English Language usage on Social Media and its Emerging Trends: A case study of WhatsApp

By

Freedom Okwudiri Nwenwe (Ph.D)
Department of English and Communication Art,
Faculty of Humanities,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt.
freedomnwenwe184@gmail.com
08036708598/08094730562

Abstract

The quickest and simplest means of communication these days is the social media. Most of its sites are very accessible as it is popular WhatsApp, one of the most popular types of the social media is not just common among the young ones today, but dynamic, user-friendly and specific. For this paper, the descriptive design and Technological Determision (TD) theory are used to examine the language of the WhatsApp, and findings have it that the platform is flooded with a lot of cyber slangs, acronyms, neologisms, contractions, initialisms and morphological shortenings. Finding of the paper also have it that the writing style of the WhatsApp departs from the already established and known conventional ways of writing especially in a situation where a word can be represented in any way found fit by the user. Furthermore, it is noticed that the time saving nature and the friendly nature of the platform, its flexibility and economic friendliness make the platform attractive. On the other way, the unhealthy academic implication of all that is its anti-pedagogy and the great danger it portends to the teaching, learning and usage of language. The paper recommends that the use of the innovation should be done with caution in order not to deviate from the established norm of language usage.

Keywords: Language, Social, Media, Emerging, Trends, WhatsApp.

Introduction

One of the uncommon gifts of nature that is capable of making or blemishing a society, nation or people is language. Language, a chief means of communication is systematically codified (Nwale 2015). The speech sounds or phonemes are organized conventionally into orthographic segments representations and spelling system. The representations identify the language and serve as common means of exchange of communication among the language users. Like any other developed human language, the English language has its semiotic signs, orthography and spelling systems, that are used in all forms of written communications. All first, second and foreign language competent users of English language know the semiotic conventions of the language and it is linguistically able to recognize and use them in every normal medium and context. One of the social media channels in which the English language is vigorously used is the WhatsApp. The social media web-based communication tools comprise various channels of electronic or mediated technologies that facilities communication and interaction among people and groups within the cyber space. The social media employs different forms of networks that users make communications group-specific among themselves unlike the human language which is structurally and grammatically conventionalized.

Among the lists of the social media is the WhatsApp. WhatsApp, just like any other form of the social network is interact-based. Friends, classmates, clients, customers, families, groups etc can be connected with the aid of the WhatsApp as a social network. The WhatsApp as it stands now, is one of the most popular and widely used social network. Users of this media are teenagers, school age, youths and some elderlies. The WhatsApp used-English language of these days is in flux state. All sorts of acronyms and neologisms are used by people to portray their ideas, opinions and messages. Acronyms like KK = cool or okay, BF = Boy Friend, GF = Girl Friend, LOL = Laugh Out Loud, BTW = By The Way, Sub = Subscription, HBD = Happy Birthday, JK = Just kidding, BD = Big Deal etc are commonly used in WhatsApp. The examples given above can also be represented in different forms since the system is not standardized. This implies that the linguistic dynamism of the social media with regard to the WhatsApp is linguistically and communicatively inadequate and makes a meal of mutual intelligibility a feature of language which makes it possible for people to share and exchange maximum

communication. The aim and goal of this paper is propelled by the problem and negative consequences of the flexibility of social media. Firstly, to reveal the dynamic, economic sensitivity and the user friendly nature of WhatsApp and secondly, to observe that the user friendly nature and openness of the WhatsApp is both linguistically dangerous to language teaching and learning.

Statement of Problem

Language as a chief means of communication, is conventional with a writing system and rules governing it usage. Any attempt to deviate from its writing system and rules, is seen to be language corruption. On the other way, sticking to its writing system and rules of its usage lead to effective communication.

Lately, it has been observed that the youngsters and the students have deviated from obeying the rules and the conventional English language writing. They have come up for themselves other forms of writing that are unconventional and personalized to each other. To the end, this has become a great threat and danger to education, language learning and usage.

