



STANDARD ENGLISH AND THE DISTORTION INTRODUCED BY SOCIAL MEDIA SHORT MESSAGES

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ABSTRACT: *This study assesses the negative effect of social media text messaging on the Standard Written English of Nigerian undergraduates. Data is elicited from the written English of undergraduates from the three most popularly used social media websites in Nigeria; namely, Facebook, Whatsapp and Instagram. The data is analyzed using a simple percentage. The results are presented in tabular form. The study reveals that the use of social media text messaging prevalent on social media platforms has impacted negatively, the Standard of written English of Nigerian university undergraduates. The study further observes that the major areas of deviation found in the written English language of the undergraduates include: wrong punctuation, wrong spelling, breaking of concord/agreement rules, code-mixing and code-switching, etc. The study shows that to a large extent, the use of text messages has affected adherence to Standard written English of undergraduates in Nigeria. The study, therefore, recommends that urgent pragmatic measures are needed to curb the problem. Specifically, the study recommends the following measures as checks: to awaken the consciousness of the undergraduates to the importance of the use of the Standard English language in their communication; to urge the media to use its functions as a watchdog of society to sensitize the public and condemn the profuse use of social media text at the expense of the use of Standard English and to enlighten undergraduates to use Standard English in all forms of their formal communication to uphold the continued development of Standard English usage in the universities and society at large.*

KEYWORDS: Social Media Text Messaging, Standard Written English, Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram.



INTRODUCTION

It has been commonly acknowledged that man has undergone a great technological transformation over the years. This technological transformation has indeed transited man from the medieval ages of cuneiform writing to the present day of alphabetical writing. In recent times, however, there is overwhelming evidence that man has taken even greater leaps in the business of communication through writing. This is evident in the unprecedented advancements in information technology, which has greatly transformed the entire world into a real global village, in such a way that vast geographical, cultural-cum-political distances have been curtailed by a microchip/silicon revolution, desktop publishing, satellite and cable television. The fascinating and interesting story continues of course with the World Wide Web and other computer-based communication resources (Okoh 7).

Every day new inventions keep unfolding, especially in science and technology. With this, people acquire new information, technologies, lifestyle and language to mention but a few. The most popular and fastest-growing of this new trend is the Internet. Since 1990, the Internet has rapidly grown in an unprecedented form and has continued till today. All media exists to invest our lives with artificial perception and arbitrary values (Macluham 199). The introduction of the Internet has generated multiple advantages for the general well-being of man. This includes the establishment of many industries such as online advertising and e-commerce business, the connection of people all around the world, the creation of room for easier communication globally, guaranteed easy access to educational materials and so on. In addition, from the Internet, tons of social network sites have also emerged. Formerly, simple online communication tools such as e-mail and MSN were used for easy communication internationally, but within the past few years, these communication tools have advanced into more multiple and complex platforms. Amongst them is the social media platform.

Notwithstanding, these platforms still maintain the ultimate goal of the initial online communication tools which is the establishment of the connection between every human. Social media has been defined as the interactive forms of media that allow users to interact with and publish to each other generally by means of the Internet. Merriam-Webster Dictionary also defines it as a form of electronic communication through which people create online communication to share information, ideas, personal messages, etc. Some examples of these social media platforms include Facebook, Google +, Twitter, Whatsapp, Pinterest, Snapchat, Instagram, Wikia, and YouTube.

Presently, the use of these network platforms especially social media is very popular, amongst teenagers and the youth. They hold social media in high esteem and are excited by it because they believe that information from social media is authentic. They contend that being involved in it makes them smart and acceptable amongst their peers. Recent statistics show that social media hosts not less than 100,000,000 registered users. In America alone, a survey reported that 84 per cent of adolescents have a Facebook account. Over 60 per cent of 13 to 17-year-olds have at least one profile on social media with many others who spend more than two hours each day on these sites.

These youth create accounts with social media sites, using smartphones and getting connected by texting, chatting and calls to as many as they can reach which includes friends, relatives, business associates, etc. Also, they are connected to people from different countries, and educational backgrounds and engage in all manner of conversations. Social media has been



noted for its advantages which include: connecting people worldwide, easy communication or interaction between people globally, easy transaction of businesses, rapid dissemination of information, etc.

However, the uses of social media platforms also come with some negative effects. The variety of English written on social media platforms has posed a great challenge to the standard of written English because; it is a complete deviation from the Standard English written form. In fact, the English written on social media is a corrupt version of standard written English.

The Advent English

The English language originated from the dialect of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes (Anglo-Saxons)-the three Germanic tribes that invaded and dispossessed the Celtic speakers during the fifth and sixth centuries (Ndubuisi 9). Within a very short period of time, English spread so rapidly and become the most influential means of communication globally (Okoh 27). Presently, over one billion people could communicate in English to some extent. Out of this population, 300 million are native speakers (L_1) of English while around 250 million people use English as a second language (L_2). The remaining number can be attributed to the numerous others who use English for one specific purpose or the other (Okoh 28). Nigeria falls among the second language (L_2) users of English with the total number of speakers placed at about 79 million (Ngulube 66). Meanwhile, the timing of the advent of the English Language in Nigeria is not certain, nor is there any specific record of the Nigerians who used or spoke the English Language first (Ogu 64). English is a borrowed gown and one of the inheritances from our colonial experience (Uzozie 19).

Nigeria is a highly multilingual nation with over 450 indigenous languages. Its multilingual nature has given room for the English Language to be elevated and used as an official language of governance, business and commerce, literature, mass media and communication (Okoh 40-41). In education, it is used as the medium of instruction from the primary school level through the secondary to the university level. It is also studied as a subject in school. In addition, a pass in it is required for promotion to a higher class as well as certification at the secondary school level. A credit pass in English, as well, is required for admission into any Nigerian University and a pass in it is a major prerequisite for graduation. Therefore, as pointed out by Trudgil and Hannah, care should be taken to ensure that deviations from Standard English do not become too great, to avoid impairment in wider communication through English (101).

Consequently, it is pertinent to know that British English (BrE) has a Standard form of usage. Standardization is a set of codified systematic norms or rules that are acceptable and agreed generally by the speakers of the language as a yardstick for measuring its correctness. These codified norms form the basis for teaching and learning/writing or speaking. Furthermore, Standard English is used to avoid those elements of imperfection resulting from social environment, cultural and political models which affect the correct use of English. The standard varieties of English used globally take to the British Standard, especially in Nigeria.

It should be noted that any other forms that do not conform to the tenets of Standard English are non-standard forms and therefore pose a threat to the standard form. Basically, for any variety of English to be regarded as standard, it must conform to the appropriate phonological, lexical, syntactical and grammatical conditions of the standard variety as well as be regarded as highly mutually intelligible (Okoh 91). Similarly, it must be guided by the basic rules of



grammar for effective communication. A basic understanding of English grammar is necessary for effective communication in English. The English sentences are organised into paragraphs, and paragraphs are in turn arranged into different types of texts such as letters, reports, etc.’ Words are the building blocks of any language and English has 26 letters of the alphabet which are combined to form words.

Consequently, English words are grouped into classes, namely, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, conjunction, preposition and interjection. These various word classes perform different functions in sentences and are, therefore, arranged accordingly for effective communication (Agava 33). The correct use of mechanics is another requirement for effective communication. This refers to the use of punctuations such as capitalization, spelling and grammar (noun/verb agreement). It also includes the correct use of punctuation marks such as; full stop, comma, question mark, etc., used in writing to separate sentences and their elements and clarify meaning. However, social media texts do not mostly conform to these rules of grammar and punctuation as specified. In social media, written texts are mostly makeshifts and abbreviations. In fact, what is seen is an abuse of the English Language.

