



THE INCURSION OF SOCIAL MEDIA LANGUAGE: ITS EFFECTS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE PURITY AND THE NIGERIAN STUDENT SITUATION

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Abstract: Social media no doubt has tremendous effects on global communication system. Many scholars and academics applaud the usefulness of such modern inventions for communication because of its unfathomable merits. David Crystal one of the foremost authorities on language argues that the internet which is the primary host of social media language will promote a dramatic expansion and adoption of variety of language. This certainly will provide an unprecedented opportunity for personal creativity. The internet revolution has launched a host of social media networks and has undoubtedly brought with it many linguistic challenges especially among the English speech community. This paper therefore x-rays the effects of social media language on the English language purity as conversed in Nigeria and the present situation in Nigerian classrooms. In x-raying this subject matter, attention will be given firstly, to what is social media language, a cursory consideration of the origin and examples of social media language. Then a brief attention will be paid to the scope and spread of the use of social media language by students in tertiary institutions. Finally, critical consideration will be given to the effects of social media language on the effective use of English Language by students in Nigerian classroom situation.

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Introduction

English language is the dominant international language of the twenty-first century. It is spoken at a useful level by some 1.75 billion people which is no doubt a quarter of the world's population.

World over, English is spoken in 115 countries. This shows its importance and relevance in our society. In Nigeria, English language is the "lingua Franca" the officially approved language for communication, science, entertainment and diplomacy. It is on this premise that English language is the official language for instruction in Nigeria, usually from the beginning of the academic ladder to the zenith of the academic ladder. Great emphasis is often placed on the mastery of English language in all strata of the educational layer ranging from primary to tertiary levels of education. In employment and job offers, strict

attention is given to an individual's ability and proficiency in the use of the English language both in the spoken and in the written forms.

Frantic efforts are being made by language teachers to inculcate in learners the rules and conventions governing the use of the language. At all levels of education in today's Nigeria, English grammar unarguably is given a central attention in our institution. Usually the English language study curriculum is structured to accommodate and promote the basic skills of the language. This has made English language a focal aspect of our national lives.

World over, English has witnessed a tremendous growth and linguistic development over the centuries. In Nigeria, this growth has initially been initiated by physical encounter such as historical factors of trade, empire, military and industrial might and innovations. And later through classroom, circulation of printed materials, radio, television, cinema and other mass media.

The rapid linguistic development has created many dialects, a different brand of English language that is fittest for its purpose and meets the needs of their users.

In Nigeria there is the existence of this brand called the Pidgin English, a dialect commonly spoken as an unofficial or low version of the English language. The effect of this brand of English in no little measures has had its effect on the purity of English language as taught in classrooms since the pidgin interferes with the learning and effective use of the English language in all its universal or accepted form. Therefore, leading to, in most cases, a speaker mixing between the two codes or mixing the two codes while still trying to contend and manage this linguistic problem. The English speech community is besieged with the issue of social media language which no doubt has punctuated the efforts of achieving the level of English language purity and proficiency prescribed for students and graduates of tertiary institution in Nigeria.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to define the terms that form the crux of this paper in order to clarify them and as well situate this paper in its proper context.

Social Media Language

Social media language embraces all the following: internet slang, internet short hand, Cyber slang, Net speaks, Text speaks etc. It refers to variety of slangs language used by different people on the internet. Because of its revolutionary nature no distinct definition can be given to the term social media language.

However, within the context of this paper, social media language is construed as the system of arbitrary verbal symbols that are used through websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

In buttressing the above position Von Reeds (2014) averred that social Media Language embraces an alphabet soup acronyms abbreviations, and neologism which has grown up around technology mediated communication which are usually called "text speak".

He further added social media is having an impact on language since so much of written language we see is now on the screen of computers, tablets and smart phones, language now evolves partly through interaction with technology. Language in itself tends to be malleable and the social media is a receipt for rapid change.

According to Lena J (2013) a whole host of words originating from social media and the wider internet have become common place that they have slipped into popular usage and we don't even recognize.

Yet another phenomena associated with social media language is the re-appropriation of existing words based on brands to refer primarily to social media context. While the origin of social media language is not the core of this of this paper, a cursory consideration or its origin is not out of place.