Aim and Objectives

The singular aim of this paper is to bring to limelight and to the knowledge of the people the trending WhatsApp unconventional writing system.

The objective of this paper is to demoralize the youngsters and school age from the use of these social media (WhatsApp) trending English language and words that hamper effective communication, language learning and language use.

Literature Review

Language

In linguistics, language is one of the most commonly defined terms. This is because of its central position in human existence. Nwala (2015) calls it the support system of all human endeavours. Language makes and defined people and a nation.

A system of linguistic communication which subsumes of number of mutually intelligible varieties is known and called language. It is people's history and culture repository. Language is characterized with varieties which are regionally, occupationally and socially defined. Halliday (1964), language is used in all

human related interactions. It is the means in which humans communicate and interact with each other by either a habitually used oral-auditory symbol or other forms of semiotic signs. Piaget (1955:71), sees language as an organized system of arbitrary vocal sounds by which a particular social group operates. His view is in consonants with those of Bloch and Trager (1942:13), which see language as a system or arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a society co-operates. The two definitions see language and the society to be inseparable and this is quite correct. In fact, socio-linguistically speaking, there is a sort of symbiotic relationship between the society and language. The change in the form of language used in the social media is a glaring example where the society detects the form, function and nature of a language (Bloch & Trager, 1942:15).

Language is a type of social communion, which is communicatively shared by a group of users. They use the forms to co-operate and do different things. By this Nwala (2015:3) notes that language is a shared code of behaviour by people. Ndimale (2001:1) in a similar opinion sees language as "essentially communication system in the sense that it associates meaning with a set of sight." Ndimele's opinion agrees with universal and changing nature of our present world that sees language as a semiotic system which entails the use of certain agreed upon symbols or signals to convey meaning from one person to another. The defect of foregoing positions of scholars especially that of Ndimele (2001) which this paper notes is the one that holds that the signs of language are always agreed upon. The acronomys and neologism used in the social media to a large extent are not agreed upon. They are linguistic evolutions that are linguistically unpredictable. They give different meanings and can be interpreted differently by different people. What is correct judging from the current situation of the language of the social media is that language can appear in different forms and shapes and can be linguistically and communicatively interpreted in different ways. It is the properly of the user(s), group(s) and society. With it, one can do many things, perform many actions and achieve many goals.

The Social Media

Social media is a medium in which people connect share information and create content on line. It is a collection of websites and applications that allows users to

create, share and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities. Some popular social media platforms are WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube etc. Social media is a powerful tool for socialization and connection. It can also allow companies to interact with customers in a dual way communication. It is an integral part of many people's daily lives. Nearly sixty percent of the world's population uses social media and new users are joining at an average global rate of seven users per second.

The concept of social media can be looked from diverse ways but generally, it is seen as a platform that employs mobile web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and countries share, co-create, discuss and modify user-generated media content (Kietzman 2012). In a related position, Andreas and Michael (2010) observe that the social media is a channel of interaction among themselves on different networks. The foregoing simply means that the social media, which has social network as a subcategory is an internet based technology. It uses computer-related facilities and resources to enhance effective communication and information dissemination among people. It is also clear from the foregoing that the contents of the social media which are shared are user-generated. This therefore, makes it multifaceted phenomena which is dynamic and open. Elisu Morcean (2016) cited in Bouchiki and Bounanami (2016) notes the openness of social media and observes that it has both positive and negative effects. The positive or advantage of social media according to him is the ability to connect many or different people at a time easy and instant provision of information and its ability to permeate every field of human endavours. But the disadvantages are enunciated in privacy issues. This means that too much sharing of information on social media can bring up all forms of problem, and online communication is fast substituting face-to-face interaction. Another disadvantage of the social media which is a point to focus of this paper is the trendy spelling styles of the social media which is dangerous to language teaching and learning.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a subscription cross-platform messaging application that allows users to send unlimited messages, photos, videos, and documents, make voice and video calls, participate in group conversations, use end-to-end encryption to ensure that only the sender and the recipient can read or listen to messages or calls.