Statement and Objectives

This study, therefore, sets out to examine the written texts of some Nigerian university undergraduates on social media (Facebook and WhatsApp) as well as their formal writing, and place these alongside Standard English usages. The study uses the method of observation and analysis with a view to highlighting the lapses and the negative effects of the social media written text and consequently, upholds the use of standard written English among Nigerian undergraduates.

The frequent use of mobile phones by students is alarming. The time they should devote to their studies is being miss-channelled to browsing, chatting and interacting with friends on one social media platform or the other. This is affecting their literacy skills generally. Different studies on computer-mediated discourse have also revealed that the linguistic structures of most online texts (messages) are less standard, less complex and less coherent, unlike the standard written form. To this effect, complaints have been raised by commentators, academics, teachers and parents that the written standard of English is likely to deteriorate as a result of the influence of this new trend of writing and later degenerate into language failure in the future. (Winkler, 2012, p. 245)

Chantel et al also share the same view that children’s text messages on social media are void of conventional written rules and also characterized by a register known as text. The text comprises a register full of abbreviations, emoticons, slang, etc. Thurlow who investigated extensively texting and text in newspapers have linked this method of writing by young adult and adults to a notion that can result in poor reading and writing skills as well as language deterioration, if not handled promptly.

A report on texting and formal register indicated that the use of text has hindered the ability of students to remember Standard English spelling. With all these facts, it is so evident that the use of non-standard written texts in the social media leads to poor performance in the use of Standard Written English by students and equally might result in total language loss if left unchecked. In the Nigerian context, these views about the use of text and its resultant negative impact on English are very obvious. As a frequent user of social media, it is obvious that most



users of the social media sites are the youth who are mostly in various tertiary institutions. Based on this, there is a strong assertion that this new trend of writing has started encroaching upon the formal writing of students and will definitely deter the standard of written English of university students now or in future.

This paper, therefore, sets out to find out if this assertion is true, if true, what areas of standard written English are being affected and finally, what solutions can be proffered to check the menace before Standard English becomes extinct in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to determine whether the use of text on social media sites has actually affected the use of standard written English of Nigerian university undergraduates. Ascertain the areas where social media texts have affected negatively the standard of written English of the university undergraduates. Find out why the use of social media text has interfered with the formal writings of university undergraduates. Suggest possible remedies to the menace. The following research questions will guide the study. Has the use of social media text affected the standard written English of Nigerian university undergraduates? What areas of Standard English are affected by the use of social media text? And why has the use of text encroached upon the academic/formal writing of undergraduates in Nigeria? How can this trend be checked to avoid a complete bastardization of standard written English among undergraduates in Nigeria?

The main focus of this study is to assess how standard written English has been corrupted by social media text among Nigerian university undergraduates. The following universities are randomly selected for this study: Abia State University, Uturu, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, VERITAS University, Abuja and the University of Port Harcourt. The search focuses on Facebook and Whatsapp because they are the most frequently used social media platforms by university students in Nigeria and therefore can easily give the linguistic data required for this research. The thirty undergraduates selected for the research are those using the above-mentioned platforms. Two hundred and forty text messages (posts) of these undergraduates were studied, examined, analysed and juxtaposed with their formal written essays in English to ascertain the areas the use of text has encroached upon their formal writing.

RELATED LITERATURE

Originally, English is spoken in England which implies that it is indigenous to that country's natural habitat. But recently, the situation has taken another dimension with the language breaking out of its natural confinement to assume the status of a global phenomenon. This view is clarified in the words of Okoh who posits that "English appropriately qualifies for the tag of the world's lingua Franca (2006, p. 27). Eirling (2006) buttresses this idea thus:

English has come to be commonly known as the global lingua Franca. The language is noted for its international use and for the fact that non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers three to one (Graddol 1997). Moreover, Walker (2001) estimates that there are now more linguistic exchanges between non-native speakers of English than between non-native speakers and native speakers. Because of the wealth of English interactions, research in English as a lingua franca has blossomed in the new century. Likewise, English as a lingua franca (ELF) is often the terminology preferred by contemporary scholars..., as it seems to aptly describe the use of English during globalization (p. 70).



English is the dominant language when it comes to world politics, deliberations at the United Nations, trade diplomacy, the field of economics, law, agriculture and education and any other discipline one can think of (Okoh, 2006, p. 28). It is the dominant language in scientific communication with 70-80% of academic publications in it. It has also been certified as the de-facto official and working language in most international organisations and the most taught second/foreign language across the world.

Globally, English plays a very significant role. It serves as the only language of communication and also a great unifying factor amongst people from different countries across the globe. In the words of Okoh (2006) for example:

Whether we are living in Africa, travelling to the Middle East, discussing the chilly diplomatic relationships between America and Libya on the one hand, and Iraq on the other, trying to get information or listening to the world's news regarding events concerning the Taliban, Afghanistan or Osama bin Laden, knowledge of English plays an important role (p. 28).

In terms of spread, English might be considered a global language that is second to none. It has not only resisted the influence of some world powerful languages such as Latin, Greek, and French but has also gained ascendancy among national languages by former British colonies where the local people shed off British colonial powers but retained English (Ike, 2000, p. 9). Broughton et al (1978) elucidate that:

Of the 4,000 to 5,000 living languages, English is by far the most widely used. As a mother tongue, it ranks second only to Chinese, which is effectively six mutually unintelligible dialects little used outside China. On the other hand, the 300 million native speakers of English are to be found in every continent and an equally widely distributed body of second language speakers who use English for their day-to-day needs totals over 250 million. Finally, if we add those areas where decisions affecting life and welfare are made and announced in English, we cover one-sixth of the world's population (p.1).

Today, statistics reveal the following about English. Amongst its users as L1 are the United Kingdom, the United States of America, New Zealand, Australia, Trinidad and Tobago, and parts of Canada. Statistics also show that L2 speakers of English are in Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, India, Pakistan, Singapore and Hong Kong. Foreign language users of English are Germany, France, Sweden, China, and other European nations. This grouping of the speakers of English has given rise to the classification of speakers of English into three major groups – native speakers of English known as the inner circle, second language users of English known as the outer circle and those who use English as a foreign language known as expanding circle (Kachru, 1982, p. 11).

Nigeria falls amongst the L2 speakers of English. Nigeria is a highly heterogeneous country with over 240 million people in the population and over 450 different languages which lack mutual intelligibility (Okoh, 2006, pp. 40 - 4). The multilingual setting of the Nigerian society necessitates English to be unanimously accepted as the official language in Nigeria. Originally, English was introduced into Nigeria by the European merchants as the language of trade and commerce between the slave traders, but today, the status of English has been grossly elevated to occupy a prominent position in Nigeria (Okoh, p. 41). The role of English in Nigeria remains that of an official language and cannot be relieved by any other language because all the other languages in Nigeria lack political neutrality. It also plays a pivotal role in the areas of



administration, and mass media (electronic or print). English also plays the role of a unifying factor amongst the divergent ethnic groups in Nigeria (Okoh, p. 70). Bamgbose (1971) notes that the most important role of English in Nigeria is its usage as a medium of social communication (p. 36). In line with this role of English, Bamgbose also points out that the high status of English is mostly felt in the area of education.

