

Chapter Five

Disruptive social media linguistic elements in communication among Nigerian netizens

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Abstract

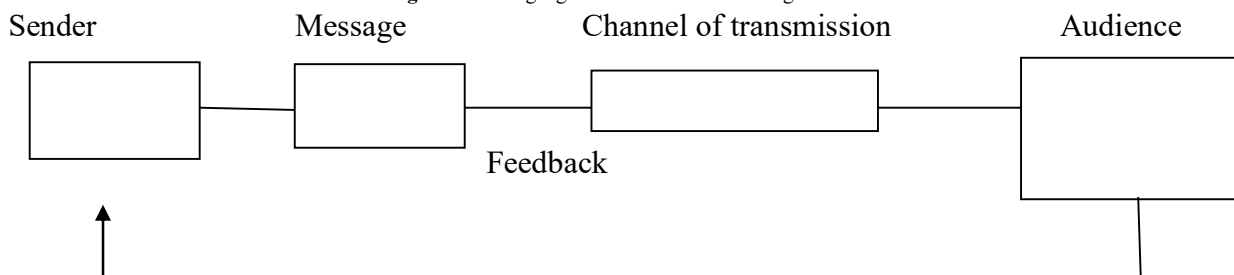
This paper examined the disruptive social media linguistic elements in communication among Nigerian netizens. The study made use of the interactionist theory and the principles and parameters theory to investigate the relevance of social media language, the scope of reachability and the non-acceptability of the social media linguistic elements in the construction of formal language situation. Domiciled in the domain of syntax, the descriptive research design was used to collate data from relevant sources on which thirty-three linguistic elements were tested. The findings show that although the media language and the British language which is the language of education in Nigeria are both in the English language domain, Nigerian language policy has not accepted the use of the British and any other variety of the English language concurrently in a formal situation. The position of this paper is that the social media play a huge role in information dissemination, influencing public opinion and behaviour in the face of modern realities and has become eminent for language policy makers in Nigeria to consider the moderation and inclusion of the new media communication elements in the academic curriculum in line with the dynamism of language. The study has utilized the interactionist theory and the Principles and Parameters theory as frameworks to synergise language syntax with sociolinguistics, sociology and anthropology in the new normal.

Keywords: Communication, Disruptive, Grammaticality, Language policy, Netizens, Social media

Introduction

The study on disruptive social media linguistic elements in communication among Nigerian netizens investigates the linguistic elements used by netizens in social media that dislocates communication. Conventionally, certain units are involved in communication, they include: the messenger, the message, the channel of transmission, the audience and feedback. Linguistic elements in communication are usually contained in the message which moves from the messenger to the audience. The message in any communication is guided by the rules of the grammar of the language in use.

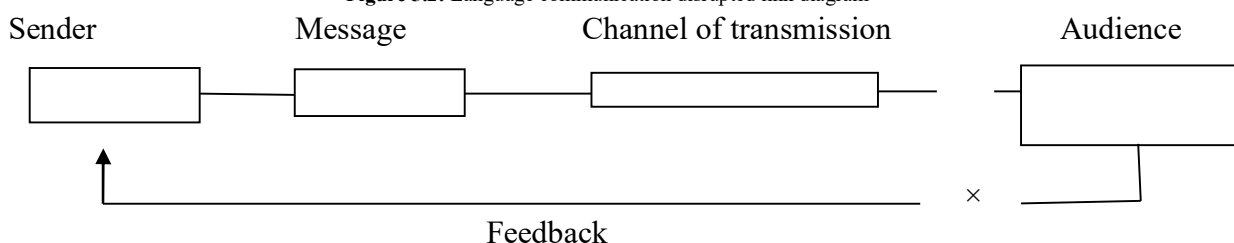
Figure 5.1: Language communication link diagram



In language communication, certain basic systems exist. The basic systems enfold the communicative links and communicative facilities. The communicative links study the process on how the message moves from the sender through the channel of transmission to the audience and their feedback while the communicative facilities study the personality and knowledge of the messenger; the language, aim and objectives of the message; the type of facility utilized in sending or transmitting the message; the type and size of audience and their reactions or feedback.

It follows that the messenger is required to have a good knowledge of the language they make use of in sending their messages to suit the audience set for the message. Consequently, there are also channels available to transmit the message to the audience, such as letter writing, radio and television broadcast, direct discourse and social media platforms. A common instrument used for communication in any of the channels of transmission is language.

