited to 160 characters each, Shortis stresses the use of the fewest words possible to communicate a message effectively and analyses abbreviations, phonetic spellings and emoticons.

Thurlow and Brown (2003) investigate 544 SMS messages transcribed from 159 first year undergraduate students. Their investigation concentrates on the length of the messages, the main typographical and linguistic content as well as the primary functional orientation. They record six broad categories in typographical and linguistic content adopting Shortis’ (2001) non-standard orthographic forms: (1) shortenings, contractions, G-clippings, and other clippings, (2) acronyms and initialisms, (3) letter/number homophones, (4) misspellings and typos, (5) non-conventional spellings, and (6) accent stylization.

McSweeney (2018) offers probably the most comprehensive analysis of text messaging language features. 44,597 text messages were donated by fifteen Spanish/English bilinguals aged 18 to 21.

Table 1
Classification System for Respelling

Type	Definition	Example
Iteration	A word or phrase spelled with one or more letters repeated where it is not repeated in the traditional spelling	“helloooo” for hello
Abbreviation	Single word with one or more letters missing	“vdd” for verdad (“true”)
Initialism	Phrases spelled with only the first letter of each word present	“wya” for where you at?

Mistakes	Mistakes are unintentional spellings of words. These are respellings that are likely based on the position of letters in the keyboard or that have been repaired in a later message	Message 1: novis Message 2: *novia (“bride”)
Phonetic stylisations	Words that are spelled based on the way that they sound rather than the way they are traditionally written	“saze” for says

(McSweeney, 2018, p. 33)

McSweeney classifies non-adherence to the rules of prescriptive spelling, capitalisation and punctuation use into two broad categories, ‘respelling’ and ‘punctuation and capitalisation’. Under the ‘respelling’, she lists five terms borrowed from Thurlow and Brown (2003): ‘iteration’, ‘abbreviation’, ‘initialism’, ‘mistakes’, and ‘phonetic stylization’ (see Table 1).

Table 2
Classification System for Punctuation and Capitalisation

Type	Definition	Capitalisation Example	Punctuation Example
Omit	In environments where the feature would be expected, the feature is not used	hello! how are u?	Hello How are you
Repurpose	The feature is used in a new, unconventional, or creative way	Let’s go Together	She’s coming to the party!?
Repeat	The feature appears multiple times in a row	I’m so HAPPY	I passed the test!!!!!!!!!!!!

(McSweeney, 2018, p. 35)

Under ‘punctuation and capitalisation’, texters omit, repurpose, or repeat the punctuation marks and/or capitalisation in their text messages for communicative effect (see Table 2).

Most of the studies on text messaging language features focus on interactions between social messaging application users in symmetrical power relationships such as undergraduate students (Akujobi & Eze, 2021; Alazzawie, 2022; Khan et al., 2024; Kolobe & Ekanjume, 2023; Kurniawati et al., 2025; Oreoluwa & Omotayo, 2022; Zayyanu & Yunusa, 2021), high school students (Alazzawie, 2022; Shaku, 2024), late adolescents (Shahbaz et al., 2024), and teachers (Hussein et al., 2023; Indiran et al., 2024). The interactions of the participants in these studies being peers of either the same age or social position, their communication is governed by neither authority nor formality.

Repeated Capitalisation

The features of text messaging language observed have evolved over the last quarter century. The features are marked for their prosody, brevity and informality. The repeated capitalisation feature, for instance, can be used by texters to signify loudness, and thus anger or emotion in their text messages to a friend, peer, or lover (Heath, 2017; McSweeney, 2018; Vandergriff, 2013).

McSweeney (2018) points out that these features replicate the interlocutor’s choice of tone. For instance, a word can be highlighted or emphasised through capitalisation. McSweeney defines repeated capitalisation as “the feature (that) appears multiple times in a row” (2018, p. 35) as in a word or “a message written in all capital letters” (p. 60). Furthermore, her analysis showed that texters repeat capitalisation to express and reinforce the tone of their messages to addressees who are socially close (p. 58) to them. However, the capitalised words in text messages are not always linked to anger. They can also represent other emotions ranging from disbelief to excitement as well as formal language

forms such as ‘initialisms’ (McSweeney, 2018), e.g., ‘APA’ for American Psychological Association. As illustrated in Table 2, the word ‘HAPPY’ (see shaded text) was displayed with a series of capital letters as if to intensify one’s happiness rather than conveying the similar emotion with other more complex vocabulary, such as ‘ecstatic’, ‘overjoyed’ or ‘thrilled’.

Heath (2017) studied the intentional use of non-standard orthography utilised by social media users on Twitter, which is now known as X (Ivanova, 2023). The study focused specifically on the whole word or whole message capitalisation. From an initial large sample of dataset downloaded via Twitter streaming application programming interface (API), Heath selected and analysed quantitatively 144 messages with non-standard capitalisation. To investigate how readers interpret these forms of non-standard capitalisation, 23 research participants (with ages ranging from 18 to 60) evaluated both the original and standardised versions of messages by rating observed possible emotions on a sliding scale. The results supported Heath’s claim that capitalisation plays a pragmatic role in text interpretation, a tool for indicating prosody in writing such as happiness (2017). Heath further argued that single-word capitalisation indicates the texter’s semantic focus to mirror how stress in spoken language conveys emphasis (Kelly, 2000).