The entrenchment of English is perhaps most noticeable in the field of education.... Since the product of schools will be absorbed into types of employment where English is the official medium of communication and where, consequently, proficiency in English is a necessary qualification, the preeminent position of English in the educational system is likely to remain for a long time (p. 45).

James (1979) classified the role of English in Nigeria into three broad categories. These are accommodation, participation and social mobility. The participatory role means that English remains the only acceptable language in the country's legislative house for now; even in the future, English will remain the language used for administrative and educational purposes. Therefore, proficiency in English is a prerequisite for admission to parliament, to the bench and bar, to the civil service, to the essential services and many positions in the industrial and inaugurating sectors of the country (p. 260).

English is the dominant language in scientific communication with about 70 – 80% of academic publications in it, the de facto official and working language in most international organisations and the most taught second/foreign language across the world. English as an international language has also been introduced in Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes in some universities (Matsuda, 2012, p. 12). These observations corroborate with the report on the status of English in international politics, relations, education, and intercultural communication consequently endorsing its dominance and global influence. Thus, the English language which was once confined to some limited tribes in the British Isles, and narrowly escaped extinction under the influence of the French language, has emerged today to become second to only one language in the world, is the Chinese (in terms population) (Okoh, 2006, p. 27). In terms of geographical spread, English is undisputable as a global language that is second to none.

Social Media

We said earlier that social media platforms are Internet networking sites that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Social media platforms enable users to connect with each other by creating personal information profiles. These personal profiles include information such as text description, photos, audio or video. The profiles can be shared with others to create lists of friends and maintain contact with them. The lists show each user's network, that is, the user's profile or updated messages which are accessible by individuals included on the user's list. As Comm (2010) writes, social media describes a form of publishing in which stories are exchanged rather than published within a community 'like a chat in a restaurant and later added that social media describes how publishers can distribute their messages through texts to thousands of people encouraging them to build strong connections and firm loyalty (p. 3). Castells (2000) describes the social media network society as a culture that is constructed virtually by a persuasive, media system. The network society is based on the idea of using computer-mediated communication (CMC) to promote cooperation between



two or more individuals and build social capital (p. 1). Comm further suggests that perhaps the best definition of social media is that its content has been created by its audience because the social part of social media means that ‘publishing is now about participation. (p. 3). Those who use social media sufficiently create not only content but also conversations and those conversations through the use of texts posted as status combine further to create communities (p. 3).

Boyd and Ellison (2007) gave a similar definition of social media as new kinds of online media that share most or all of the characteristics of participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness (p. 211). Meanwhile, Kaplan and Helenlein (2010) later advocated a more theoretical definition of social media as a group in Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content (p. 64). Merriam Webster in support of this view also defines social media platforms as forms of electronic communication through which people create online communication to share information, ideas, personal messages, etc.). Although social media platforms have been given different definitions by different people, their definite purpose centres on communication – its control, dissemination or management worldwide just like the entire World Wide Web and other computer-based communication resources (Okoh, 2006, p. 5). Currently, the popular social media platforms are Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Twitter, Wikipedia, Youtube and so on. This massive phenomenon is changing the way we create and use content because it allows a varying amount of flexibility in communication.

In Nigeria, social media platforms have exposed standard written English to serious challenges due to the use of other non-standard forms of English predominant on the websites. Crystal (2011) opines that:

Language on the Internet combines speech exchange and written communication in which words and constructions are mainly written in contracted forms, lengthy sentences full of complexity, multiple instances of subordination, elaborately balanced syntactic patterns and items of vocabulary that are never spoken (pp. 244 – 5).

Beasley (2013), in her article titled, “some of the negative social media effects on students writing” supports this view by maintaining that social media has impacted negatively on students’ writing. According to her, social media is now part of everyday life and children are exposed to and interact with it at an early age. Hence, posts on social media are acceptable among peers regardless of the fact that social media writings can pose serious negative effects on students writing. Beasley enumerates some specific areas in social media has negatively affected the written English of students. These are errors in grammar and spelling. She notes further that this is the most common area social media exerts error on written English and advises that the use of grammar and spelling are very vital and therefore should not be overlooked. The habit of writing very fast is another area she pointed out. According to her, writing very fast gives room for an increase in errors and does not allow the students to reflect on the ideas first before posting them on social media. The use of text language is another factor she emphasised. She advises that students should write complete words. Abati (2016) in an article titled ‘Social Media and the English Language’ also affirms very positively that the new English written on the social media and text messages sent through cell phones, get him confused because of its dynamic nature. According to him, in the last 20 years, social media English (text) has lent itself to many innovations which are drawn from different cultural,



religious and situational codes which have transformed the language and extended the dictionary with new words and idioms. He went further to note that:

The kind of new English being written by Twitter and Whatsapp users particularly young people is, however, so frightening and lamentable because it is beginning to creep into regular writing. Texting and twitting are producing a generation of users of English as a second language, (it is worse that they are using English as a second language), who cannot write grammatically successful sentences. I was privileged to go through some applications of young graduates submitted for job openings recently and I was scared (2).

He further pointed out the various areas in social media where English has deviated from Standard English usage. These include non-differentiation between a comma and a colon, no regard for punctuation, mixing up of pronouns, cannibalization of verbs and adverbs, and violation of all rules of lexis and syntax. Abati further notes that the users of English on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Whatsapp rely more on sound rather than formal meaning. This method of writing will deprive its users of the capacity to write meaningful prose, communicate properly or even think correctly (3).

Abati refers to social media English as meta-English which implies a language used in place of another. For example, words like 'for' is written as '4', 'forget' becomes '4get' or '4git', fortune is written as '4tune', and forever as '4eva'. The word 'see' has been pruned down to a single letter of the alphabet 'c'. Words like 'see you' are written as 'cya' or 'cu'. Other words which have suffered a similar fate are; straight which is now written as 'str8', first as 'fess', will as, 'wee', house as 'haus', help reduced as 'epp' (Who have you epped?). Phrases like 'kind of' are changed to 'kinda', money has been simplified to 'moni', the computer sign '@' has effectively replaced the word 'at', and come is now 'cum'. The conjunction and is now represented as 'an' or with the sign '&', that is now 'dat', temporary is likely to be written as 'temp', are as 'r', 'your' as 'ur', to as '2', and take as 'tk'.

In place of phrases like 'thank you', one likely sees abbreviations such as 'tank u', How are you is written as 'Hawayu', Where are you? Becomes 'wiar d u' and so on. As he rightly pointed out, the combination of these new words in what is assumed to be a sentence will definitely pose a big challenge to the reader while trying to analyze the meaning. Oftentimes, he had called for the sender of such messages to explain what they are trying to communicate in simple English. Examples of such written English sentences on social media are 'This kidney gist is giving me heddik', I wee hold ya hand if need kidney, love you till we find a miraku. It kent happun, pass dat"/ other ones are 'as fuel don add moni, everybody don park dem moto for house'. Well b/c we d p'pl thought # fuel scarcity was temp. With the fuel hike policy, the high cost of living is now a perm cond'n in Nig. He refers to this combination of English as a photographic combination of English and hieroglyphics (6).

Abati in the same article notes that on many occasions, this special prose is written amidst a number of other confusing symbols, emotions, memes, acronyms and abbreviations. Such abbreviations are LMGO (laughing my ass off) Lol (laughing out loud), lwkmd (laughter wan kill man die) stfu (shut the fuck up) Omg (Oh my God), rofl (Rolling on the floor with laughter), Uwc (you are welcome), smh (shaking my head) brb (be right back). Expressions such as wifed up, you should mute me now, birthday loading and so on (p. 7). Abati in conclusion notes that those scholars who were brought up in those days within such grammar books as *Brighter Grammar* by Ogundipe, Eckersley and Macaulay and *Practical English* by Ogundipe and



Tregido will never write this new English made popular on social media. He, therefore, advocates that parents and teachers should develop the responsibility of ensuring that their children are able to learn the fundamental skills of standard written English and also inculcate the habit to communicate in decent prose (p. 8).