WhatsApp was founded on February 24 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum, former employees of Yahoo. The idea started off as an app that would display statues in a phone's contact menu, showing if the person was at network or on a call. Whatsapp application runs on mobile services and can be accessed from computers. The service requires a cellular mobile telephone number to sign up.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on Technological Determission (TD) theory. This term was used by an American sociologist and economist, Thornstein Veblen in 1899. This theory is a reductionist which sees technology to be a determinant of a society's development, its social structures and cultural values. In 1964, Marshal Mchuhan refreshed and renewed the theory. He states that technologies shape the individual and the society. It models thoughts, actions and feelings of the individual and defines the activities of the society. The social media like the Whatsapp, a product of new age science and technology largely influence the activities of the language learners, youths, school age and some adults. The WhatsApp, a trendy system social media has influenced the writing system of the school age and youngsters which totally deviate from the conventional known English Language writing system.

This theoretical framework is chosen not only to make this paper vital and relevant but also to put in the right perspective the technological circumstance of our time. Furthermore, this theory aids us to limit social media (WhatsApp) writings and write ups within the confines of the WhatsApp on words spellings and language use.

Methodology

This paper finds the descriptive survey design more appropriate to carry out the work. According to Nwankwo (2013:62), "it is that in which the researcher collects data from a large sample drawn from a given population and describes certain features of the samples as they are at the time of the study." In using this design, some WhatsApp chatting were extracted from some quarters and analyzed, observing the usage of acronyms, abbreviations and unconventional writing styles.

Presentation of Data

Below are some of the extracts from WhatsApp chats

Chat 1

Sender: Guy, g/mornin nd appy xtmas
Receiver: Tnk nd same 2 u
Sender: Hw re u?
Receiver: Fyn, nd u?
Sender: Kul
Receiver: Ok
Sender: Hw are u planning 4 d trado/m?
Receiver: No pp, everytin is going fyn
Sender: Ok
Receiver: Tnx

Chat 2

Sender: bros, hv u gun 4 d biznes?
Receiver: Yap, hv pd 4 d tp nd d guds
Sender: Issorite
Receiver: I will cum 2morrow 2 c dem
Sender: Kk

Chat 3

Sender: Don't worri, wen I cum bak, will c u
Receiver: No P, am somehw beta nw, tnx
Sender: Gudnit gee
Receiver: No kwams

Chat 4

Sender: Hy bae gud pm
Receiver: Run away boo
Receiver: Where hv u bin?
Sender: Abj
Receiver: 4 wot?
Sender: Notin much

Chat 5

Sender: gud am bae, hw wz ur nite?
Receiver: Just fyn, tnx nd urs

Sender: Same
Sender: Appy 2 chat wit u 2day
Receiver: hw iz ur skul?
Sender: I tnk God, dia ris no probs. In yr 3 nw
Receiver: Wow, dats gr8t
Chat 6
Sender: gud pm sir
Receiver: How are you?
Sender: Am fyn. Hw waz ur dei?
Receiver: Fine and what about your parents?
Sender: Dey r doing gr8 ur famili?
Receiver: Fine, thank you
Sender: U r welcum sir

Analysis

In the above extracts of WhatsApp chats, a lot of unconventional writing systems were found among the language use of the youngsters and present day students in the social media. Found in the chats were different forms of abbreviations, coinages, abnormalities.