Vandergriff (2013) delves into how a group of advanced foreign language learners of German at a public university in the US express emotion and stance in asynchronous online discussion forums. The use of capitalisation was highlighted as one of several non-standard orthographic cues which included letter repetition, unconventional spelling, and punctuation. These visual cues were seen close to the prosodic characteristics of speech to indicate emphasis or loudness. Using a qualitative discourse analysis approach, Vandergriff examined naturally occurring online data of the learners’ discussion to study how linguistic and paralinguistic resources are used to construct interpersonal involvement. Though capitalisation was recognised as a possible marker of emphasis or loudness, it was not systematically analysed in her data. However, Vandergriff highlighted the limitations of adopting a fixed relation between the orthographic form and expressive meaning as the use of capitalisation can be context-dependent and multifunctional. In general, her findings showed that CMC users depend on a variety of creative textual cues to express affect and interpersonal alignment, indicating that emotion in online discourse surfaces through collaborative meaning-making rather than fixed symbols. She sees capitalisation as a meaningful feature of expressive online language use.

Teacher-Student Communication

Teacher-student communication is a form of ‘institutional talk’ (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 2005) as well as a ‘professional discourse’ (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999), which is part of ‘educational discourse’ (Wright, 2005, p. 49), technically termed as ‘the process talk of classroom’ (p. 107). It revolves around the process of teaching and learning in educational institutions, i.e., school, college, university, where teachers perform their professional obligations toward their students (Wright, 2005). These professional obligations include but are not limited to giving instructions to the students using an authoritative tone (Scrivener, 2011).

The asymmetrical relationship between the teacher and the student is governed by two elements, social distance (created by age difference) and power (created by the institutional setting and the teacher’s position in it) (Bills, 2000, p. 46). To mitigate their power and appreciate students’ talk, teachers use politeness strategies (Bills, 2000). Similarly, students apply politeness strategies as well out of respect

for their teachers (Adel et al., 2016; Bolkan & Holmgren, 2012; Eshghinejad & Moini, 2016; Mahmud, 2018).

The teacher, the superior in the asymmetrical relationship, may bear five bases of power: reward, coercive, expert, legitimate, and referent (Bailey, 2006; French & Raven, 1960; Spencer-Oatey, 2008), which largely reflect the institutional authority. Additionally, the distance in the teacher-student relationship may be subject to the curriculum and assessment roles (Schut et al., 2020), classroom discourse style (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), and face-saving practices in the classroom context (Aporbo et al., 2024). The choice of strategies for the performance of specific speech acts is determined by the relation between the teacher and the student based on their power and the distance between them (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

Practicum Supervisors

In higher education supervision, the teacher-student relationship is labelled in various ways such as 'university supervisor-preservice teacher' (El Masry & Mohd Saad, 2018), 'supervisor-student teacher' (Gebhard, 1990; Nair & Ghanaguru, 2017) 'mentor-teacher' (Waring, 2017), or 'supervisor-teacher' (Bailey, 2006). Hence, despite the differing labels they represent the same supervisory functions institutionally, with the supervisors possessing authority over and being more knowledgeable than their supervisees.

Lecturers of teacher education institutions are appointed as practicum supervisors to supervise and guide trainee teachers in accomplishing their practicum tasks (Institut Pendidikan Guru Malaysia, 2017). The practicum supervisors are provided with a list of tasks to be completed collaboratively with their trainee teachers. The list starts with a discussion with the assigned trainee teachers, a school social visit, clinical supervisions, lesson observations, post lesson consultations, joint evaluation with the trainee teachers' cooperating teachers (who are assigned by the school administrators to guide the trainee teachers in school), and submission of documents to the practicum unit.

The practicum supervisor and their trainee teachers require frequent face-to-face communication due to their task-oriented interactions. However, this is often hindered by schedule differences and distance between campus and school. The schedule differences are subject to the trainee teachers' teaching timetables prepared by their schools and their practicum supervisors' academic responsibilities on campus. Consequently, communication is necessary to arrange clinical supervisions, lesson observations, and post-lesson consultations. WhatsApp is one of the preferred modes of communication due to its capacity to maintain effective communication and ubiquitous learning (Annamalai, 2018).

Use of WhatsApp in Teacher-Student Communication

WhatsApp is a social messaging application that offers group chats to connect family members and workplace colleagues (WhatsApp Inc, 2020). Studies on interpersonal interaction have looked at interlocutors in asymmetrical relationships such as teachers and students (Eshghinejad & Moini, 2016; Farida & Yuliana, 2018; Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018; Shanmuganathan, 2021; Yuliawati et al. 2019).