Jon Reed (2014) in an article titled “How Social Media is Changing Language” reveals that social media has changed the original meaning of some words and introduced new ones into English vocabulary, for example, the use of the word ‘unfriend’ to denote stop being in friendship with, selfie to denote the picture taken by oneself. This happens because the words which people constantly use will definitely influence the choice of words they make. Also, because many of the written words we see are constantly on the screens of our computers, tablets and smartphones, words now evolve partly through our interactions with these technology gadgets (p. 1).

He further states that because the use of social media English (text) which is the medium of communication with each other in social media tends to be more flexible than standard written English, the combination of informal, personal communication and the mass audience afforded by the media is a recipe for rapid change (p. 2). With respect to the formation of new words, Reed, in another article titled ‘New Words and Meaning’ still maintains the same viewpoint that Facebook has done more than other platforms to offer up new meanings for common words, such as friend, status, wall, page and profile. These new words which crop up from social media platforms also reflect the dark side of social media for example a troll is no longer just a character from Norse folklore, but someone who makes offensive or provocative comments online, and a sock puppet is no longer solely a puppet made from an old sock, but a self-serving fake online persona; and astroturfing is no longer simply a plastic lawn but also a fake online grass-roots movement (p. 1).

In pointing out the new ways of communicating, Reed notes that an alphabet soup of acronyms, abbreviations and neologisms has grown up around technologically mediated communication to help its users understand themselves easily and reduce the number of characters they use in writing through the use of text massaging (p. 3). Reed summarily writes: “Some people may feel left behind by all this without taking into cognizance how the use of this informal medium can lead to an equally casual attitude to English grammar” (p. 10).

The reviewed works on ‘The Negative Effect of Social Media Texts on Written English’ show that the researches-conducted earlier concentrated mainly on the use of abbreviations, slang, codes and neglected areas such as the English words (morphology) and sentences (syntax), that is a word, its formation and arrangement in sentences. The notion of abbreviation, slang, and codes was also analysed mainly on the word level, neglecting the syntactical aspect which has to do with the combination of these abbreviations, pieces of slang and codes in sentences. In previous research, little or no attention was paid to such areas as the correct use of punctuation, grammatical violations; the use of other non-standard varieties of English as prevalent in social media. It is necessary to give specific attention to these areas because as Kemp et al pointed out, grammar rules of conventional written English are often transgressed. This study, therefore, seeks to fill these gaps.



Theoretical Framework

This research uses the “**Social** Learning Theory (SLT)”, “Magic Bullet Theory (MBT) or Hypodermic Needle Theory (HNT)”. The social learning theory was introduced by Albert Bandura in 1977. He is of the view that people learn and imitate behaviours they have observed in other people in their environment. He, however, added that man’s superior cognitive capacity is another factor that determines not only how he will be affected by his experience, but the further direction his actions may take. In the social learning theory, people acquire new patterns of behaviour through direct experience or by observing the behaviours of others via any media. To this effect, the youth can learn through external influences and later use such ideas to guide their actions. During the period of learning, the youth not only respond but also observe the differential consequences accompanying their various actions on the basis of informative feedback and develop thoughts or hypotheses about the type of behaviour they want to imbibe (Bundura, 1977, p. 17).

SLT is of the view that learning specifically involves a person learning from another through observation, imitation and modelling. Additionally, the HNT which is also known as the Hypodermic Syringe Model, Transmission-Belt Model or Magic Bullet Theory is a model of communication, which suggests that an intended message is directly received (through social media) and wholly accepted by the receiver (the youth). The model originally was rooted in the 1930s between behaviourism and was largely considered obsolete for a long time, but was later reviewed by big data analytics-based mass customization. The Magic Bullet or HNT has a direct influence and the effects were centred on early observations of the effect of mass media as experimented through Nazi propaganda and the effects of Hollywood Dramas in the 1930s and 1940s. People are assumed to be uniformly controlled by their biological-based instincts and that they react more or less uniformly to whatever stimuli that follow.

Furthermore, the MBT graphically assumes that the message from the media is like a bullet fired from the media gun into the viewer’s head (the youth). Similarly, the HNT shares the same idea of the shooting paradigm. It is of the view that social media injects its messages straight into the passive audience (the youths). These youth are immediately affected by what they see and get influenced automatically. Based on this, it is very obvious that the youth, especially cannot escape from the media influence. The youth is, therefore, considered a “sitting duck”.

In conclusion, both models strongly assert that the youth are easily and directly vulnerable to the negative effects of social media. The study is, therefore, based on the aforementioned theoretical frameworks.

METHODOLOGY

Research design is a ‘blueprint or plan’ specifically created to answer research questions and control variance (Ngulube, 2019, p. 40). Answering research questions enables the researcher to establish that a specific fact is the central purpose of all research work. Therefore, in this research, the descriptive research method is used. A descriptive research method is referred to as the study that mainly analyses what is before it. The researcher studies a specific situation to find out if any general theories will arise out of it or whether existing general theories are borne out by the existing specific situation.



The population of the study comprises the social media posts of the entire university undergraduates using social media networks in Nigeria. According to 2018 statistics, the population of social media users in Nigeria is rated at approximately 29.3 million (Nigeria Statistics, 2018). The researcher, therefore, decided to select the text messages of some Nigerian university undergraduates as well as their formal writing in order to elicit more valid and reliable data necessary for the study.

The sample size selection of the population used for the study was done randomly. It consists of two hundred and forty posts of Nigerian university students on the two most popularly used social media platforms in Nigeria namely Facebook and Whatsapp and also thirty written essay scripts of the university undergraduates from the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, Veritas University, Abuja and Abia State University, Uturu. Each of these text messages and the essay examination scripts of the students were studied and analysed taking into cognizance the requirements of standard grammatical rules and other rules that determine the standard written English. The juxtaposition of the two types of data helped in pointing out the areas and extent the use of text messages in social media has affected negatively, the standard of written English among undergraduates in Nigeria.

The choice of this sample population by the researcher is borne out of two reasons: first, the social media platforms selected are the ones often used by most students in Nigeria, so it helped in providing the linguistic data required for the study. Secondly, the university undergraduates whose formal essays were studied are those who are also social media users.

The primary instrument used in the collection of sample data (social media text messages) is the compact disc while the hard copies of the undergraduates' formal written essays were collected by the researcher for the study.

An instrument can be rated as reliable if it yields a constant result, no matter the interviewer or researcher, using the same respondents. The reliability of the instrument for this study is dependent upon the relevant text messages and formal written works of the undergraduates. A preview of the students' text messages on the social media platforms was made by the researcher to make sure that the information needed is obtained.

Data Presentation

The relevance of this section is to analyse the research data collected from two hundred and forty posts (social media texts) of university undergraduates. The data was got from Facebook and Whatsapp, the two most frequently used social media platforms by Nigerian students.

