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NEW ENGLISHES FROM THE NIGERIAN LANGUAGES IN SOCIAL MEDIA

AMADI, EBERECHI CHINENYE
Department Of Linguistics
Faculty of Arts
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
ec.amadi@unizik.edu.ng, +2348033350990

NWACHUKWU, OBINNA SOLOMON
obinna2505@gmail.com, +2348063123559
&
SAMUEL, KOSISOCHUKWU MIRABEL
mirabelkosi88@gmail.com, +2348144024280

Abstract

There has been a new trend in the use of English in social media. Due to the urgent need to communicate, especially by the young people, the English language has been subjected to several mutilations and changes to suit the purpose of these young vibrant users. This study used a descriptive approach to analyze the new Englishes and the Nigerian languages that have also found their way into the English language as used in social media platforms such a Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. As a result of the peculiarity of this usage as spread across the whole social media, it might be quite difficult to do a wide sampling of data for the analysis. Rather, random data will be selected across the board to provide and analyze this new Englishes and how they have been used in social media as well as their impact on the same medium of usage and the users.

Keywords: New Englishes, English Language, Nigerian Languages, Social Media.

Introduction

Ever since Nigeria gained independence in the 1960s, from the British rule, English language became our medium of expression and on official language. In recent times, there has been a new trend in the dynamics of the use of English Language in Nigeria. With the advent of several social media platforms such as Face book, what's app, twitter and telegram, there have been an infiltration of different kinds of 'Englishes' into the mainstream English language. There is now a new kind of English that has emerged as a result of social, cultural and linguistic influences from all quarters. The new Nigerian English is an embodiment of some new characteristics such as high pitch pronunciation, lots of abbreviations and shortening of words to pass across coded meanings. What is now obtainable is a new variation of English that is fast paced and is in tune with the present day conversations especially among the youths. The English language in itself has witnessed a lot of changes and new modifications. It has never been the same ever since then. However, this paper attempts to fill a gap in literature by looking at the very recent trends of the use of English language in social media with all their dynamics meaning and usage and contexts.

Review of Literature

There have been a few studies done in this area generally. Some of the prominent ones are to be discussed here. Discussing about this new kind of English used in social media, Udofot and Mbarachi (2016) corroborate the fact that this new kind of English has been in circulation during the last two decades. In their study, they commended (Baron 2003, Postequillo 2003, and Crystal, 2005) for studying the internet from a sociolinguist perspective. They go on to observe that Facebook has become an important way of teaching English language to people. In addition, Kabilan, Ahmad &Abidin (2010), in a nutshell observed that Lamidi (2012) seem to be the only Nigerian who has actually done a much related work on this new Nigerian English using the Nairaland platform as a case study. According to them, there has not been any other Nigerian who had written on that subject matter.

Kaan, Amase and Tsavmbu (2013) examine Nigerian English in the light of its unique characteristics emanating from the mode of acquisition of the language by Nigerians, and the socio-cultural environment in which English is now used. In their data analysis, they employed Uriel Weinreich's theory of language contact to explicate the phenomenon of language variation. It was observed that the English language in Nigeria has been cultivated and re-domesticated to accommodate the distinct linguistic, cultural identities and tradition of the people of Nigeria. That it achieved by acquiring local color and distinguished itself from the native speaker variety with features reflected at the semantic level. Ojetunde (2013) on the other hand investigated the lexico-grammatical errors in Nigerian English in order for teachers and learners of English to understand learners' communicative competence in English. This shows the extent of differences between Nigerian variety of English and the British variety at the lexical and grammatical levels, deviations were seen at syntax and lexicon–semantic level in Nigerian English, and as such affect the English language usage, pedagogy and academic performance of Nigerian students.

Olushola (2013) identifies deviance and deviation in Nigerian English syntax and usage, using a socio–linguistic (systemic grammar or Functional Linguistics) framework of M.A.K. Halliday. However, data were analyzed from the day-to-day English use. It's observed that the innovation of typical Nigerian English is as a result of the local socio – cultural and linguistic contexts of Nigerian culture and society. The implication of deviance and deviation in Nigerian English is therefore discussed with reference to international intelligibility and communicative strategies.

