Communication and socio-engineering: The realities of SMS in language pedagogy

Goodnews Chinasa Ihezuonu & Chinedum Enweonye

That man is advancing daily is a fact that Applied Linguists cannot shy away from. The global advancement is centered on communication and language is its hub. This study has as its focus on the GSM revolution and how its short messaging service (SMS) is reshaping language, for instance, the English language in Nigeria. It is the belief of many linguists that the short messaging service is taking text messaging through a natural process of language development. Findings have shown that the youths are more active in the use of text messaging. This is more reason why Applied Linguistics cannot go to sleep because this fragmentation of words, which is the concern of short messaging service, has dire consequences on the written English of Nigeria students mainly at the post-primary level of Education.

Introduction

Sociolinguistics is interested with language and social interaction. Every human endeavour activities, religions, social and business intercourse are hinged on communication and no one communicates without language. Communication on the other side is the main brain of social engineering via the establishment of social relationship existing between humans. Communication centres on a good mastery of language that is the system of signals, signs and symbols. Hence, some communication processes involve verbal and non-verbal symbols that are exchanged between two or more persons, then the three basic forms of communication involved namely; oral communication, visual communication and written communication are to be considered.

Oral communication involves direct speech and telephone. Visual communication involves posters, slides, charts and picture messages. While written communication involves letters, text messages etc. The study is limited to written communication which is closely related to the realities of SMS in language pedagogy. Where written communication includes the use of handsets to write letters and notes, then socio-engineering has really come of age.

Language, which is an interactional discourse on which socialization is achieved, performs numerous personal and social functions. This is in line with Alo's (1995:10) reference to Halliday's (1975) functional classification of language as listed below:

1.   Informative (communicating new information).
2.   Instrumental (satisfying material needs e.g. learning and education).
3.   Regulatory (controlling the behaviour of others e.g. conversation, greetings etc).
4.   Interactional (getting along with other people e.g. advertisement).
5.   Personal (expressing feelings)
6.   Heuristic (exploring the world)
7.   Imaginative (literacy creativity)

Notably, the functional classification of language listed above is fulfilled in the use of cell phone to send text messages and more importantly as it relates to the use of the English language in communication in Nigeria.

Historical Setting

From the linguistic point of view, Nigeria is an amalgam of different nations. So Nigeria is a multilingual nation. Tengan (1994:131) estimates Nigerian indigenous languages as between 150 - 400. This estimate excludes the various dialects of the figures captured above. It is based on this heterogeneity of Nigerian languages that three principal Nigeria languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba have been given national recognition while the English language continues its imperial dominance, courtesy of its antecedent as a colonial language. In the area of National life as; education, science and technology, information dissemination, commerce, administration, law and orders, the English language has held sway. It is a fact that the English Language is the principle medium of instruction in schools in Nigeria.

The use of English language in Nigeria is classified into two broad classes; Standard English and non-standard English

Standard English

> Yule (2003:227) defines Standard English as: The variety which forms the basis of printed English in newspaper and books; which are used in the mass media and which are taught in schools. It is the variety we normally try to teach to those who want to learn English as a second language. It is clearly associated with education and broadcasting in public contexts and its more easily described in terms of written language (i.e. vocabulary, spelling, grammar) than the spoken language.

Standard English involves the highly coded variety used by highly educated speakers. It is the prestigious form of English that cuts across national boundaries. It is the model taught in schools. The mass media equally make use of this model. It is also employed for official use by government and its agencies for communication purposes.

Non-Standard English

Non-Standard English is the English associated with uneducated usage as it departs from the variety of English which forms the basis of printed English. It is the type of English that is not accepted among educated speakers of English. This type is not expected to be taught in schools. The expression of socio-cultural concepts align to Standard English replete the coinage and form of non-standard English.