The findings from the analysis of the study formed the basis that provided answers to the research questions stated earlier in the study and thereby provided a clear view of the research topic. A sample data of 240 text messages were collected and studied. 120 messages were selected from Facebook and another 120 messages from Whatsapp. These text messages of the undergraduates were juxtaposed with their formal essays in order to ascertain the areas of deviation from the standard written English usage. The result from the analysis is represented in a tabular form, using a simple percentage. The details in Table 1 in appendix 1 represent the sources of data and the number of data collected from each social media platform.

Table 1 (Appendix 1) shows that the anticipated number of sample data speculated for the study was realised in the above number and percentage. 120 text messages representing 50% of the



total sample data from Facebook, and another 120 messages representing 50% of the total sample data from Whatsapp. A total of 240 messages were collected.

Research Question 1

Has the use of “text” in the social media platforms negatively influenced the standard written English of Nigerian University Undergraduates?

Table 2 (Appendix 1) shows that 100% of the sampled social media text messages studied indicated yes to research question 1. From our examination of the entire sample texts of the undergraduates, there is evidence of one error or the other when standard written English rules are applied.

Research Question 2

What areas of standard written English are most affected?

Table 3 (Appendix 1) shows that a total of 68 messages representing 28.3% of sample data of the undergraduates indicated an error in the area of spelling, while 172 messages representing 71.7% did not indicate any error in this area but also showed the presence of deviations in other aspects.

Table 4 (Appendix 1) shows the total number of results realised in the analysis of the deviation of the written English of the undergraduates based on the use of subjects in sentences. Fifty-three (53) messages representing 22.1% of the sampled data indicated that some of the sentence constructions of the undergraduates on the social media lack sentence subjects, whereas 183 messages representing 77.9% of the data indicated ‘no’ in this aspect. It is observed that some of the students are conscious of the use of subjects in sentences when writing on social media, but still make other mistakes such as the wrong use of concord, punctuation, etc.

Table 5 (Appendix 1) shows contrasts between social media text and standard written English based on the use of concord/agreement. 74 messages representing 30.8% of the total sampled data of the undergraduates' written English are void of the rule of concord. 166 messages representing 69.2% did not signify this error.

Table 6 (Appendix 1) is in the area of the correct use of tense, a total number of 90 messages representing 37.5% showed correctness in the use of various forms of tenses – present, past and future tenses, 150 messages representing 62.5% indicated that error in this area is not significant.

Table 7 (Appendix 1) evinces that a number of the written text (90) representing 37.5% of the sampled data attest positive that the sentence constructions of undergraduates lack appropriate capitalization where required, while 150 messages representing 62.5% did not show deviation in this area.

Table 8 (Appendix 1) indicates that the majority of the written text (64.6%) points out serious deviations in the use of punctuation. In fact, this area of error is the highest recorded in this study. 85 messages representing 35.4% do not show evidence of punctuation error. Table 9 shows the presence of new word coinages. Although this can be rated as minimal, the analysis shows that 19 times representing 7.9%, there is evidence of new informal words that have been introduced into English vocabulary as a result of the social media form or style of writing. Such



mistakes are not evident in 221 messages representing 92.1% of the data. Table 10 (Appendix 1) reveals that the spelling/pronunciation of some English sounds (17%) has been altered in social media text messages. This is very evident in the way most English words are spelt based on pronunciation in the text messages. The spelling problem was not evident in 200 text messages of the undergraduates.

Table 11 on the other hand (Appendix 1) presents the total sum of common errors observed in the text messages. The mistake types were selected based on how frequent the occurrence was. Punctuation error has the highest occurrence (64.6%). Next is faulty sentence construction (52.1%), tense error (37.5%), orthographic error (37.5%), concord (30.8%), spelling error (28.3%), no subjects (22.1%), spelling based on pronunciation (17%) and new coinages /neologism (7.9%).

Research Question 3

What is the level of corruption of standard written English among Nigerian University undergraduates?

Table 12 reveals that the level of error is highest in punctuation; in 20 essays representing (66.7%) punctuation error preponderant, but in 10 essays representing (33.3%) punctuation error is non-existent. The implication is that this grammatical error is individual-based. Table 13 indicates that the next level of error is the inappropriate use of the different tense categories and aspects. This occurs in 50% of the written essays of the students indicating that the social media method of writing has seriously affected the standard written form of English by the undergraduates. However, tense and aspect abuse did not occur in 50% of the essays of undergraduates. The implication is that some students still uphold the Standard.

Table 14 shows that 66.7% of the formal written essays of the students indicate incorrect use of capital letters. The error was, however, not evident in 33.3% of the respondents' written essays. Table 15 shows that 26.7% of the students' essays indicate the wrong use of concord/agreement. The implication is that grammatically, social media form of writing is exerting some negative effect on a standard written English. We observed that 73.3% of the respondents still use correct concord/agreement in their written English. Table 16 is about wrong spellings and unnecessary abbreviation or shortening of English words. This error occurs in 73.3% of the students' written essays, another indication that social media form of writing is affecting standard written English. Nevertheless, 26.7% of the respondents' essay writings did not show signs of this error, so the researcher deduced that some undergraduates are still conscious of the correct use of English spellings while writing formally.

Table 17 is about faulty sentence construction. About 10% of the respondents' essays indicated this feature in their formal writings as also identified in their social media messages. On the other hand, 20% of the respondents' essays showed the absence of this feature. Table 18 reveals that 6.7% of the respondents' formal essays indicated that some of the new coinages that are being used in social media have encroached upon the formal writings of the students, although this is minimal. About 93.3% of the students' written essays did not show evidence of this social media feature.

Table 19 sums up the various types of errors observed in the social media text messages, which have negatively affected students' formal written English, thereby resulting in the deterioration of standard written English generally. The errors are incorrectness in the different levels of



English usage, such as morphology, syntax, semantics, phonology and mechanics (spelling and punctuation).

Morphologically, we observed wrong spelling and/or contraction of English words (68 (28.3%) in social media text messages and 22 (73%) in formal essay writings); lack of /misuse of capitalization (75 (31.3%) in text messages and 20 (66.7%) in formal essays); and informal word coinages (19 (7.9%) in text messages and 2 (6.7%) in formal essays). Syntactically, we observed the wrong use of tenses, aspects, mood, and concord (90 (37.5%) in text messages and 10 (33.3%) in formal essays). Orthographically, there was a lack/misuse of punctuation marks and wrong spellings. We see wrong sentence construction, padding, and unnecessary mixed sentences. Semantically, mistakes occur in the meanings assigned to words and neologic expressions. These results evince that the highest level of wrong influence of social media text on the standard of written English is at its peak at the morphological (word) level and the non-adherence to mechanics of writing.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from this study reveal that standard written English has been greatly debated in the social media context. Secondly, the deviations in standard written English observed in the social media text messages have also encroached into their formal written English. These findings support the SLT by Albert Bandurah (1977) who suggests that people learn and imitate behaviours they have observed in other people in their environment. To this effect, people can learn through external influences and later use such knowledge to guide their actions. In terms of the areas of written English that have been impacted by the use of social media text method of writing, linguists specified four different levels namely morphology, syntax, semantics and phonology (Ndimele, 1999, p. 1). To this effect, the study reveals errors in all these levels of written English, including the mechanics of written English. For better perception, the researchers have categorised the errors into the following categories:

Punctuations errors		mechanics
Spelling errors		graphology
Errors in capitalization		orthography
Coinages (neologisms)	-	morphology/semantics
Error in the use of tenses		grammar
Concord/agreement error		grammar
Sentence construction error	-	grammar
Alteration in English sounds	-	phonetics/phonology



Spelling Errors

This is one of the most prevalent features of social media text which was identified in the formal written essays (formal) of the students. Orthographically, written English involves combining letters of the alphabet in an orderly manner to form words. This is what the spelling of English words entails. The correct ordering of the sounds gives rise to a meaningful word, but in a situation where the ordering is wrong, it becomes a problem. This research observed that the spelling of English words have been highly abused in social media and this has affected the way undergraduate spell word in formal/academic writing. The study reveals that the spelling of most English words follows the way they are pronounced. Examine the table below for evidence.