Figure 5.2: Language communication disrupted link diagram



The diagram in figure 2 illustrates what happens when the language transmitted does not suit the audience. The diagram shows disruption marked ‘x’ between the channel of transmission and the audience, and again, between the audience and the feedback link. It simply demonstrates what happens when a less standard, a much higher standard or an unapproved variety of a language is sent to a given audience; an example is the use of informal variety of a language in a formal language situation. Similar situations usually transpire both in local, national and international domains of language use.

Countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Botswana, Cameroon Gambia, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, among other African nations have their experiences that led them to second language users of the English language. As trade and diplomatic activities increased, the use of English language in Africa further embraced other English varieties other than the British English

(Adetugbo, 1984; Umera-Okeke, 2017). The different varieties of English through modifications differ from British English in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and spellings of words. These modifications have a great negative influence on second language (L2) users of English in Africa (Gilbert & Ogum, 2020).

English language in parts of the world is also rule guided. It became rooted in Nigeria from the sixteenth and early seventeenth Century when merchants and Christian missionaries settled in coastal towns and the subsequent British settlement. There was no earlier trace of any record of the use of English language prior to this period or of linguistic research in Nigeria preceding the late 18th century (Eyisi, 2006; Gilbert, 2019). The synergy between the Nigerians and Britain which led to colonization planted, watered and grew the English language in Nigerian soil. Currently, the British English has been adopted as the language of education, commerce, legislation, diplomacy and for other official purposes. Suffice it to say that the British English is the language for formality in writing and reading as contained in school curriculum in Nigeria (Fafunwa, 1974; NPE, 2004). As such, the use of any other language or variety of a language in formal discourse is usually unaccepted as it disrupts formal communications.

From oral history, the study of language linguistically in Nigeria began in the late 1950s in the then University College, Ibadan. The study of linguistics then was under the sub-department of phonetics in the department of English language and literature with the award of only postgraduate diploma. Upon the elevation of the university, the department of linguistics and Nigerian languages was created and subsequently established (Fafunwa, 1974; Nwala, 2015). In linguistics (scientific study of language), the structure of the language, the grammar of the language and the sound segments of the language under examination are usually investigated. Within comparative linguistics (a branch of linguistic study), the infiltration of another language in a certain domain or a concurrent mix-up of different varieties of the same language is usually unacceptable and viewed as ungrammatical. As a result of this norm, students in Nigeria who concurrently make use of British and American Englishes in external examinations organized by WAEC (West African Examination Council), JAMB (Joint Admission Matriculation Board), NECO (National Examination Council of Nigeria), and others, are usually discredited (Gilbert, 2020). Following the established view, the place of English language in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized; hence, English is the language of communication officially recognized and therefore performs all socio-political, cultural and linguistic roles in Nigeria (Amuseghan, 2007).

Statement of the problem

Recently, the world advanced to digital era where events and discourses are usually curtailed to a précised graphic representation of codes and sounds for easy and fast communication. This development led to the grammar rules normally associated with formality being unconsciously displaced. This development became more pronounced through the recent introduction of the use of the social media and its type and style of internet languages. It follows that the social media and internet languages has shifted the pattern of speech and the structural rules of the

English language in communication. Through the newly introduced language shift, certain acronyms, neologisms and abbreviations which contain linguistic items that are not in alignment with the formal English language grammar were embraced (Chopra, 2013), for examples:

1. BAE: “Before Anyone Else,” (typically referring to a person's significant).
2. BFF: meaning “Best Friends Forever.”
3. BRB: meaning “Be Right Back.”
4. BTW: meaning “By the Way.”
5. FBO: meaning “Facebook official.”
6. OMG: Stands for “oh my god.”
7. FOMO: “Fear of missing out.” And others.

Chopra identified the influence of the Internet in shifting the words used for speaking to one another beyond the ways traditionally made for communication. It also influences the simple act of talking – out loud and writing. The veracity of this situation led to Dorcas, Nyamanya, Omari and Nyanga’U (2017) stating that social media has penetrated the cradles of popular culture recently and over 1.5 billion citizens globally have joined online communities in the use of social platforms. As a result, industries from all walks of life have also resorted to the use of social media platforms for their transactions. Indeed, social media is relevant in all industries of the world; even in the domain where it is judged unacceptable, it is still a subject of investigation.

Following this situation as it is obvious in Nigeria, the current study investigates the linguistic elements contained in the language of Nigerian netizens that disrupt communication using the under listed objectives as a guide.

Research objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To identify social media communication,
- ii. To categorise Nigerian netizens,
- iii. To investigate social media linguistic items used by the Nigerian netizens,
- iv. To find out how the social media linguistic item disrupt communication.