Consideration of socio-engineering and the realities of SMS

The nature of elasticity of human language made it extremely vulnerable to change over time. English language has not remained static, but like other languages it has undergone changes and transformations in form and in context as a point of reference. Akmajian et al (2006:339) stress the above claim with these examples

a.   In the town were the house and the chamber of the chief (early) modern English
b.   In pm tume waeron paet has bur paes eorles (Old English).

It is worth stating here that the vocabulary, morphology, phonology and syntax of a language (English) can undergo three different types of changes namely: addition, loss and change in structure. See: Akmajian (2006). It is the structural change that short messaging services has introduced into human communication and its efforts on teaching and learning especially in English as a second language situation (ESL) that has become the business of the Applied Linguists.

Communication

Altitudes, values, ideas, norms, information, culture, findings etc, are useless to any individual until when others can benefit from it and or appreciate it. Any means through which such is transmitted to others is called communication. (Akinyele, 2008).

Communication has to do with achieving a fully reciprocal understanding between two or more people. To Kolawole and Akinyele (2002:8), Communication is the act of carrying and exchanging information and ideas. Communication is very important in all human endeavour as there cannot be a relationship without communication. According to Akinyele (2008:1-3) communication is the sharing of information or making ones thought and wishes known to others. Without communication parents would not know their children needs, teacher could not help their students learn, friends cannot plan nor share with one another and people could not share knowledge. Sharing of knowledge is achieved through communication through the help of language.

A look at computer mediated communication (CMC)

In socio-engineering, there are new forms of technological mediated discourse (T.M.D). This new varieties includes mobile telephoning, email and SMS text messaging.

These three varieties above are merged under computer mediated communication. According to Rotimi (2007:43) "computer mediated communication involves communication between two or more people who interact with one another via separate computers through the internet or a network connecting using social software.'' Indeed, computer mediated communication means using computer technology in communication. Among the three forms of computer mediated communication mentioned above the main concern of this paper is SMS text messaging. SMS is the acronym for Short Messaging Services. It is based on the use of cell phone to send short messages of at most 160 characters to a recipient or recipients. It equally gives opportunity for feedback at the recipient is able to send a reply through the same mechanism. Notable, the users of SMS in order to maximize space and money, design creative means of expression such as condensed expression non-correctional spelling, latter/number/homophones and incomplete sentences. Rotimi (2007:44) citing Bush 2005 notes that: Users try to define themselves with styles in their   groups by playing with the language as they create new prescriptive roles to written language in the   process.

Rotimi (2007) citing Kupelian (2001) sees "a positive angle to short messaging services at it encourages the younger ones to participate in writing activities because it provides a non-threatening atmosphere in which writers feel less inhibited about expressing themselves".

Rotimi (2007), Reid and Reid (2004) and Thurlow (2003) have observed that several people all over the world use the facility, short message services. Among the millions of people all over the world that use the facility, the youth form the largest percentage of users of short messaging services. The service has helped youths to achieve some Halliday's functional classified of language such as international, informative, personal and imaginative functions.

Some (SMS) short message services used in text messages.

TABLE 1

Short message services (SMS)	Glossary
Ar or re, nt, tin, ok or k, gud or gd, d or de, abut c;	Are, not, thing, okay or cool, good the, about, see,

luv, or lv, der U, b, frm, Hv or hav, nd, hop or hpe, wds , jst , wit, pls or plz, contin, bt, tot, dat, dis, 4, wt, wen, ur, nw, nite or 9th/9te. dis, bk, pix, togeda sori, govmt, 4give msg, cos, cmin, wrk accusd, bn, ans, dwn, swit, tank or tnks, eva, cme, tru, hwz, 4eva, hu, environ. unkn, hart, datz, sis bro, wot, 8	love, there, you, be, form, have, and, hope, words, just with, please, counting, but, thought, that, this, for, with, when, your, now, night. This back picture, together sorry, government, forgive message, because coming work, accused, been answer, down, sweet, thanks, ever, come, through, how was, forever, who, environment, unknown, heart, that is sister, brother, what, ate.