Furthermore, Foluke (2017) reports that Nigerian English (NE) coinages was borne out of socio-cultural norms, experiences and practices. The work looked at the socio-pragmatic factors that influence coinages and seven categories of Nigerian English coinages were identified and tested among different groups of English as second language users using quantitative design. In her argument she revealed that some of the features of Nigerian English coinages are more acceptable and intelligible than others. Besides, Nigerian English coinages in texts, discussions and newspapers enjoyed the highest acceptability rating while coinages based on meaning broadening, narrowing and total shift received the highest intelligibility rating. She further recommended that Nigerian English and its coinages should have agreed norms and conventions that can be used as a model for education and public use

while maintaining Standard English usage in grammar and pronunciation. These coinages should also be codified and represented in dictionaries and grammar books.

Ojetunde (2019) examined the use of English on social media with a view to assess the extent to which the language of social media conforms to the Standard English usage using constructed homophony as theoretical framework. Her data were from selected messages and posts on Facebook, WhatsApp and SMS. Thirty (30) texts were randomly selected from the data gathered and analyzed textually. It was observed that non-conforming to social media use of English appears at the grammatical level; sentences, phrases and words, there were cases where words are miss pelt to speed up the rate of communication and lexically, there is a misappropriation of existing words. New words are literally created and new meanings are given to existing words.

The above study therefore concluded that deviation occur because the rules and conventions of word and sentence patterns in English cannot be complied with by social media users. So therefore, English is regarded as variety of English since the description and codification of social media linguistic features and the provision of conducive, linguistic, educational and political environments for its popularity and use have not been established. He therefore advised that users of social media should always be conscious not to transfer the linguistic features of social media language to formal use of English.

Methodology

This article adopted a descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design according to Nwankwo (2013) cited in Nwala and Tamunobelema (2019) "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". Data for this work were collect from social media such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter posts and comments of people and subsequently analyzed them noting instances of acronyms, abbreviations and semantic meaning of borrowed words into the English lexicon.

Analysis of available data

As stated above, there is now a sense of urgency among young person's to communicate very fast. They seem to always be in a hurry in everything they do, Most times, they just want to quickly drop a message and concentrate on other matters that interest them. Hence, the reason there are shortened version of English prevalent in most of their social media communications. This kind of English is appalling in the sense that according to Reuben Abati (2016), "It is beginning to creep into regular writing". These new crops of users now find it very difficult to "write grammatical correct sentences". A closer look at the kind of English written on twitter and Whatsapp will indicate the violation of the English language to suit their purpose. The letter "4" now replaces "for" and has been used in abbreviated forms to form different words with different meanings. Take for instance the following examples: 4WD now stands for "forward", 4GET stands for "forget", and 4KU now stands for the foul words "fuck you". Other examples include 4TUNE which stands for "fortune", 4EVA which stands for "forever" and so on.

Apart from the use of '4' in the above instance, there is also the use of the letter "U" to coin some new words in abbreviation to convey the meaning of certain words most likely to make

it possible to type faster. Examples include, CUCM2dy standing for "can you see me today", HWU stands for:" how are you", HURU stands for "who are you" and many other examples. In a more elaborate manner, Abati outlines more detailed examples with several linguistic manipulations such as follows:

the computer sign "@" has effectively replaced the word "at"; "come" is now "cum", the conjunction "and" is represented with an "n" or the sign &, "that" is now "dat", "temporary" is likely to be written as "temp", "are" as "r", "your" as "ur" "to" as "2", "take" as "tk." In place of "thank you", you are likely to find "tank u", "with" is now "wit" or "wif", and "sorry" is commonly written as "sowie". I have also seen such expressions as "Hawayu?" ("How are you?"), or "Wia r d u?" ("where are the you?"). The you? The me? The us?

These features as seen above are a reflection of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the country, as well as the influence of local languages on the use of English.