Spelling adopted from Social Media

S/N	Standard English	Social Media	Formal writing
1.	now	nw	nw
2.	its	itz	itz
3.	know	knw	knw
4.	your	ur	ur
5.	what	wat	Wat
6.	that's	datz	datz
7.	you	u	u
8.	character	xter	xter
9.	because	becoz, cos	becoz
10.	friends	friendz	friendz
11.	later	lata	lata
12.	time	tym	tym
13.	told	tld	tld
14.	that	dat	dat
15.	like	lyk	lyk
16.	this	dis	dis
17.	the	d	d
18.	and	nd	nd
19.	them	dem	dem
20.	numbers	numbaz	numbaz
21.	never	neva	neva
22.	good	gud	gud
23.	weekend	wkend	wkend
24.	night	nite	nite
25.	they	dey	dey
26.	cheating	chetin	chetin
27.	between	btw	btw
28.	day	dei	dei
29.	father	fada	fada
30.	mother	moda	moda



31.	heart	hrt	hrt
32.	room	rum	rum
33.	anyone	anione	anione
34.	friend	frnd	frnd
35.	something	sometin	sometin
36.	when	wen	wen
37.	who	hu	hu
38.	thing	tin	tin etc.

From the table contraction appears to be in vogue hence such spellings as hrtbroken, tym, becoz, rlship, wen, sometin, wkend, told, etc., while others are totally newly coined for example ur, dis, dem, dey, fada, moda, hu, rum, gud, neva, wat, lata and so on. This method of spelling is quite unhealthy for the development of English vocabulary.

Tense errors

Tense is another grammatical error that is excessively used in social media and has infiltrated into the formal writing of students. This assertion is based on the fact that similar errors in tense usage which occurred in the social media text messages were very obvious in their formal essays. Tense is a grammatical category (usually a verb form) which indicates the time of an action, an event or a state of affairs relative to some reference point (Ngulube, 2019, p. 294). All tense system is categorised by the moment of speaking/writing as the fundamental reference point. Tense functions basically in three categories present, past and future. Relative tense is another form of tense whose expression is dependent on a situation relative to some other situation. The situation may be simultaneous to it or subsequent to it.

The study shows that the functional process of tense has been altered on social media platforms. It further reveals that the error has negatively affected the formal writings of students who are regular users of social media texting thereby posing a threat to standard written English. Consider the data below.

1. Have you try him. (tried)
2. You will not died untimely. (die)
3. I am convince that she pay her dowry. (convinced, paid)
4. You should have inform me that you were traveling. (informed)
5. I never know you were a thief. (knew)
6. Ngozi has gone when she come in. (had, came)
7. Who post this? (posted)
8. His wife attack him with a knife (attacked) etc.



This reveals that students do not use tenses appropriately. Sentences indicating actions in the past are reported using verbs in present tense and vice versa. We observe similar mistakes in the written essays of students.

1. Richard pretend to be a Christian. (pretended)
2. Every eyes in my family look unto me (looked)
3. He hardly spend time with his family. (spent)
4. I develop my trust in him. (developed)
5. I no longer attend classes at night, I sneak out with Richard and his friends. (attended/sneaked)
6. My heart bleed for her. (bled)
7. The Police Officer had ask her to leave before I came in. (asked)
8. Tobi realize that he has many responsibilities. (realized)
9. The guy swear never to get married again. (swore)
10. Had I know that you were a back stabbing cheat, I wouldn't have marry you. (known, married).

These mistakes have made their ways into the formal written English of the undergraduates.

Concord/agreement errors

Concord is another grammatical error observed in our data. The rule of concord in English states that the verb agrees with its subject in a sentence. This simply means that if the subject is singular, the verb should be in singular form but if the subject is in plural form, the verb should also reflect plurality. For example James/He/She/it (singular noun) is (present tense) or was (past tense). These specifications are observed on social media platforms. Consider the examples below which attest to this fact.

1. *God have blessed me. vs. God has blessed me.
2. *My friends accompanies me each time I'm going to eat.

vs.

My friends accompany me each time I'm going to eat.

3. *You see what zee would extraordinarily have done to Nigerian University.

vs.

You see what Zee world extraordinary has done to the Nigerian University.



4. *Nkechi have died and her burial is next month.

vs.

Nkechi has died and her burial is next month.

5. *Please enjoys urself.

vs.

Please enjoy yourself.

6. *I travels whenever there is a break.

vs.

I travel whenever there is a break.

7. *Today is a new day, enjoy it and tell someone you loves her.

vs.

Today is a new day, enjoy it and tell someone that you love her.

8. *This have to do with one's understanding.

vs.

This has to do with one's understanding.

9. *If she have the money, why not pay?

vs

If she has the money, why not pay?

Similarly, the study reveals the same method of concord violation in the written essays of undergraduates. Consider the examples below:

They didn't has anything. (have)

Raymond Philips is a nineteen-year-old boy who have a good heart. (has)

He hardly have time for his family. (has)

She have diabetes. (has)

Raymond have been designing while in Prison. (has)

She have lost her mother. (has)



Philip have been lost for some years now. (has)

While positing that these observations are not limited to Nigerian students only, a stitch in time saves nine.

Faulty Sentence Construction

Faulty sentence construction is another error identified by the study. In English, sentences have definite patterns in which they are woven together to produce longer stretches of utterances or sentences. When these patterns are violated, it results in an error in sentence formation. The basic sentence patterns in English are classified as SV (Subject Verb), SVA (Subject-Verb Adverb), SVO (Subject Verb Object), SVOA (Subject, Verb, Object, Adverb), SVOC (Subject Verb Object Complement) etc. This signifies that for any sentence to be regarded as correct, it must have basically the subject, verb (and object). Most sentences lack subjects.)

Sentences without subjects

Miss you so much.	vs	I miss you so much.
Thought you could swim.	vs	I thought you could swim.
Very wrong, be prudent in spending.	vs	You are very wrong, be prudent in spending
Committed suicide because of a gal friend	vs	He committed suicide because of a girlfriend
Love you to the moon.	vs	I love you to the moon.
Doing great in her academics.	vs	My sister is doing well in her academics.
Relaxing with beautiful Ugo Cynthia.	vs	I am relaxing with beautiful Ugo Cynthia.
Never knew he was so bad.	vs	I never knew he was so bad.
Thank god itz Friday.	vs	I thank God it's Friday.
On point dearie.	vs	You are on point dear.
Can't stop tinkling about u. etc.	vs	I can't stop thinking about you.

Saw an old tym friend at a function.

Sent a message to her mother anonymously demanding for 10 million naira ransom.

Found out later that she was pregnant.

Was devastated after everything he had done for her.

Wish I could turn back the hands of the clock but I cannot.



With these forms of sentence constructions, the reader of the written messages is left in doubt about who performed the actions specified in the sentences above. This development is unhealthy for academic work.