Eshghinejad and Moini (2016) found that Iranian EFL learners draw heavily on positive and negative politeness strategies when texting their lecturers. Rosenberg and Asterhan (2018) observed that teachers and students in secondary schools used WhatsApp groups as a channel of communication that

served multiple functions such as organisational, instructional, and socio-emotional. Farida and Yuliana's (2018) study demonstrated that WhatsApp, despite being a social platform, does not mitigate the students' obligation to observe politeness norms when communicating with their lecturers. Yuliawati et al. (2019) reported that polytechnic students demonstrated language politeness in the academic-related messages when communicating with lecturers via WhatsApp. Shanmuganathan (2021) identified that university students commonly embed excuses and employ negative politeness in their apology messages to their lecturers due to their lecturers' seniority and power-relations. Nevertheless, these studies have consistently concentrated only on analysing students' written messages.

As there is a clearly specified social role, the language use within the group chats between the practicum supervisor and their trainee teachers may probably anticipate a difference from other social groups among friends, family, and colleagues. In addition, practicum supervisors use this messaging platform to manage most of their practicum matters, which include but are not limited to the speech act classes of directives, such as requesting and advising (Goh & Lowe, 2025), in which their illocutionary point is to attempt to get trainee teachers to do something. Hence, the present study investigated how repeated capitalisation that is situated inside the practicum supervisor's messages is used to interact with her trainee teachers in the group chat.

METHODOLOGY

Data and Research Participants

The data for this study was collected from two institutes of teacher education in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It consists of 2,744 messages in English sent by 19 practicum supervisors to their trainee teachers in 19 group chats. There were 17 female and two male practicum supervisors, whose ages ranging from 40 to 59 at the time of data collection.

The 19 practicum supervisors created a teacher-student community, with a practicum supervisor and between two to five trainee teachers in each group chat, to supervise their trainee teachers during the 12-week practicum. As research participants, both the practicum supervisors and their trainee teachers provided their written consent to be part of the study. All proper nouns were coded to maintain participant anonymity.

Of the 19 practicum supervisors, only three used repeated capitalisation in their messages. The feature was found in only 34 out of the total 2,744 messages in the data set. Only 41 words in the data set of 25,336 words showed repeated capitalisation. With a distribution of 3/19 (15.8%) practicum supervisors, 34/2,744 (1.2%) messages, and 41/25,336 (0.16%) words, the feature demonstrated extremely low frequency. The feature's low occurrence suggests that it is not a common characteristic of the practicum supervisors' communication style. However, studying how it might be employed by practicum supervisors in interactions with their trainee teachers might prove revelatory.

Table 3*Distribution of Repeated Capitalisation in Words by Practicum Supervisors*

Practicum Supervisor (PS)	Number of Words Capitalised	Number of Messages with Capitalised Words	Number of Messages Sent	Number of Words Texted
PS01	1 (2.4%)	1 (2.9%)	107	704
PS06	39 (95.1%)	32 (94.2%)	814	9,436
PS18	1 (2.4%)	1 (2.9%)	121	997
Total	41 (100.0%)	34 (100.0%)		

Out of a total of 41 capitalised words found in 34 messages, practicum supervisor PS06 accounted for the vast majority: 39 words (95.1%) across 32 messages out of 9,436 words in 814 messages. In contrast, practicum supervisors PS01 and PS18 each used one capitalised word (2.4%) in a single message (2.9%). Because the occurrence of repeated capitalisation was overwhelmingly concentrated in the message output of one practicum supervisor, the qualitative analyses and interpretation of pragmatic functions in this study centre primarily on the discourse of PS06, while the instances from PS01 and PS18 are included to inform the overall quantitative frequencies.

Research Instrument: WhatsApp

WhatsApp served as the research instrument for data collection in this study. As a widely used social messaging application, it provides authentic, naturally occurring online data in the form of interactions between practicum supervisors and trainee teachers. All textual messages retrieved from WhatsApp group chats made access to real-time communication possible. The extracted history of textual messages contained timestamps, sender and recipient's information, and the message content.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection involved the trainee teachers sending their WhatsApp group chat history files to the principal researcher's email address or WhatsApp using the 'Export chat' function found by tapping the vertical three dots and selecting 'More' (WhatsApp Inc., 2020). The received history files in .txt (text document) format were copied and pasted onto a .docx (Microsoft Word document) format and were saved as .rtf (rich text format) to facilitate the uploading of the document for data analysis on ATLAS.ti 22 (Friese, 2021).

Data Analysis Procedure

The unit of analysis in this study was the practicum supervisor's initiated messages in her respective WhatsApp group chat sent to her trainee teachers.

The data analysis was conducted in four steps. First, the messages were extracted from the group chat file exported by one of the trainee teachers via email. Second, specific selection criteria were applied to the dataset: messages were only selected for analysis if they were initiated by the practicum supervisor and contained at least one instance of a fully capitalised word. Standard acronyms or institutional initialisms (such as 'CIDS' or 'RPH') were excluded from selection unless they were repurposed for emphatic repeated capitalisation. Third, the selected messages were manually coded. Repeated capitalisation was coded by applying McSweeney's (2018) framework, identifying words where a whole word was capitalised to intensify emotion. The messages were then coded for speech acts (e.g., directives, assertives, expressives, commissives) drawing on standard speech act taxonomy

(Searle, 1979). Grammatical characteristics were coded according to traditional word and phrase classes (e.g., determiners, coordinating conjunctions, adjectives). Finally, regarding analytical validation, formal inter-coder checking was not conducted in this study. Instead, reliability was maintained through a rigorous, iterative coding process conducted by the principal researcher. To ensure consistency and prevent subjective drift, the assigned codes were strictly cross-referenced against established frameworks, namely McSweeney’s (2018) definition for repeated capitalisation and Searle’s (1979) speech act taxonomy. The initial coding and functional interpretations were subsequently reviewed and discussed between the researchers to resolve any ambiguities, ensuring that the final interpretations of the text messages’ context reliably addressed the research questions.