The unconventional linguistic features found in the chats are

(a) **Abbreviations:** hv = have, tnx = thanks, nw = now, hw = how, wz = was, nd and fyn = fine, skul = school u = you, dat = that, bin = been etc
(b) **Acronyms, Shortening and Cyber slangs:** KK = okay, fine, or thank, boo = baby, boy, dey = they, dia = there, de = the, sometin = something, worri = worry, prob = problem, kul = cool, etc.
(c) **Letter/Number Homophone:** 2 = to, b4 = before, 4 = for, gr8 = great, 2narrow = tomorrow, 5n = fine.
(d) **Non-Standard Spelling/Orthography:** gud = good, kum = come, ur = your, welcum = welcome, bizness = business, tnx = thanks etc.
(e) **Use of letters to represent words:** U = you, C = see, K – Okay etc.

From the chats (data) a high degree of unconventional and different forms of writing were shown, a revelation that is uncommon and worrisome. It showed a system that is unconventional and open especially, a case where each person is

free to use any form of his or her choice to represent and send his or her message. In English language writing system or language generally, it is governed by rules, conventional, learnable and predictable but what is seen from the chat (data) is a language corruption, abbreviation, one at the mercy of the language user. For instance, we see where single letters are used to represent words. Also, all forms of unusual abbreviations were observed. The data also showed a representation of words with figures and letters as in b4, 5n. These situations makes the system unpredictable and perplexing.

The extent to which the language of the social media, WhatsApp in particular has negatively impacted on the psych of the students is noticeable in chat number 6 which is a chat between a student and a lecturer in which to some extent is supposed to be formal and reflect in the language. It is noticed from the chat that the lecturer used formal expression while the student used the cyber slangs. The student failed to observe that he was talking with his lecturer whom he culturally owe high regard and therefore should conventionally accept language code or writing system.

From the literature which is also replicated in the data, it is very obvious that the social media shape the individual and mode of the society. The general and rocket science nature of the social media make its system be widely shared by all people and fields of study. It has no age barrier, can provide both positive and negative influence on the society.

Conclusion

This paper has critically looked at the effects of the social media on the language use of the student, using the WhatsApp as a case study. From the chat extracts, findings have it that students and youths employ all forms of unconventional language codes or writing system and are careless of the context and their co-chatters. The writing styles of the students are quite open, unpredictable and student specific. This tells why the words thank, the, and, are, fine etc are written as tnx, tnk, d, de, nd, fyn and fn respectively. The openness and unpredictability of the language use of the students in social media is anti-pedagogy and learning, which is always systematic and organized.

The worrisome aspect of this writing method of the students is that it has gone virile and deep into the psych and fabrics of the students such that the students no longer take note of any form of contextual, formal or even social difference their use of language. As one reads essays and compositions of the students, one will notice all forms of acronyms, morphological shortenings, initialisms, contractions and coinages/neologisms. This linguistic abysmal nature deviation portends great danger to the government, social and educational sector.

Recommendation

Based on the above observations and findings, the papers recommends that students, youths and the society in general should use the innovation of the social media with caution in order not to deviate from the norms of English language usage. This is truism if we recall that the development, transformation and substance of our world and environment largely depend on the communicative power of language and the pedagogical empowerment of the youths.

References

Andreas, M. K., & Michael, I. I. (2010). Users the world unite. The challenges and opportunities of social media. www.scribed.com.Doi,KaplanandHaenlein.

Austin, J. (1962). How to do things with words. Oxford University Press.

Blouchiki, M., & Bounanami, D. A. H. (2016). The impact of social media on students academic at Tlemcen University aspace.univ-Elemeen.

Bloch, B., & Trager, G. L. C. (1942). Outlines of linguistic analysis. Linguistic society of America Baltinore.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1964). Introduction to system functional grammar. University of Birminghan.

Ndimele, O. M. (2001). Readings on language. English books.

Nwala, M. A. (2015). Introduction to linguistics: A first course. (rev. edition). Obisco, Nig Enterprisco.

Nwankwo, O. C. (2013). A practical guide to research writing for students of research enterprises (5th edition). Pam Unique Publisher Co. Ltd.

Piaget, J. (1955). The construction of reality in the child. Basic Books New York.