Punctuation errors

Lack/misuse of punctuation is one of the highest errors recorded in our corpus. Punctuation is very essential in every piece of writing because it marks out strings of words in manageable groups and thereby clarifies meaning. The study reveals that certain punctuation marks are abused. The comma is the most victim, used any and everywhere. This is followed by the full stop, which is often not used where it is needed, or inserted carelessly everywhere. The non-use of the period (full stop) to mark the end of declarative sentences:

Nkechi is dead (no full stop)

Sonia, see me tomorrow (no full stop)

I can't advise you to beat her (no full stop)

Ya time will definitely come (no full stop)

May God forgive u and give u anoda opportunity (no full stop) and so on.

I was in shock

The officers locked the lady

I rushed close to d scene and I kept yelling at them to let her go

I cried out and I was too weak to cry again

I blame myself and regret why I ever listened to him

In most cases, ellipses (...) which show incompleteness or omissions in the middle of quotations are used in place of full stops at the end of sentences:

He has really made thousands to laugh...

This is the highest level of madness...

You will never died (sic) untimely...

Tell us how you are feeling right now...

One Saturday she sneaked out of the house to meet with her friendz (sic) for a smoke...

Ronke was lost she didn't have anything...

A month later she was diagnosed with cancer...



Femi and Deborah got married ten years ago and they live happily in Ikeja...

Another area of error is the non-use of question mark (?) to indicate that a sentence is in question form.

Seba can you give us the details of the exam

Did u see the morning rain

Was u in the lecture yesterday

The price is high how do you see it

Who would have thought that Williams would behave otherwise

Will my fada (sic) ever find a place in his heart to forgive me

Will Donald learn from his mistakes

Can She ever learn from her past mistakes

What's his story all about

The use of exclamation mark is also abused. The exclamation mark is used in a sentence to depict emotions like surprise, anger, joy and sympathy, but in social media, it was observed to be used erroneously in the middle or end of declarative sentences, which should end with full stops.

- Thanks!!! we are alright. vs Thanks, we are alright.
- You are my special bea!!! vs You are my special friend.
- I am hanging out!!! with my bea.
- It'z not easy!!! at all.
- Junior!!! pray for your quick recovery.
- My dear don't belittle urself!

- He told me dat (sic) he was a kidnapper and dat (sic) he made his money through that means!
- My name is Daniel Isaac nd (sic) I hail from Abia State in the eastern part of Nigeria!!
- They talked to me about getting a Job!



In the examples given above, students neglect the use of commas to differentiate ideas, occurring together in a sentence in their formal writings. For example, “There was no looking back he changed me a lot my parents noticed that I had changed I acted absent-minded whenever I was at home” All these ideas are clustered together without a comma.

Coinages /Neologism

There are newly coined meaningless words/phrases used interchangeably with English words in social media. These words include spelliology, baddest inbox, dude, on point, bea, flexing, fada, moda, lata, wen, frnd, hubby, wifey, sometin, rum, datz, gud, lyk, neva, etc. The use of these coinages in sentences obstructs meaning.

chisos is lawd.	vs.	Jesus is Lord.
ur just dare.	vs.	You are just there.
dat dude nxt to u is my everyday crush.	vs.	That man next to you is my close friend.
dat’z a gud one.	vs.	That’s a good one.
itz my moda’z born dei, wish her well.	vs.	It’s my mother’s birthday, wish her well.
dey will be here morrow.	vs.	They will be here tomorrow.
dis guy is really trending.	vs.	This young man is popular.
that was a real flexing.	vs.	That was a real outing.
dis is wat I call itiboribo.	vs.	This is what I call unintelligence.
I dumped my geh friend.	vs.	I jilted my girlfriend.
I thank God for seeing this guy like dis	vs.	I thank God for seeing this young man like this.
ha! no problem naw.	vs.	There is no problem.
this gal can’t be an Imo State gal believe me.	vs.	This girl can’t be an Imo State girl believes me.

I tink is more in Imsu than Alvan! wen in school we only have our books to focus on

vs.

I think it is more in IMSU than Alvan when in school we only have our books to focus on.

Dat’z why I said women will never see heaven.

vs.

That is why I said that women will never see heaven.

Thanx 4 ur acceptance dear!!! etc. vs. Thanks for your acceptance dear.



After the birth of Olayinka, Tobi realize dat he had more responsibility. (dat - that)

He was fulfilling his duties as a husband and father by providing them with material tin. (tin - things)

dat he didn't have money to spend on minor issues like that. (dat - that)

She didn't want to face the punishment dat come in a relationship for about 2 months. (dat - that)

Will my fada ever find a place in his heart to forgive me? (fada - father)

I have brought shame and disgrace to them with my actions that now I regret, most especially my moda who I have no doubt she was heartbroken. (nd – and, nw – now, moda – mother, hrtbroken - heartbroken)

My fada chased me out of the house saying that he cannot live with a bastard. (fada - father)

When she finally came, she started helping him in his shop. (wen - when)

So they started dating and flexing together. (flexing -enjoying)

This is wat I had in mind. (wat - what)

The Day of Judgment came and we were matched to the law court. (nd – and, d - the)

She was very excited and swore to be a good mother to her son... and so on. (gud - good)

With these examples, the researcher deduced that the use of these social media coinages is one of the reasons for the decline of formal written English grammar among Nigerian university students. Its continuous use will definitely hinder the vocabulary development of the written English language in Nigeria in the nearer future.

Substitution of English Sounds

English sounds are substituted with familiar indigenous language sounds. few examples are given here.

thing /θiŋ/ has been changed to tin /tin/

something /sʌmθiŋ/ has become /sʌmtin/.

In these words, the sound /θ/ voiceless interdental fricative has been substituted with /t/ voiceless alveolar plosive. Other examples are:



they /ðei/ represented as dey /dei/

them /ðəm/ represented as dem /dɔ̃m/

mother /mʌðə/ represented as moda /mʌðə/

father /fɑ:ðə/ represented as fada /fada/

this /ðis/ represented as dis /dis/

that /ðət/ represented as dat /dat/

then /ðen/ represented as den /den/ etc.

The sound /ð/ voiced interdental fricative is substituted for the sound /d/ voice alveolar plosive. Others are the displacement of /ə/ a centre vowel sound by /a/, a back short vowel sound in later /leitə/ being spelt as lata - /lata/

The use of /u/ short vowel sound in place of /u:/ long vowel sound also deleting the sound /u:/ in words like room /ru:m/ written as rum /rum/

good /gu:d/ written as gud /gud/

cool /cu:l/ written as cul /cul/ etc.

Linguistically, these changes may pose a great hindrance to the phonological development of Nigerian students.

Capitalization

The wrong use of capital letters is preponderant in our corpus. The mechanics of written English specifies the proper arrangement of the use of capital letters (majuscule) and small letter (minuscule) in written English orthography. The study shows that these specifications are not obeyed. There was an omission of capital letters in the writing of initial letters of the names of countries. For example:

britian (Britain)

south Africa (South Africa)

Proper nouns like tina, nancy, sonia are written with lower case letters. Others are abia, nigeria, america, etc. instead of Abia, Nigeria and America. The use of lower case letters in place of upper case letters in the writing of proper nouns like people's names in formal essay are disgusting, for example, philips, ronke, williams, augusta, femi, deborah, olauyinka, rob, yusuf, bella, phebe etc. instead of Philips, Ronke, Williams, Augusta, Femi, Deborah, Olanyinka, Rob, Yusuf, etc. The use of small letters in the first letters of the alphabet of new sentences, for example.



- i need you to give ur passport to Sonia wen she comes.
- did u see the morning own?
- it's the morning fyn/
- you are on point
- congratulations my broda
- the price is high a bit.
- dat's good to hear
- pls friends like Cynthia mentioned yester let's appreciate Nkechi's little girl.