RESULTS

As established in the methodology, the following findings, numerical counts, and functional analyses focus exclusively on the discourse of the primary practicum supervisor (PS06). Consequently, the data presented in Table 4 and Table 5 represent only the 39 instances of repeated capitalisation found across the 32 messages initiated by this specific practicum supervisor, which allows for a focused, in-depth analysis of how the feature functions in her practicum supervisory discourse. To achieve this, the words with repeated capitalisation in the data were examined for the speech acts performed, their grammatical characteristics, and the possible functions based on the context of the messages.

Repeated Capitalisation in Practicum Supervisor’s Speech Acts

This section discusses the speech acts in which repeated capitalisation appeared in the practicum supervisor’s WhatsApp messages. The analysis of data indicates that repeated capitalisation occurred in the speech act classes of directives, assertives, expressives, and commissives (see shaded text in Table 4).

Table 4

Frequency of Repeated Capitalisation in the Primary Practicum Supervisor’s (PS06) Speech Act Classes

No.	Speech Act Classes	Frequency N (%)	Example
1	Directives (advising, reminding, requesting, questioning)	24 (75.0%)	(1) Everyone, you have to ensure that ALL steps and ALL stages are linked and connected to the learning standard. (2) You will gain more by discussing your ideas and plans AND exchanging and/or sharing your teaching aids. (3) Can make arrangement to swap OR enter Pn. [Madam] CT's 1 hour class? (4) You know...with ALL the changes that went on?
2	Assertives (informing)	4 (12.5%)	(5) For TT5, there were 2 RPHs uploaded BUT incomplete!
3	Expressives (expressing gratitude, praising, expressing disbelief)	3 (9.4%)	(6) THANK YOU, TT5! The most needed document! (7) TT3, good that you had also uploaded ALL lessons Week 2 and on 13/8 too. (8) HUHH??
4	Commissives (promising)	1 (3.1%)	(9) You do good LP with GOOD activities, you will SURELY get your treatsss
Total		32 (100.0%)	

Repeated capitalisation was most frequently found in directive speech acts (n = 24, 75.0%), where the practicum supervisor advised trainee teachers to carry out specific actions which support their learning and completion of practicum tasks (Example 1). In reminders, repeated capitalisation appeared when the practicum supervisor prompted trainee teachers to follow through on pending tasks or to implement the advice given (Example 2). Instances of repeated capitalisation also occurred in requests (Example 3) and questions (Example 4), particularly when the practicum supervisor sought information or action that could facilitate her own supervisory responsibilities.

Less frequent occurrences of repeated capitalisation were seen in assertive speech act of informing (n = 4, 12.5%), which involved the practicum supervisor confirming and stating practicum-related details (Example 5). Repeated capitalisation was also utilised, although minimally, in expressive speech acts (n = 3, 9.4%) where the practicum supervisor expressed gratitude when accepting things required for practicum (Example 6), praised trainee teachers for their achievements (Example 7), and expressed disbelief on unexpected information shared by them (Example 8). Additionally, repeated capitalisation was rare in the commissive speech act of promise (n = 1, 3.1%) typically when the practicum supervisor expressed commitment to fulfil a promise with the condition that the trainee teachers fulfilled their tasks (Example 9).

Overall, repeated capitalisation could be seen with speech acts that necessitated action, supplemented information, expressed reaction, and conveyed commitment. Having identified the speech acts in which repeated capitalisation occurred, the following section studies the grammatical characteristics of repeatedly capitalised words and the possible functions based on the messages contextually.

Grammatical Characteristics of Practicum Supervisor’s Repeated Capitalisation

This section identifies the grammatical characteristics of words that the practicum supervisor capitalised in her messages (see Table 5) and their possible functions.

Table 5

Frequency of Repeated Capitalisation according to Word and Phrase Classes in the Primary Practicum Supervisor’s Messages

No.	Word/Phrase Classes	Frequency N (%)	Example Found (Frequency)	Example
1	Determiners	11 (28.2%)	ALL (9)	(1) Friday 10/8 ALL 5 to come to college for consultation on behavioural objectives
			ONE (1)	(2) By Thursday, show me ONE LP for a different skill which you have not shown me yet...
			LOADS of (1)	(3) You still need LOADS of guidance, TT1.
2	Coordinating conjunctions	8 (20.5%)	BUT (4)	(4) I hope everyone is trying hard to ensure quality teaching and a fun BUT MEANINGFUL learning for your pupils.
			AND (2)	(5) You will gain more by discussing your ideas and plans AND exchanging and/or sharing your teaching aids.
			OR (2)	(6) Can make arrangement to swap OR enter Pn. [Madam] CT's 1 hour class?
3	Adjectives	4 (10.2%)	MEANINGFUL (1)	(7) I hope everyone is trying hard to ensure quality teaching and a fun BUT MEANINGFUL learning for your pupils.

