The Social Media and Language Use: The Case of Facebook

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ABSTRACT

The social media is now the fastest and easiest means of communication; it is very popular and most of its sites are accessible. The Facebook, one of the popular types of the social media is not just common among youngsters; it is very dynamic, user-friendly and specific. This paper using the descriptive design and Technological Determision (TD) theory, investigates the language of the Facebook and discovers that the platform is awash with a lot of cyberslangs, acronyms, morphological shortenings, initialisms, contractions and neologisms. The paper discovers that the writing style of the Facebook departs from the known conventional ways of writing, a situation where a word can be represented in any form deemed fit by the user. Again, it is observed that the flexibility of the platform, its economic sensitivity or time saving nature and its user friendliness makes the platform attractive. But the negative implication of all these is that it is anti-pedagogy and portends great danger to language learning and usage.

INTRODUCTION

Language is of one of the uncommon gifts of nature that can make or mar a people, a society or a nation. As a means of communication (Nwala, 2015), language is systematically codified. The phonemes (the speech sounds) are conventionally organised into segments of orthographic representations and spelling system. The representations identify the language and serve as common means of exchange of communication among the users of a language.

The English language like any other developed human language has its semiotic signs, orthography and spelling systems, which are used in all forms of written communications. Anybody who is a first, second or foreign language user of the English (who is competent in it) knows the semiotic conventions of the language and is linguistically able to recognize and use them in every normal medium and context.

The social media (or network to be specific) is one of the channels where language is vigorously used. The social media- web-based communication tools comprise various channels of electronic or mediated technologies that facilitate communication and interaction among people and groups within the cyber space. Unlike human language which is structurally and grammatically conventionalized, the social media employ different forms of networks that are users or group-specific to make communications local among such groups or clients.

Among the different subcategories of the social media is the Facebook. The Facebook like any other form of the social network is interact-based. As a social network, it can be used to connect friends, families, customers, classmates and clients. The Facebook at the moment is the most popular, and widely used social network. Most of the users of the Facebook are teenagers and school age youths. The language of the Facebook of late is in the state of flux. People use all forms of acronyms and neologisms to represent their ideas, opinions and messages. Acronyms such as BD **big deal**, BF **boyfriend**; GF **girlfriends**, BRB **be right back**; BTW '**by the way**; HBD '**happy birthday**; JK **just kidding**; KK **cool** or **okay** and their types are common in the Facebook. The examples given above can also be represented in different forms since the system is not standardized. It therefore means that the linguistic dynamism of the social media with regard to the Facebook is linguistically and communicatively inadequate and makes a meal of mutual intelligibility-a feature of language which makes possible for people to share and exchange maximum communication. This problem and negative consequences of the flexibility of the social media

bring to focus the aim and goal of this paper. Firstly, to show-case the dynamic, economic sensitivity and the user friendly nature of the Facebook, and secondly, to observe that the user friendly nature and openness of the social media (in this case the Facebook), is both linguistically inimical to lan-guage and pedagogically dangerous.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language

Language is one of the commonly defined terms in linguis-tics. The reason is because of its central position in human existence. It makes, defines a people and a nation, hence, Nwala (2015) calls it the support system of all human en-deavours.

Language is a system of linguistic communication which subsumes a number of mutually intelligible varieties. It is a repository of a people's history and culture. Language, we know has many varieties, which is regionally, occupationally or socially defined. For Halliday (1964) language is used in all human related interactions. It is the means through which humans communicate and interact with each other by either a habitually used oral-auditory symbol or other forms of se-miotic signs.

In a related opinion, Piaget (1955, p. 71) sees language as "an organized system of arbitrary vocal sounds by which a particular social group operates". His view agrees with those of Bloch and Trager (1942; p. 13) which see language "as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a society cooperates". The two definitions picture or see lan-guage and the society to be inseparable. This is quite correct. In fact, socio-linguistically speaking, there is a sort of sym-biotic relationship between the society and language. The change in the forms 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).