Methodology

The study employs the qualitative research method as a less structured method of data collection and certainly more suitable for handling social phenomena. Vital information was got from various publications and documents of many organizations and scholars arranged according to the researcher’s intuitive knowledge as a normal native speaker and the various interactions with other competent native speakers of the language as it relates to this subject under investigation.

Review of related Literature

The print, radio and television were the leading media platforms in Nigeria at the beginning of the Fourth Republic and they played the roles of official documentations, public enlightenment, campaigns, advertisements, interpretation of policies, among other things. One of the hitches of these old media was the lack of opportunity for instant and live interactions. To a large extent, ownership interests and meticulous editorial processes could lead to some level of 'richness' being removed from the original news stories before such is made public on broadcast. It follows that new media platforms has addressed most of those rigorous situations across nations, including Nigeria.

According to Hiradhar and Gray (2008) cited in Anika (2014) MySpace, a well-identified social networking locations has got a number ranging to 110 million users on board. Some other locations making wave globally are the Facebook, having over 69 million users; the Friendster, having 58 million active users; the Hi5, has 70 million active users; the LinkedIn, has 20 million users; the Xanga actively engages 40 million users and the Flickr which has 9.6 million users. Furthermore, McNair (2009) and Shadrach (2017) in their separate opinions aver that the new media facilitated the capacity to provide viable and interactive platforms for political awareness, political mobilization, political debates and advertisements. Indeed, social media platforms such as the Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, blogging have been major channels through which the global public is shown the happenings in modern Nigeria. Statistically, internet users in Nigeria have greatly increased to the height of 122 million users: Facebook has 83.27% sign-ups and Instagram with 10.51% (Global Stats, 2021) and Africa Check (2021) states that the number of Twitter users in Nigeria is at 3 million, as of June 2021 (The National Communication Commission, 2021). The statistics shows that a greater number of Nigerians are internet users which have helped in prompt dissemination of information within and outside the residents of the nation.

On this note, Arroyo (2012) cited in Anika (2014) posited that once the social media was brought on board, it introduced a fresh system for people, principally among the youths, to relate with each another, based on their common interests. It is an indication that the emergence of social media and digitalization has brought about a linguistic paradigm shift among the 20th and 21st Century users of the English language. This recent developed technology is actually a medium that enables swift scholarship among students and their teachers/lecturers to fabricate social connections that will enhance distance learning. Again, Anderson (2008) sees the use of social media and its language for online learning which is a detachment of all distance education with the responsibility to provide access to education that is easier in time and in space than campus-based education. Contrarily, even though the internet language is an English lexifier language, the Nigerian language policy through the National policy on education (1977, 1981, 1998, 2004) made a major advance on educational language.

Apart from the National policy on education, various statements on language use in Nigeria favours the British English as contained in Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979, 1989, 1999 and

2011 constitution, Section 55 (as amended); the considerations and statements of government on the findings and suggestions of the Political Bureau, 1987; Cultural Policy for Nigeria, 1988; A Handbook on Nigerian Culture, 1991 (particularly the segment on the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria). In the programme of notion on the role or status of a language in a given nation, three categories are usually considered:

- i. Official language policy,
- ii. Educational language policy,
- iii. General language policy.

As it were, the official language and educational language policy of Nigeria favours the British English while the internet language belongs to the general language; that is the reason for non-acceptance of any other variety of English in the official and educational domain.

Netizens and linguistic elements of Nigerian netizens

The word Netizen is a recent coinage got from the blend of “net” and “citizens” (net + citizens = Netizens). The blending of the said morphemes was done by Michael F. Hauben in 1987. The internet pioneer and author is credited with the blending and popularization of the term netizens to refer to the people inhabiting the electronic commons of the internet (CNC magazine, 1987). By implication, internet users in any part of the world fall within the category of Netizens and their Nigerian counterparts.

Notably, Nigerians inhabiting the electronic commons of the internet like their equals in parts of the world make use of certain acronyms, neologisms and abbreviations which contain linguistic items that make their communication apparent, relevant and prompt in business transactions, advertisements and social discourse. As it were, to find out how the widely accepted language style could interrupt communication in the domain of the same English language requires the use of a theoretical framework as a guide.

Theory

The current study adopts the interactionist theory and the principles and parameters theory as the theoretical frameworks. The interactionist theory states that people have always had the innate desire to interact with others in the society (Sarem, 2014) and the only instrument that can be used to satisfy this desire is the language spoken in the immediate environment. This view suggests that the interactionist theory acknowledges the role of the language of the immediate environment in achieving the aims of every human society. On the interactionist approach, Nwala (2015) states that the keywords in interactionist theory are ‘interaction’ and ‘environment’. In his opinion, interaction and environment play significant roles in the acquisition or learning of language.