		GOOD (1)	(8)	You do good LP with GOOD activities, you will SURELY get your treatsss
		HUGE (1)	(9)	All around the school is a HUGE cemetery!
		READY (1)	(10)	Everyone, ensure folios are READY and completed for the next checking.
4	Adverbs	3 (7.8%) A LOT (1)	(11)	You need to be polished A LOT
		SURELY (1)	(12)	You do good LP with GOOD activities, you will SURELY get your treatsss
		NOT (1)	(13)	One class CANNOT be shared by 2 trainees!
5	Interjections/ Exclamation	3 (7.8%) OH MY (1)	(14)	I will only look at the LPs (1+3+ 2+6=OH MY 🤔) tomorrow probably after 4.
		HUHH (1)	(15)	HUHH??
		THANK YOU (1)	(16)	THANK YOU, TT5!
6	Noun phrases	3 (7.8%) WEEK 2 (2)	(17)	please complete your cids for WEEK 2 by Tuesday 14/8 midnight.
		LAST WEEK (1)	(18)	Just to inform again: I am only able to sit down together with the cooperating teacher on these dates: LAST WEEK of Practicum: Monday 22/10 Tuesday 23/10 Wednesday 24/10
7	Modal verbs	2 (5.1%) CANNOT (1)	(19)	One class CANNOT be shared by 2 trainees!
		MUST (1)	(20)	You MUST learn to make wise decisions.
8	Nouns	2 (5.1%) EXAM (1)	(21)	Same thing. You still write/do your LP. Class: Date: Remark: EXAM: invigilation: class/time/subject
		REMARK (1)	(22)	Class: Date: REMARK: The English class teacher discussed the test paper (Paper?) with the pupils and they had to their corrections in (?). What I did: What I think:
9	Adverbial phrase	1 (2.5%) FOR THIS WEEK (1)	(23)	please start using the cids and key in your LPs and daily reflection of the lesson implemented from Monday 6/8, Tues 7/8, Wed 8/8, today's and tomorrow's FOR THIS WEEK.
10	Pronoun	1 (2.5%) ALL (1)	(24)	Dear ALL, ...
11	Verb	1 (2.5%) READ (1)	(25)	READ carefully, TT4!
Total		39		

Of the 39 words/phrases with repeated capitalisation, 28.2% (n = 11) were determiners, 20.5% (n = 8) were coordinating conjunctions, 10.2% (n = 4) were adjectives, 7.8% (n = 3) were adverbs, 7.8% (n = 3) were interjections/exclamations, 7.8% (n = 3) were noun phrases, 5.1% (n = 2) were modal verbs, 5.1% (n = 2) were nouns, 2.5% (n = 1) was adverbial phrase, 2.5% (n = 1) was pronoun, and 2.5% (n = 1) was verb.

= 1) was verb (see Table 5). Findings revealed that most of the items with repeated capitalisation were determiners.

Why a word or phrase of a particular class was capitalised completely could be due to what was to be emphasised in a message. Examples of the repeated capitalisation (see shaded text in Table 5) used are illustrated below (the use of other text messaging features has not been corrected by the researchers).

- (1) Friday 10/8 ALL 5 to come to college for consultation on behavioural objectives
- (2) By Thursday, show me ONE LP for a different skill which you have not shown me yet...
- (3) You still need LOADS of guidance, TT1.

Legend: 'LP' is Lesson Plan, 'TT' is Trainee Teacher

In both Examples (1) and (2), the determiners specify quantity. In Example (1), the determiner *ALL* is a pre-modifier to the noun phrase 'trainee teachers' which is ellipsed. The capitalisation of *ALL* before the numeral 5 specifies the entire group in the chat. In Example (2), the capitalisation in the determiner *ONE* specifies the number of lesson plans [LP] to be shown to their practicum supervisor. In Example (3), the determiner *LOADS of* quantifies the uncountable noun 'guidance' which can imply that a large amount of guidance is necessitated by the trainee teacher.

- (4) I hope everyone is trying hard to ensure quality teaching and a fun BUT MEANINGFUL learning for your pupils.
- (5) You will gain more by discussing your ideas and plans AND exchanging and/or sharing your teaching aids.
- (6) Can make arrangement to swap OR enter Pn. CT's 1 hour class?

Legend: 'Pn. CT' is Madam Cooperating Teacher

The capitalised coordinating conjunction in Example (4) *BUT* is used to contrast 'fun' and 'meaningful', two adjectives that describe the noun 'learning'. In Example (5), the capitalised coordinating conjunction *AND* connects two participial clauses 'discussing your ideas and plans' and 'exchanging and/or sharing your teaching aids' in one compound sentence. In Example (6), the repeatedly capitalised coordinating conjunction *OR* is used to present two alternatives.

- (7) I hope everyone is trying hard to ensure quality teaching and a fun BUT MEANINGFUL learning for your pupils.
- (8) You do good LP with GOOD activities, you will SURELY get your treatsss
- (9) All around the school is a HUGE cemetery!
- (10) Everyone, ensure folios are READY and completed for the next checking.