Language is a type of social communion, which is com-municatively shared by a group of users. They use the forms to cooperate and do different things. This is what Nwala (2015; p. 3) meant when he notes that "language is a shared code of behaviour, by people". Ndimele (2001, P.1) in a similar opinion sees language as "essentially communica-tion system in the sense that it associates meaning (i.e. the meaning) with a set of signs (i.e. the sounds and symbols)". Ndimele's opinion agrees with universal and changing na-ture 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 the 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 acronyms and neologism used in the social media to a large extent are not agreed-upon. They are linguistic evolu-tions that are linguistically unpredictable. They give differ-ent meanings and can be interpreted differently by different people. What is correct judging from the present situation of the language of the social media is that language can ap-pear in different forms and shapes; and can be linguistically and communicatively interpreted in different ways. It is the property of the users, groups and society; with it, one can do many things, perform many actions and achieve many goals (cf. Austin, 1962).

The Social Media

Information Communication Technology (ICT) is an ad-vance form of language use. It is a form of computer-medi-ated system of communication and interaction which helps to advance the courses of man and his environment. The so-cial media are offshoots of ICT. 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 indi-viduals 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 people in which they create, share and exchange comments among themselves on different networks.

The social media is web-based service that allows in-dividuals, communities and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, and share such contents through one-to-one, or one-to many communications.

The foregoing simple means that the social media, which has social network as a subcategory is an internet based tech-nology. It uses computer-related facilities and resources to enhance effective communication and information dissemi-nation among people. It is also clear from the foregoing that the contents of the social media which are shared are us-er-generated. This therefore makes it multifaceted phenome-na, which is dynamic and open. Elisu Morceau (2016 cited) in Bouchiki and Bounanami (2016) notes the openness of the social media and observes that it has both positive and neg-ative effects. The positive or advantage of the 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 endeavours. But the disadvantages are enunciated in privacy issues. This implies 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 disad-vantage of the social media which is the bother of this paper is to trendy spelling style of the social media which does not promote effective language teaching and learning.

Facebook

This is an American online social network. It is a site on the internet that allows registered users to create personal or group profiles, upload photo, videos and messages, lo-cate friends meet different people and make new friends. The Facebook network was created by Mark Zucherbery in February 4, 2004. Since its evolution, the social media has witnessed a lot interest very all over, especially as the site can be accessed from a large range of connectivity, such as desktop computers, laptops, tablets computers and

smartphones. The Facebook is almost the first site contact or the beginning point of social media communication of every youngster; this is why the number of people (especially the youth) that log into the Facebook social network, everyday runs into thousands of millions. The Facebook network is awash with a lot innovations and unconventional linguistic writing styles. This is because the network is user friendly, open and linguistically user-specific.

Theoretical Framework

In this article, we adopt the Technological Determision (TD) theory. It is a term that was first used by Thornstein Veblen (1899), an American sociologist and economist. It is a reductionist theory which assumes that a society's technology determines the development of its social structures and cultural values. Freshness and newness to the term in the form of theory was enunciated in 1964 by Marshal Mchuhan. According to him, technologies shape the individual and the society. It models the thoughts, actions and feelings of the individual and defines the activities of the society. The response and activities of the youths, the school age, who are involved in language learning, are largely influenced by the social media, a product of new age science and technology. The writing system of the youngsters, which is largely different from the conventionally known English writing system, is the product of the social media, a trendy system.

The choice of this theoretical framework is to make this paper not only relevant but correct with the technological circumstances of our time. The theory also helps us situate the article within the confines of the influence of the social on language use.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, we adopted a descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design according to Nwankwo (2013, p. 62) "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". Using this design, we were able to collect Facebook chatting extracts of ten people and subsequently analysed them noting instances of acronyms, abbreviations and unconventional writing styles.