- after the birth of olayinka...
- femi and deborah got married ten years ago.
- femi was devastated, the death of deborah was an eye opener for him.
- class is over, see you next week.
- few months later, mary was the breadwinner of the family .

Next is the use of capital letters in the middle of sentences:

- It is a **STOLEN** Money. vs. It is stolen money.
- See how fine gal **KILLED HERSELF** because of boyfriend.
- vs.
- See how a fine girl killed herself because of boyfriend.
- Princess birthday dear, wishing you **LONG LIFE AND PROTECTION** always.
- vs.
- Its princess' birthday, dear wishing you long life and protection always.

In some cases, initial and ending words are written in capital letters.

- **THANK GOD** it's Friday. vs. Thank God it's Friday.
- Who are you **PLEASE**? vs. Who are you please?
- I will soon give birth **Anytime** etc. vs. I will soon give birth, anytime.



These inappropriate usages predominant in the social media setting which are now visible in the formal essays is a proof of the assertion that social media text is corrupting the standard of written English.

CONCLUSION

This study through its research objectives and questions sought to ascertain the effect of texting on a standard written English among undergraduates. In order to achieve this purpose, the researchers opted for an observation method of research where two hundred and forty social media text messages of first-year undergraduates were analysed. The text messages were elicited from Facebook and Whatsapp. These text messages were juxtaposed with thirty formal written essays of undergraduates to ascertain the various linguistic areas where standard written English have been corrupted.

The evidence is colossal. All aspects of the grammar of English have been adversely affected. This study also asserts that one of the reasons students in Nigeria are having challenges in their formal written English is that they are addicted to the Internet and chatting on social media platforms. The consistent use of these platforms is the cause of the deterioration of the standard of formal writings of undergraduates in Nigeria. We posit that in the nearest future, Nigerian undergraduates may lose the ability to spell, punctuate and construct sentences appropriately.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend the following measures to curb the lapses before they get out of hand. The lecturers should create sufficient awareness of the need to maintain a standard form of written English. Standard English is the variety used in the school for academic purposes. It is the variety taught in schools at various levels in Nigeria. It is Nigeria's official language (Lingua Franca). A pass in English is a prerequisite for gaining admission into most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. It is also a condition for certification in most fields of study. It is necessary to note that one's competence in it determines to a great extent the level of his/her progress, especially in academics. Based on all these, the need for the lecturers to enlighten the undergraduates on the need to use the Standard form of English cannot be over-emphasized.

Lecturers/teachers are to correct/punish students for the use of substandard English. Lecturers should not ignore these mistakes during the marking of students' formal/academic writings. The need to highlight these errors, correct them and further deduct marks from students who insist on using them is very necessary.

The media is to use its function as the watchdog of society in sensitizing the public and condemning the profuse use of social media text at the expense of Standard English. The media should campaign against sub-standard usage since these pose serious challenges to the use of standard written English in Nigeria.



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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Tables

Table 1: Text messages Collected from the social media

Source	No of messages studied	Percentage
Facebook	120	50%
Whatsapp	120	50%
Total	240	100%

Table 2: Deviations from Standard Written English

Platforms	Yes	No	Percentage
Facebook	120	0	50%
Whatsapp	120	0	50%
Total	240	0	100%

Table 3: Spelling Deviations

Sample messages	Total No	Percentage
No of messages with deviation	68	28.3%
No of messages without deviation	172	71.7%
Total	240	100

Table 4: Subject Sentence Deviations

Sample message	Total No	Percentage
No of messages with deviation	53	22.1%
No messages without deviation	183	71.9%
Total	240	100%

**Table 5: Error of Concord/Agreement**

Sample messages	Total No	Percentage
No of messages with error	74	30.8%
No of messages without error	166	69.2%
Total	240	100%

Table 6: Wrong use of Tense

Sample messages	Total No	Percentage
No of messages with deviation	90	37.5%
No of messages without deviation	150	62.5%
Total	240	100%

Table 7: Non-use/misuse of Capital Letters

Sample messages	Total No.	Percentage
No of messages with deviation	90	37.5%
No of messages without deviation	150	62.5%
Total	240	100%

Table 8: Lack/misuse of Punctuation Marks

Sample messages	Total No	Percentage
No of messages with deviation	15.5	64.6%
No of messages without deviation	85	35%
Total	240	100%

**Table 9: Neologism/coinages**

Sample messages	Total No	Percentage
No of messages present	19	7.9%
No of messages absent	221	92.1%
Total	240	100%

Table 10: Pronunciation influence spelling

Sample messages	Total No.	Percentage
No. of messages present	40	17%
No. of messages absent	200	83%
Total	240	100%

Table 11: Mistakes from written text messages

Area of deviation	No of deviation	Percentage
Lack/misuse of punctuation marks	155	64.6%
Non-use/incorrect use of tense	90	37.5%
Lack/incorrect capitalization	75	31.3%
Wrong use of Concord/Agreement	74	30.8%
Wrong Spelling/shortening of words (contracted forms)	68	28.3%
Non-use of Subjects of sentences	53	22.1%
Wrong Sentence Construction	125	52.1%
Use of Neologisms (coinages)	19	7.9%
Alteration in sounds based on spelling/pronunciation	40	17%

Table 12: Analysis of the Written Essays

Social Media Feature:	No. Of Essays	Percentage (%)
Lack/misuse of punctuation marks.		
No. of essays with error.	20	66.7%
No. without error.	10	33.3%
Total	30	100%

**Table 13: Wrong use of Tense**

Social Media Feature: Wrong use of tense	No. Of Essays	Percentage (%)
No. of essays with error.	15	50%
No. of essays without error.	15	50%
Total	30	100%

Table 14: Nonuse/incorrect Capitalization

Social Media Feature Non-use/incorrect capitalization	No. of Essays	Percentage
No. of essays present	20	66.7%
No. of essays absent	10	33.3%
Total	30	100%

Table 15: Wrong use of Concord

Social Media Feature Wrong use of English concord.	No. Of Essays	Percentage
No. of essays present	8	26.7%
No. of essays absent	22	73.3%
Total	30	100%

Table 16: Wrong spelling and shortening of words

Social Media Feature Wrong spelling and shortening of words	No. of Essays	Percentage
No. of essays present	22	73.3%
No. of essays absent	8	2.6%
Total	30	100%

Table 17: Wrong sentence construction

Social Media Feature Wrong sentence construction	No. of Essays	Percentage
No. of essays present	10	33.3%
No. of essays absent	20	66.7%
Total	30	100%

**Table 18: Neologism (coinages)**

Social Media Feature:	No. of Essays	Percentage
Neologism (coinage)		
No. of essays present	10	33.3%
No. of essay absent	20	66.7%
Total	30	100%

Table 19: Error features

S/ N	Features	Social Media Messages (240)	Percenta ge	Students' Formal Essays (30)	Occurrence Percentage
1.	Lack/misuse of punctuation	155	64.6%	20	66.7%
2.	Wrong use of tense	90	37.5%	15	50%
3.	Wrong spelling/shortening of words	68	28.3%	22	73%
4.	Wrong sentence construction	125	52.1%	15	50%
5.	Lack/misuse of capitalization	75	31.3%	20	66.7
6.	Nonuse of concord	126	52.5%	10	33.3%
7.	Use of neologism	19	7.9%	2	6.7%
8.	Alteration in English sounds/ pronunciation		5%		5%