Legend: 'LP' is Lesson Plan

The capitalised adjectives in Examples (7), (8), and (9) are attributive as they directly describe the nouns they precede: *MEANINGFUL* describes the noun 'learning', *GOOD* describes the noun 'activities', and *HUGE* describes the noun 'cemetery'. However, the capitalised adjective *READY* in Example (10) is predicative as it comes after a linking verb 'are' and is used to describe the noun 'folios'.

- (11) You need to be polished A LOT
- (12) You do good LP with GOOD activities, you will SURELY get your treatsss
- (13) One class CANNOT be shared by 2 trainees!

Legend: 'LP' is Lesson Plan

The capitalised adverbs in Examples (11) and (12) modify the verbs. The adverb of degree, *A LOT*, modifies the verb phrase 'be polished', and the adverb of certainty, *SURELY*, modifies the verb 'get'. However, the capitalised adverb of negation *NOT* in Example (13) is used to negate the verb phrase 'be shared'.

- (14) I will only look at the LPs (1+3+ 2+6=**OH MY** 😞) tomorrow probably after 4.
 (15) **HUHH??** Don't they have a prescribed novel for short story?
 (16) **THANK YOU**, TT5! The most needed document!

Legend: 'TT' is Trainee Teacher

The capitalised phrase, *OH MY*, in Example (14) is not only an interjection, but also a pronoun, taking the place of "12", the sum total of "1+3+2+6". The capitalised *HUHH* in Example (15) is an interjection used to express a reaction. The capitalised exclamation, *THANK YOU*, appears to be exclamative in Example (16) as it can be seen possible to reveal the interlocutor's expressive reaction as well as acceptance to what was offered.

- (17) please complete your cids for **WEEK 2** by Tuesday 14/8 midnight.
 (18) Just to inform again:
 I am only able to sit down together with the cooperating teacher on these dates:
LAST WEEK of Practicum:
 Monday 22/10
 Tuesday 23/10
 Wednesday 24/10

Legend: 'cids' is CIDS, an acronym for Collaborative Instructional Design System

In Example (17), the head noun 'week' in the noun phrase, *WEEK 2*, is capitalised. The noun phrase combines with the preposition 'for' to form a prepositional phrase that functions as a temporal adverbial phrase. In Example (18), the head noun, *WEEK*, and its pre-modifier, the adjective *LAST*, are capitalised. The complete noun phrase, '*LAST WEEK of Practicum*', is likely a cataphoric reference for the earlier noun phrase, 'these dates', and the dates that come after it.

- (19) One class **CANNOT** be shared by 2 trainees!
 (20) You **MUST** learn to make wise decisions.

The capitalised modal verbs in Examples (19) and (20) *CANNOT* and *MUST* convey the degree of necessity associated with the lexical verbs 'share' and 'learn' respectively. The negative modal verb *CANNOT* indicates prohibition, whereas *MUST* indicates obligation.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>(21) Same thing. You still write/do your LP.
 Class:
 Date:
 Remark:
 EXAM:
 invigilation: class/time/subject</p> | <p>(22) Class:
 Date: 1/8/2018
 REMARK:
 The English class teacher discussed the test paper (Paper ?) with the pupils and they had to their corrections in (?).
 What I did:
 What I think:</p> |
|---|--|

Legend: 'LP' is Lesson Plan

The capitalised nouns *EXAM* in Example (21) and *REMARK* in Example (22) are used as titles or main labels prior to the subtitles or fields that follow. Capitalised, these nouns are given more prominence

than the words in small letters. The subsequent subtitles or fields are to be completed with details relevant to the titles or main labels.

- (23) please start using the cids and key in your LPs and daily reflection of the lesson implemented from Monday 6/8, Tues 7/8, Wed 8/8, today's and tomorrow's **FOR THIS WEEK**.
- (24) Dear **ALL**, ...
- (25) **READ** carefully, TT4!

Legend: 'cids' is an acronym for Collaborative Instructional Design System, and 'LPs' is Lesson Plans

The capitalised adverbial phrase *FOR THIS WEEK* in Example (23) can be seen to answer the question of when. The combination of the preposition *FOR* and the noun phrase *THIS WEEK* produces a prepositional phrase that functions as an adverbial phrase. In Example (24), the capitalised *ALL* is a pronoun referring to all the trainee teachers in the WhatsApp group chat. The capitalised verb *READ* in Example (25) is the action required of the recipient of the message.

While the capitalised words and phrases in the data are from both open and closed classes, determiners and coordinating conjunctions are the most frequent. Additionally, there was no consistent pattern as to which word or phrase class was capitalised in particular speech acts. Words and phrases seem to be capitalised to distinguish them from those in small letters and thus, draw attention to them. Following the identification of the grammatical characteristics of the capitalised words and phrases, the final section discusses the possible functions of these forms.