Subsequently, the use of the interactionist theory as a framework in this study will assist in the investigation of how social media linguistic elements are identified in the communication/interactions of Nigerian English language users. On the other hand, the

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principles, and parameters (henceforth, P&P) theory was set out by Noam Chomsky in 1983 during his study of the universal grammar of language. The universality of language grammar simply explains common features found in language grammar studies in different languages of the world that shows similarities and dissimilarities.

The principles according to Chomsky (1995), Ndimele (1999) and Gilbert and Isaac (2021) refer to hypotheses which capture a syntactic feature shared by all languages, while parameters refer to the measure of variations from or adaptation to the general principles. The principles usually address specific areas of the grammar, because of the modular nature of syntax. Principles and parameters as a framework within generative linguistics, study's the syntax of a natural language, describing in harmony with general established principles and specific parameters.

As a result, the use of the principles and parameters theory in the current study will describe the harmony of generally established principles of the native English language used in Nigeria and the specific parameters found in the linguistic structure of Nigerian netizens that disrupt formal communication. It follows that the theories have a strong grip on this study because every language policy needs to understand the linguistic structure and situation of the immediate environment for effective implementation.

Data analysis

Table 5.1: Data analysis

S/NO	Native English language	Media English language
8	As far as I know	AFAIK
9	Ask Me Anything	AMA
10	Age/Sex/Location	ASL
11	Because	b/c, bc
12	Business-to-business	B2B
13	Before	B4
14	Before Anyone Else	BAE
15	Best Friends Forever	BFF
16	By the way	BTW
17	Carbon copy	CC
18	Content Management System	CMS
19	Cost per click	CPC
20	Direct Message	DM
21	Face to face	F2F
22	Flashback Friday	FBF
23	Fear of Missing Out	FOMO
24	Got to go Ex. "Talk to you later! G2G!"	G2G
25	Great	Gr8
26	Happy birthday	HBD
27	I don't care	IDC
28	In my opinion	IMO

Social media linguistic elements in formal communication

29. The government and people of the state wish our governor an **HBD**.

30. The marketing department of the bank had got the **FOMO** in the start of 2022 business year.
31. We humbly solicit for your **Gr8** input in the documents presented.
32. Our application requesting a **F2F** meeting with the director is yet to be replied.
33. Ensure that all protocols are duly observed **b4** the meeting.

Sentences 28 to 33 contain elements of social media linguistic items at some points in the string of construction. Although, the statements are formal, but the insertion of the highlighted linguistic elements (which the netizens will not find difficult to understand) are not usually acceptable in formal statements in the view of education language policy in Nigeria (NPE, 2014). In the researcher's opinion, since the current reality accepts the social media linguistic items when parenthesized and their full graphic representation clearly inscribed; is an indication that language planning has the ability to provide for the use of such linguistic items un-parenthesized in a string of formal construction.

Findings

From the beginning of the Fourth Republic till date, the use of radio, newspaper and letter writing have played major roles in communication in Nigeria. The said media played the roles of official documentations, public enlightenment, campaigns, advertisements, interpretation of policies, among other things. One of the hitches of these old media was the lack of opportunity for instant, live interactions and ownership interests in editorial processes. The new media facilitated the capacity to provide viable and interactive platforms for wider reach to parts of the world through the internet. However, the identified linguistic paradigm shift from the rule guided English language usage, associated with formal speeches, letters and addresses to the use of acronyms, neologisms and abbreviations in order to catch up with the internet style of language use has introduced styles that are unacceptable in the formal sequences of English language structures in the domain of the English language formality.

It follows that when new words are used on social media, the existing formal linguistic elements are used less, pushed to create obstacles in communication and cause poor vocabulary development. Although the new normal has ability to swift communication through symbols, the language barricade ha a way of preventing the message communicated from being understood by the audience. The un-moderated digital media contain language variables and semantic hurdles that hinders effective passage of information formally and the simplification of the English language by the netizens have negative effects that disrupt academic and formal documentations.

Contribution to knowledge

The recommendation of this study to moderate and include the social media communication elements in academic curriculum is in line with the dynamism of language. The study has utilised the interactionist theory and the principles and parameters theory as frameworks to

synergise language syntax with sociolinguistics, sociology and anthropology in the new normal.

Conclusion

In modern society, the new media play a huge role in information dissemination, influencing public opinion and behaviour in the face of modern realities. It becomes eminent for language policy makers in Nigeria to consider the moderation and inclusion of the new media communication elements in academic curricula in view of its relevance in the Nigeria immediate environment to quashing the disruption of social media linguistic elements in formal communication.

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