Beyond the above usage of English Language, there is also another significant kind of English used in communication in Nigeria known as Pidgin English. Nigerian Pidgin English can be said to be "originated as a lingua franca for trade purposes amongst the Nigerians and the Portuguese merchants during the 17th century" (Nkwocha, 2018). This is a broken English orcreoles language that has evolved from a mixture of English and local Nigerian languages. It is widely spoken especially along the shores of West Africa with each country adding its own blend of words to make for easy understanding among its citizens. In Nigeria, it is now understood across the country and is now a common language of communication in informal situations. It has also found its way into social media and being used in a variety of ways such as political commentary, ridicule, humor and satire. Some of the very common pidgin English used in social media are as follows: 'Na u sabi' meaning " it is your concern" this is used in conversations where someone might not want to reveal in totality what he/she means or wants to communicate. It is usually applicable among young people especially when a young man is wooing a girl and he says one nasty thing, the girl feeling shy not to respond will say "na you sabioo" in other words, it's your concern. Other examples commonly used are ," I go com",'(I will come) , wetin you mean'(what do you mean) , "leav am" (leave it) U too sabi (you are very enlightened or intelligent) how na or how u dey (how are you) better yan now or beta tokna (you better talk now) both combination can be used since they express the same meaning. It is clear that this is beginning to be a part of English now very much acceptable in the main English language communication as part of colloquial usage in social media.

Nigerian Languages in the social media; the Yoruba examples

It is quite interesting the way some new words from our local dialects are finding their way into English. Yoruba language is one of those major languages that have some of its words adapted into English through the social media or internet. There has been this popular recent one, " Shey you dey whine me ni" which was popularly introduced by Austine Emmanuel the popular Nigerian Singer in his song has become a popular house hold slang used among young people on Facebook, twitter, Tiktok etc. This slang simply means "So you are trying to deceive me". It is mainly used when some people feel you are trying to play with their intelligence. Khadijat (2022) had written extensively on some of those slangs commonly used. We are going to incorporate them in this study while trying to give an in depth analysis of

their meanings and implications as well as when they are used. Apart from the above example, the next word she mentioned was 'Omo"

This particular word does not have a specific meaning. Rather, it is usually used as an exclamatory word for surprise, excitement and even shock. Most times, when people use it, they are trying to avoid saying something that could land them into trouble. In a society where anything you say could be recorded and used against you in the court. People try as much as possible to avoid saying things with such words. Even in social media, you see people saying" Omo I don tire oo" or "omoo the tin tire me ooo" in their chats meaning that the situation has given them night mares and they are tired of it. For instance, someone might have gone to the bank to withdraw money and he/she is chatting with other person, the other person could say, "Omoo if you see the queue in the bank today, you go tire" such is used to explain that there was a lot of crowd in the bank that it would have taken a lot of time for one to finish a transaction.

"Japa" is another Yoruba word that came into prominence because of its meaning to most young people on social media. Once it is mentioned, the mind goes to one thing that is, "relocating abroad'. It's actual Yoruba meaning is "moving swiftly' now this is attributed to the speed in which the relocation happens. Nigerians are highly spiritual people; they tend to believe that if you tell someone about your relocation, they might get jealous and do something nasty to stop the person from travelling. Most cases, it is kept as a secret until all plans are concluded and the person migrates before people back home start hearing the news. Another word that has equally become prominent is "shebi" it is used as an affirmation in conversation. For instance, we often hear people say "shebina you talk am" it simply means "It is you that said it" that is mixing the pidgin with the Yoruba word to communicate in English. It is also used in many other examples like "shebi you don start now", "na you get that ball shebi" etc.

During his presidential campaign in 2022, the APC Presidential elect Bola Ahmed Tinubu used a work "Emi Lokan" when translated it means "it is my turn". Ever since then, this expression has found its way into social media. People now use it to express ownership of something in their conversations. Another popular Yoruba expression is "Ma Fo" which was popularized by the Nigerian singer Naira Marley. Literarily it means 'don't break' but its applicable meaning is "don't be intimidated." Another interesting word is "Werey" in Yoruba it means "mad' as in madness. So if someone says "himdeywereynioo" it simply means 'he is mad'. In colloquial language, it could be an insult or used to abuse someone when one does something wrong. There are many other such words used in social media but we have decided to select some of the popular ones for our purpose. Through providing their meanings, one will begin to appreciate the context of use and the reason why these words are now used in social media.

Nigerian Languages in the social media: The Igbo examples

As can be seen in the Yoruba example, there are Igbo words that are now used as part of the language of the social media. We shall discuss some of them and provide their meaning. Examples of common words are: 'Chai', 'Ewo' 'maka', 'gini' "Chimoo"

"Chai" is used to show pity or empathy when something happens to someone. Examples include when someone loses a loved one, lost a job or falls down. It is generally used to express something bad that happens to someone. Sometimes it could be used as just an exclamation like saying "really" did that really happen and so on.