Possible Functions of Practicum Supervisor's Repeated Capitalisation

This section discusses the possible functions of repeated capitalisation on words and phrases included in the practicum supervisor's messages in the group chat. Though the main function of repeated capitalisation is potentially indicative of emphasis, it can be further divided into sub-functions according to the classes of speech acts and the grammatical characteristics of the capitalised words. Analysis of the capitalised words and phrases across the message examples shows that repeated capitalisation performs several distinct functions based on the context of the messages.

Specifying quantity and inclusivity in directives

Most examples of repeatedly capitalised words appear in the directive speech act class, where the practicum supervisor uses the feature to strengthen the force of her instructions. One prominent sub-function is specifying quantity or inclusivity to ensure absolute compliance. To illustrate, by capitalising the determiner *ALL* in Example (1), the practicum supervisor emphasises that a directive applies to every trainee teacher in the chat group, mitigating any ambiguity regarding attendance. Similarly, capitalising *ONE* in Example (2) emphasises that only one document is required, restricting the submission quantity, while *LOADS of* (Example 3) and the adverb *A LOT* (Example 11) intensify the extent to which a trainee teacher must improve, serving as a severe evaluation of their current competence in teaching.

Highlighting time frames and signalling urgency

Another crucial sub-function within directive messages is highlighting important time frames and signalling urgency. In the context of practicum, trainee teacher evaluations are strictly bound by institutional schedules. Hence, when the practicum supervisor capitalises temporal noun phrases like *WEEK 2* (Example 17), *LAST WEEK* (Example 18), or the adverbial phrase *FOR THIS WEEK* (Example 23), she transforms the text into a visual anchor within a scrolling chat feed. This deliberately

draws the trainee teachers' attention to non-negotiable deadlines. Similarly, capitalising the verb *READ* in Example (25) signals immediate urgency, reinforcing the obligated action assigned to the trainee teacher.

Emphasising obligation and marking structural clarity

The practicum supervisor also uses repeated capitalisation to emphasise obligation and increase structural clarity. The use of fully capitalised modal verbs like *CANNOT* (Example 19) and *MUST* (Example 20) conveys a high degree of prohibition and necessity, asserting the practicum supervisor's institutional authority to enforce compliance. Additionally, the practicum supervisor capitalises nouns such as *EXAM* (Example 21) and *REMARK* (Example 22) to act as main labels, increasing clarity by organising the digital text into readable, form-like structure. She further marks structural relations between ideas by capitalising coordinating conjunctions (*BUT*, *AND*, *OR*) to highlight contrast, addition, and alternatives (Examples 4, 5, and 6), and highlights the required quality of tasks with adjectives like *MEANINGFUL* (Example 7) and *READY* (Example 10).

Intensifying expressive reactions

Mirroring speech, several capitalised words occur in expressive speech act class, where the use of capitalisation serves to reconstruct the emotional intensity of face-to-face interactions. To exemplify, capitalising *OH MY* (Example 14) intensifies the practicum supervisor's overwhelming reaction to her heavy workload of lesson plan checking. Similarly, *HUHH* (Example 15) visually mimics a loud gasp of disbelief regarding unexpected information received from her trainee teacher, while *THANK YOU* (Example 16) scales up the expression of gratitude and acceptance to mirror an enthusiastic spoken response.

Intensifying assertive evaluations and commissive certainty

Finally, in assertive and commissive speech acts, repeated capitalisation functions to intensify evaluations and convey absolute certainty. In assertives, describing a cemetery as *HUGE* (Example 9) intensifies the physical observation, while addressing *ALL* (Example 24) signals strict inclusivity to attract the intended recipients. In commissives, capitalising the adjective *GOOD* and the adverb *SURELY* (Example 12) solidifies the practicum supervisor's evaluative power, intensifying both the praised quality of the trainee teacher's activities and the absolute certainty that the practicum supervisor will fulfil her promise of a reward.

DISCUSSION

The first research question explores the speech act classes where repeated capitalisation was used by the practicum supervisor. The analysis showed that repeated capitalisation occurred mostly in directive speech acts, followed by assertives, expressives and commissives. This finding aligns partially with studies by McSweeney (2018) and Heath (2017) who found that interlocutors do include capitalised words in their expressive messages in online communication. However, unlike McSweeney's study which focused on the interlocutors who are socially close, the present study focused on the practicum supervisor with a professional role. Furthermore, McSweeney's (2018) data were neither quantified nor tabulated. Hence, the use of capitalisation was not only found included in the expressive messages that imitate speech but also in directive messages in the academic setting. This may be specific to the practicum supervision context and the practicum supervisor-trainee teacher relationship examined in this study.

While Kurniawati et al. (2025) investigate the linguistic features of texting among undergraduate English major students operating within symmetrical peer relationships where communication is governed by neither authority nor formality, the findings from this study highlight a distinctly different pragmatic function driven by asymmetrical power dynamics. In contrast to peer-to-peer interactions, the study reveals that a practicum supervisor is able to leverage repeated capitalisation primarily within directive speech acts to strengthen the force of her instructions, particularly obligations and urgencies, to her trainee teachers. This demonstrates that in professional educational contexts, the use of repeated capitalisation is not merely an expression of casual emotion among equals, but serves as a deliberate paralinguistic tool to reconstruct an authoritative, task-oriented tone, which is a foundational expectation when issuing directives in traditional teacher-student interactions (Scrivener, 2011) in the absence of face-to-face spoken interaction.