Social media language can be traced back in time to precisely 1979 which were the early days of the internet with some terms predating the internet. Social media language is used in chat rooms, social networking services, online games, video games, etc. since this period, users of social media language communicate using network created codes or short hand.

However, in Nigeria social media language came to limelight in the late 1990's with the origin of text messaging which is at the root of all differences between normal English and Social Media English known as "Text speak". The cardinal aim of the text speak is the desire to use as few word characters as possible. SMS originally allowed a maximum of 160 characters, including space, and punctuations.

Shortening words was often the only way to fit everything one wanted to say unto the message. This position is shared and expressed by Laurel Storm in her article titled SMS and its negative effect on language.

It is pertinent to note that social media language does not constitute a homogenous language variety, rather it differs according to the user and type of social media situation.

Some examples of the brand of English brandished and used in the social media include; abbreviations and acronyms. Usually abbreviation is a shortening of a word, Eg, 'CU', 'Cya', (see you, see ya) 'SEC' for a second 'Luv' for Love.

Acronyms on the other hand are letters sequence that stand for a larger phrase and are usually formed from critical components of a word.

Examples of some common acronyms include 'lol' for laugh out loud, or lots of love, and 'BTW' for by the way. 'OMG' for 'Oh My God', 'IDK' for I don't Know, 'UWC' for you are welcome, 'Tnx' for thanks.

There are such features such as the use of punctuations, capitalization, and other symbols to indicate, emphasize or stress. Period or exclamation marks may be used repeatedly for emphasis.

Grammatical punctuations rules are relaxed on-line. For instance, E-mail may simply be expressed as email and the hyphen can be dropped.

In some creation, sentence lengths are shortened such as 'ru 2 cn me l&r? For are you two seeing me later? Less than half the character used in the traditional sentence formation is used. Also certain types of complex structures, relative clauses for instances are avoided.

Another phenomenon worthy of note is the act of re-appropriation of existing words and words based on brands to refer primarily to social media context.

Re-appropriation is the central process by which a group claims words that were previously used in a certain way and give them a new meaning.

Thus creating new words e.g. friendly and unfriendly words or phrases like ‘Google it’ has been consciously used as a replacement for look it up, or search for it, instead of ‘write a message using twitter, social media language users will say ‘tweet it’.

English Language Purity

To many, the phrase English Language Purity conjures some form of quaint elitist display of mastery of the English language and decries the incursion of loan words. However, within the context of this paper English language purity simply entails the belief that words of native origin and the conventional grammatical forms should be used instead of foreign or alien derived ones.

The cardinal task of linguistic purism is the practice of defining or recognizing one variety of a language as being purer or of intrinsically higher quality than other varieties. A language is said to loss its purity when there is perceived or actual decline, when there is change of vocabulary, syncretism of grammatical elements, or loan words.

Although, it may be argued that no language is static, and that for a language to retain its relevance it must be dynamic, changing and evolving to accommodate the realities of times.

On the other hand, there must be a conscious move geared toward the insistence on the traditional correctness of the use of that language if that language must not go extinct.

For this reason, many persons although, learn English language for its universality and dynamism has caused.

For instance, according to George Orwell in his book ‘Politics and the English Language averred that most people who bother with the matter at all would admit that English language is in bad way.

According to John Humphreys who stated that ‘lost for word was my first and, I thought my last book in English. It is a protest against cavalier approach we have taken to teaching children English over the past few decades and a comment by the way our language is managed and manipulated by those who should know better.

To English Purist, Novoseleequasi- English is a catastrophe. ‘People tend to invent all sorts of nouns and verbs and make words that should not be said.’

To cap it all, Prince Charles at the March launch of a five-year British effort to preserve English Language stated ‘I think we should be a bit careful, otherwise the whole can get rather a mess.’

In Nigeria, English language is essential and key to National Growth, development and national unity. It is the language for the work place and instruction at school. Knowledge of English is therefore an essential requirement for anyone to promote or live in any wider context of the community.

English in Nigeria is such a weapon because it provides an excellent representation of political supremacy. Because of its official instrumental gate keeping function, English is

the primary language that all Nigerian students are expected to learn and use effectively in the wider society. This central position occupied by English language in our national life is backed by statutes, for instance the language policy on the educational ordinance of 1882 make English the language of instruction in schools. By early 1947 Sir Richard's constitution reinstated English as the official language in Nigeria.