"Ewo" is used as an exclamation as well. People often use it when an unpleasant situation happens or when they an unexpected event occurs.

"Maka'' this is used to represent "for" for instance someone might say "maka gini' which means "for what reasons"

"Chimoo" this is an exclamation used to express surprise when something happens most times unexpected events.

Nigerian Language in the social media: The Hausa examples

Just like it is obtainable above, the Hausa language has also found its way into the social media. They are now in the family of Nigerian English as they are used in conversations across social media and the internet. Kperogi (2022) in his study of these new Hausa Nigerian English has observed these words have also experienced mutilations or their meanings have been changed to adapt to the Nigerian situation. We shall look at some of these words especially the popular once as required in our analysis. They are as follows:" Buka", "Kaya mata", "See gobe", "Wahala", "mugu", "Haba", "Shege" , "Jaraa"

Buka ; This is used to refer to road side food vendor. Kperogi observed that it originated from the Hausa word "bukka" which means a temporary hut that is shackled not in a proper shape. But this word has come to stay even in the colloquial interactions of people and in social media. In fact, it has found its way into part of the corpus of Nigerian English.

Kaya mata: This word originated from the word kayanmata which is a sexual stimulant for women. Recently, it can be said to be whatever drug given to women to lure them to bed

See gobe: Hausa people use this word when they want to say good night. But this is now popularly known as meaning "to see trouble" in most Nigerian context as seen in social median and everyday interaction.

Wahala: A word that is derived from the Arabic word "Wahla" meaning, trouble or terror it is now being popularized in Nigeria and some parts of West Africa. It is now also popularized in tiktok videos and comedy skits as you will keep hearing "wahala wahala, wahala, wahala' especially when a suspense is to be unveiled.

Mugu: This is a word generated from Hausa which means "a fool" or someone who can easily be cheated. It was generally popularized by scammers in the past but still in use till today. These days we hear things like, 'that guy na mugu o' meaning that such a person can easily be cheated.

Haba: A word that is used as an exclamation just like ewo in Igbo and so on. It is used to express surprise or wonder over an incident. When next you see this word definitely you will know why it was used in that context.

Shege: When one says shege it is seen as an abusive word and unlike the Yorubas that have strings of abusive words, this is a single word when used the person offended raises his hands and shows in front of the person he is abusing. It has become popular in social media conversations as well.

Jaraa; It is a word used to ask for a little extra from a vendor or merchant selling food and other items. It has become a fabric of the Nigerian lifestyle such that anytime we want to buy something; we must ask for an extra, if not, we don't get satisfied from the services of that vendor.

Findings

Through this study, it is evident that we now have in our hands a crop of young people and generation of people who believe in their own languages. They are in a class of their own and wish to estrange anyone who does not belong to their social group. They are quick to write, twit, share, do viral videos as fast as they can be. It goes a long way to establish people as cultural entity. Through the use of these forms of communication, they can communicate to anybody within this cycle as long as such a person also belongs to this category and knows how to use the new language of communication. The use of local language which is now very common in social media tries to preserve our culture and traditions, thereby linking us to the world stage.

This new kind of English is affecting young people in Nigeria as they now unknowingly utilize such English in writing official examinations such as seen in the writings of secondary students in their WAEC examination. These new set of young people find it very difficult to write grammatically correct English languages in interviews and official letters. This is the dangerous impact of such forms of language on them.

Interestingly, some of the words we examined in this paper have also found their way into the Oxford Dictionary as loan words just like other loan words are being incorporated into the English language from various languages of the world.

On the other hand, the entrant of this new English, coupled with Nigerian languages in social media conversation, has had significant implications for language use in Nigeria. It has challenged the dominance of Standard English as the language of communication and has given room for local identities and cultures to thrive. The use of this new English and Nigerian languages on social media have also helped to bridge the gap between different linguistic communities in Nigeria, promoting a sense of unity and understanding.

Conclusion

It is evident that the emergence of new English and the incorporation of Nigerian languages in social media conversations is a reflection of the linguistic and cultural diversity of Nigeria as a nation. It has given room for the expression of local identities and cultures, encouraging a sense of unity and understanding. The use of new English and Nigerian languages on social media is a proof of the adaptability and creativity of Nigerians in the face of multiple linguistic and cultural dynamics.

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