While recent literature highlights that teachers typically utilise WhatsApp with their students for facilitation and supportive instruction, such as sharing of documents and images to provide “supported reading” and collaborative learning experiences (Indiran et al., 2024), the practicum supervisor in this study employs the platform textual features distinctly differently. Rather than utilising WhatsApp primarily to scaffold learning like a typical teacher, the practicum supervisor’s use of repeated capitalisation within directive text messages closely mirrors the discourse of administrative superiors managing workplace groups hierarchically. As Hussein et al. (2023) observed, superiors at the workplace often utilise capitalisation (e.g., “VERY IMPORTANT NOTE !!”) to command immediate attention, focusing on the transactional aspects of leadership and exerting administrative power. Thus, the repeated capitalisation observed in this study functions not as a standard instructional strategy, but as a deliberate paralinguistic tool used to maintain an asymmetrical power dynamic, enforcing trainee teachers’ compliance and reconstructing institutional authority in a digital space.

Concerning the second research question, findings from this study indicate that the practicum supervisor frequently capitalised determiners, next in other word/phrase classes such as coordinating conjunctions, adjectives, adverbs, interjections/exclamation, noun phrases, modal verbs, nouns, adverbial phrases, pronoun, and verb. These findings partially overlap with previous research (McSweeney, 2018) which concentrated on capitalised nouns, verbs, adjectives, and interjections that intensified the meanings. Thus, the present study seeks to extend this line of research by showing that in the academic setting, the use of capitalisation is not limited to the word classes mentioned but also the other word/phrase classes to convey distinctive emphasis and urgency, and to highlight the point of reference.

Regarding the third research question, this study found that one of the possible functions of repeated capitalisation is to indicate emphasis. This result echoes earlier observations in McSweeney’s (2018) study, but only to a limited extent. While previous research established general functions of repeated capitalisation to highlight or emphasise the interlocutor’s intention semantically (Heath, 2017; McSweeney, 2018), very little examined the possible functions in the context of grammatical characteristics, i.e., the word/phrase classes. This study thus provides additional insights into possible functions which are grammatically-driven particularly in the directive speech acts.

Building on foundational views that repeated capitalisation exploits standard orthographic conventions to express intensified emotion and semantic focus (Carter & McCarthy, 2006), the findings of this

study can be viewed through the lens of recent research that conceptualises WhatsApp interactions as an evolving 'digital dialect'. According to Shahbaz et al. (2024), this digital dialect is characterised by distinct conventions, grammar, and vocabulary that texters utilise to make meaning in the absence of physical prosodic features. Within this framework, the practicum supervisor's specific use of repeated capitalisation, particularly on determiners (e.g., *ALL*) and coordinating conjunctions (e.g., *BUT*, *OR*), should not be regarded merely as textual deformation, but as an integral part of an evolving grammar of digital emphasis. By exploiting this digital convention, the practicum supervisor is able to deliberately reconstruct spoken stress, which is essential for conveying emphasis in classroom communicative language (Kelly, 2000), signal urgency, and maintain an authoritative professional tone in her digital discourse with her trainee teachers.

CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the use of repeated capitalisation by a practicum supervisor in WhatsApp group interactions with her trainee teachers. The findings revealed that while the feature was generally infrequent across the broader dataset, it was deliberately employed by the practicum supervisor predominantly within directive speech acts. Grammatically, the repeated capitalisation was most frequently applied to determiners and coordinating conjunctions. Functionally, this paralinguistic feature served to specify quantity, signal urgency, establish emphasis, and promote clarity. Because of the rare use of such feature by the trainee teachers themselves, which is likely due to the asymmetrical power dynamics and the risk of appearing rude, the findings demonstrate that repeated capitalisation is leveraged to construct an authoritative, task-oriented tone necessary for institutional practicum supervision in a digital platform.

The findings offer vital implications for English Language Teaching (ELT) and teacher education, regarding the development of digital pragmatic competence in particular. As online platforms like WhatsApp increasingly blur the boundaries between casual social texting and formal institutional discourse, ELT programmes are recommended to explicitly train pre-service teachers in professional "netiquette" and digital communication awareness. Trainee teachers must understand how visual paralinguistic cues, such as capitalisation, fundamentally alter the tone, urgency, and perceived intention of written text. Equipping language learners and pre-service teachers with this digital literacy will help them effectively navigate professional power dynamics, manage their own digital tone, and formulate clear, authoritative instructions without appearing aggressive or unprofessional in online educational settings.

While this study provides valuable insights into professional digital interactions in an academic setting, there are several avenues for future research. Because this study focused primarily on the text message output of a practicum supervisor within a specific Malaysian teacher education context, future research should investigate a larger cohort of educational professionals across different cultural contexts to determine if these authoritative digital conventions are universally applied. Additionally, future studies could explore the recipients' perspectives, as in examining how trainee teachers interpret and emotionally react to their lecturers' use of repeated capitalisation, and compare these textual patterns across other professional communication platforms, such as Telegram or Microsoft Teams, to further map the evolving grammar of digital institutional talk.

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