DATA PRESENTATION

Here we present discourses or Facebook interactions of ten students. They are presented is pairs, named text.

Text 1
   Speaker A. bro gudevenin
   Speaker B. Good evening, how are you?
   Speaker A. fyn sir, hw is family?
   Speaker B. We are fine, thanks
   Speaker A. ok, hw is bro clement planning for the wife's burial?
   Speaker B. He is still making arrangement, the date is yet to fixed
   Speaker A. ok, sir any tyn is been fixed, let me kn. My mum's dad is dead will b burial by nxt wk friday

Text 2
   Speaker A. hv you stated the biznes?
   Speaker B. Just paid 4 d shop
   Speaker A. Ok dear, i wil cum c the place when u hv started
   Speaker B. kk. Will k u posted
Text 3
   Speaker A. Did you c my PA b4 traveling ?
   Speaker B. No she didn't kum hum on tym, coz I left b 5.21
   Speaker A. So u won't c ur father ?
   Speaker B. Coz I told her of my travel, I had sometin to discuss wit m elder sis
Text 4
   Speaker A. Don't wori, when I kum bk, I wil kum n c u
   Speaker B. No problem
   Speaker A. Gud nite boo, ehhh hw is ur health?
   Speaker B. I am a bit better nw, tnk u
Text 5
   Speaker A. yes dear, am bk
   Speaker B. Alright. Oop u prayed 4 me
   Speaker A. yes o
   Speaker B. where ar u nw?
   Speaker A. In Opobo kmin bk today, abt leaving the ous nw. i hv seen my project supervisor, tnx
Text 6
   Speaker A. hy boo gud pm
   Speaker B. Run away bea
   Speaker A. gud pm boo
   Speaker B. where hv u been?
   Speaker A uniport
   Speaker B. hiding, i guess
   Speaker A. ya
Text 7
   Speaker A. Gud day sir
   Speaker B. How are you? It appears you have slept
   Speaker A. M 5n sir. Happpy gud Friday. Haven't slept, went 2 get sumtng
Text 8
   Speaker A. gud evening sir
   Speaker B. How are you ?
   Speaker A. m 5n sir. Hw was ur day sir?
   Speaker B. Fine. What about your parents ?
   Speaker A. dey r doing gr8. Hw is d family ?
   Speaker B. Fine, my thanks
   Speaker A. U r welcum sir
Text 9
   Speaker A. gudpm sir, hw wz ur day nd ur family ?
   Speaker B. Thanks my dear, how are you?
   Speaker A. im fn tnk u. happi 2 chat wit u 2day
   Speaker B. So, how is your program?
   Speaker A. tnk God am done wit it since, dea z no probl at all. Though I miss batch 4 service,z wen de ar stil processing my result by dt im thru de hav end names 2 abuja jst dt week. Maybe dtz hw God wnt it.
Text 10
   Speaker A. gudevening sir. longest tym, h war u doing, nd my pple sir? Sir hv u forgotten me already, u ar not replying my message, why?

Speaker B. I have not forgotten you, my dearie. How are you and your siblings?

Speaker A. ok im fine tnk u sir. sorry i ve nt bn calln al dis while. z hw my situation z now but wen tns turn aroud for me, I wil surely visit u kk. As for my siblings de ar fine nd alar graduate now except last born dt finished sec skul, las year nd first son hs done wit master degree nd ist daughter z now married wit one kid. De stay in P.H. So God z incharge. i hope u ar fine too.