Article 114(1) recommended the use of English as a national official language and the regional language in the south.

Educationally in Nigeria, English language performs a dual function since it serves as a language of instruction and a course of study in Nigerian universities. Such significance attached to it, makes its quality and quantity levels of use continue to serve as perimeters toward evaluating intelligibility, effectiveness and efficiency in English language in almost all sphere of Nigerians 'life.

Effects of Social Media Language on Students in Nigeria

Social media language no doubt has crept into the classroom situation and many language teachers in many parts of the world have commented on the negative impact of this on the teaching and learning of English language.

In Nigeria, students at the secondary and tertiary levels of education are exposed to social media language and this has impacted negatively on the effective use of English language in a formal setting especially written English.

According to an unscientific poll conducted among language teachers 50% of the 1028 respondents felt that social media language is harming students writing and grammar.

A research work carried out by Ochonogor Wc at the Delta State University Abrake reportedly show that 99.30% of students in the university are exposed to social media language. The study further reveal that 215 out of 324 students representing 66.36% of students make use of slangs and social media language even when they write formally to their lecturers.

Again, 240 students representing 74.07 out of 324 students sampled stated that they do not mind the kind of language or syntax they often use in the social media and even a higher number that is 170 students representing 52.47% of students stated clearly that there is a short fall on their English writing skills.

Therefore, considering the results thrown up from the study, no doubt social media language is definitely taken a toll on student's academic performance especially with relationship to the learning and effective use of language among students in tertiary levels of education in Nigeria.

A scientific survey conducted by these authors in the just concluded 2016 West African Senior School Certification Examination Marking Exercise, in the Bayelsa State Marking centre among English Language Examiners reveal that six out of ten essays or letter writing marked contained some form of social media language and the use of debased grammar and syntax.

That no doubt accounted for the mass failure witnessed in English language over the years in the West African Senior Certificate Examination in the country.

According to Plumzile Ngwanga a media language teacher who admitted that ‘social media language is affecting academic vocabulary very badly as it has now become a habit in their assignments and academic work. It affects their ability to spell and write correctly.

It also leads to less proficiency in the use of English. The use of social media language also makes students lazy to write words in full, and as a result, most students prefer using abbreviations when writing.

Since it is a known and accepted fact that when one spend more time or consistently do something it becomes part of that person and it ends up coming naturally, in like vain the long hours students spend chatting and texting on social medium makes hybrid language ending up as being part of their vocabulary because of such consistent use and engagement.

Monica Ariana and pop Anamaria was succinct when they stated that vocabulary is the core of any language and the most challenging and time consuming part of learning a foreign language and the social media can influence in most cases negatively.

It has been said by many language scholars that social media language is a disease that affects the mind, students no longer use appropriate language in communication instead they resort to the use of abbreviations when communicating . the social media communication has a drawback when students are given a task to complete, they use abbreviated words to construct a sentence.

English is a language that has its own rules and conventions like any other language which must be adhered to.

The effect of social media language on the learning of English language has been likened to certain animals with the ability to take down its prey gradually, so does social media language venture to consume one’s academic vocabulary.

Its influence is very subtle but potent to the extent that a lot of victims have reached a stage of denial when confronted about such. It can then be perceived as a system containing an endless array of made up words, phrases, and abbreviated text which undoubtedly derail many users of language into forsaking the conventional way of speaking and writing.

To deny its persuasive influence would be to place one’s self in a position of vulnerability and therefore be ensnared by it.

Conclusion

English language is now part of our national life as Nigerians since it is the standard language for literacy, economic and political activities. For a generation soon to inherit influence in commerce, politics, media and culture, being correct in grammar and structure in the use of English language is a priority. Technology is the vehicle that students have chosen and language is the fuel on which lit will run. Therefore, there is a job to be done. There is the ever growing need for high quality teaching of English if we must protect the sanctity, purity and integrity of the language and its structures must be carefully taught and monitored to ensure strict adherence.



Students on the other hand, should try as much as possible to communicate even on the social media with the correct English.

The integrity and purity of the language should not be sacrificed on the altar of economizing writing space.

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