ANALYSIS

The chats or discourses above contain a lot of unconventional writing system found among the language use of the youngsters or present day students in the social media. In the chats we see different forms of abbreviations, coinages, abnormal

Unconventional Linguistic Features in the Discourses

i. Non-standard spelling/orthography: gud (good), kum (come), ur (your), ous (house), (welcum), they (dey), biznes (busness), hum (home), jst (just) etc.

ii. Letter/number homophone: 2 (to), b4 (before), 4 (for), gr8 (great). 2day (today) 5n (fine)

iii. Acronym, shorthening and Cyberslang: kk (fine,okay or thank), boo (boy), bae (baby), ya (yes); dey (they), dea (there), de (the, they), dez (that is), dis (this), sometin or sumtng (something), wori (worry), oop (hope), kmin (coming), happi (happy), w it (with), thru (through), (probl), wen (when), hav (have), stil (still), las (last), (calln), wil (will), aroud (around)

iv. Use of letter to represent words: b (be or before), d (the), u (you), k (keep), c (see), n (and), r (are), z (is)

v. Abbreviations: fyn, (fine), hw (how), tyn, tym (time), kn (know), nxt (next), wk (week), hv (have), bk (back), tnk, tnx (thank); nw (now), ar (are), abt (about), wz (was), nd (and), fn (fine), dt (that), skul (school), hs (has), nt (not), bn (been)

The data show a high degree of unconventional and different forms of writing, a situation that is uncommon and worrisome. The data show a system which is open and unconventional, a case where each person is free to use any form of his or choice to represent his or her message. Writing system or language generally is rule-governed, conventional, learnable and predictable. But what we see from the discourses is an aberration, one which is at the mercy of the language user. In example for (iv), we see where single letters of orthography are used to stand for or represent words. The letters **b, u, d, n, r,** and **z** to mention just a few represent *be, you, the, and, are* and *is* respectively. In example five – abbreviations, all forms of unusual abbreviations were observed. Apart from the use of unusual abbreviations, observable in the data are the use of more than a form to stand for an abbreviated word. For instance, **tnx** and **tnk** are used to stand for *thank*; tyn and tym stand for *time*. In the discourse, single letters and abbreviated ones were used to represent the same words. For example the words *and, are* and *the* or *they, fine* were represented with **n** or **nd**; **r** or **ar** and **de** or **d**; **fyn** or **fn**. The data

also showed apart from the use of the abbreviated fyn and fn for the *fine*, it can also be represented the combination of a figure and a letter, as in 5n. This situation makes the system unpredictable and confusing.

The extent to which the language of the social media has negatively imparted on the psych of students is noticeable in texts 7,8,9 and 10, which is a chat or dialogue between two students and two lecturers. A dialogue between a student and his/her lecturer to some extent is supposed to be formal or semiformal and should also reflect in the language. But in the texts we noticed that the lecturers used the formal expressions, the students used the cyberslangs. They failed to observe that they were talking with their lecturers who they cultural owe high regard and therefore should conventionally accepted language code or writing system. They were so free and at home that they did not even notice the language choice of their co-interactants. In text 9 for instance, the student opened the discourse thus: *gudpm sir, hw wz ur day nd ur family?* but the lecturer responded formally thus: *thanks my dear, how are you?*. The student not mindful of the language use of the lecturer continued: *im fn tnk u. happi 2 chat wit u 2day*. The reason is quite simply, the student was linguistically and socially unconsciously of the context, or better does not know of any difference in codes or language use. This is very common in the writings of students; in fact, it is not out of place to see students use cyberslangs in examination compositions.

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

CONCLUSION

This paper has investigated the effects of the social media on the language use of the students using the Facebook as a test case. The findings as shown in the texts reveal that the students employ all forms of unconventional language codes or writing system and are careless or unmindful of the context and their co-interactants. The writing styles of the students are quite open, unpredictable and student-specific. This informs why the words *thank, the, and, are, fine* etc. are written as **tnx, tnk, d, de, r, ar, n, nd, fyn** and **fn** respectively. The openness and unpredictability of the language use of the students in the 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 of the language of the social media and the pedagogical deviation portends great danger to the government, social and the educational sectors. The makes a sort clarion calls to the society to use the innovation of the social media with caution. This

is a truism when we recall that the development, transformation and sustenance of our world and environment largely depend on the communicative power of language and the pedagogical empowerment of the youths.

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