The above are some handful list of short message service the researcher got to portray the fact of the existence of short message service used by youths to compose text messages. At this point, it will be good to look at the composition of text messages and what such compositions portrays fro pedagogy.

Linguistics variation in text messages

i.   The use of numbers homophones. Examples: 1 = one, 2 = two, to, too, 4 = four or for, 8 = eight, ate or hate, 24/7 = twenty four hours a day, seven days a week.

ii.   The use of letters homophones, b/c = because, b = bee, be. C = see, k = cool or okay, t = tea, y = why, r = are, y = you, w = which, wc = which.

iii.   The use of letter/ number homophones. Examples B4=before, w8=wait, n1 = nice one, 4wd = forward, 9th = night, NE1 = Nice one, CUL8r = see you later, F2F = face to face

iv.   The use of acronyms Imo = in my opinion, Tmb = text me back, Idk = I don't know, tyvm = thank you very much, Iow = in other words, Hand = have a nice day, asap=as soon as possible, ATM = at the moment, LMA=live me alone, paw = parents are watching, Ily = I love you, Lol = lots of love, NAGI = not a good idea, ETA=estimated time of arrival, Pcm = please call me, Otoh = on the other hand, etc.

v.   the use of consonant clusters. As in dnt = do not, frm = from, pls = please, g/f = girlfriend, fw = forward, att = attention, msg = message, drk = dark, txt = text, wrk = work.

vi.   The clapping of word as in comin = coming, writin = writing, talkin = talking, cookin = cooking, walkin = walking, dancing = dancing.

vii.   The use of non-convectional spelling as in gud = good, cul = cool, fin = fine, luv = love, telifone = telephone.

viii.   The use of America forms ya = you, wanna = want to, gonna = going to.

ix.   Shorting of words e.g. Bro = brother, pry = primary, sch = school, mon = Monday, edu = education, eng = English.

x.   Non-capitalization of proper noun

his mother's name is joy.
His mother's is joy.
she is on her way to aba.
She is on her way to Aba.
i will be in asaba by wednesday.
I will be in Asaba by Wednesday

xi.   Non-capitalization of the first letter of a sentence example:
his father is john = His father is John
her name is ruth = Her name is Ruth

(See Olaseinde 2010:128-137)

One of the aims of technology is to create and improve artefacts and system for man's satisfaction, the same technology placing a heavy load on the Applied Linguists, giving consideration to linguistic forms need in short messaging services in Nigeria as exemplified in 1-xii above question that would agitate the mind of the Applied Linguist includes,

(i)   What is plausible panacea to the challenges of short messaging services to pedagogy?
(ii)   Do text messaging services pose any challenge to the teaching and learning of the English Language in Nigeria?
(iii)   What are the challenges posed by short messaging services to the teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria?

In answering questions ii and iii above, it is imperative to note that learners of the (ESL) situation is expected by certain examining bodies to express themselves with clarity through the use of pronunciation and sentence types. There are appropriate words arranged and vary their sentence structures as well as expected. Those examining bodies also penalize errors in grammatical structure, spelling and pronunciation which are key areas where text messages violate the established norms/rules of writing. The concern of Applied Linguist is the awkward means of entering text messages and its limited length. Applied Linguist is bothered by the characteristics features of text messages which are not with established formal features. These characteristic features of text messages include.

i.   The outright omission or misplacement of punctuation marks.
ii.   The deliberate use of small letters for the personal pronouns.
iii.   The use of small letters at the beginning of a sentence
iv.   The use of letters / numbers homophones.
v.   The fragmentation of words.
vi.   The use of non – conventional spellings
vii.   The use of small letters at the beginning of a proper noun.

The above lists are key challenges posed by short messaging services to the teaching and learning of the English language in (ESL) situation. Indeed Applied Linguist examination of the language of (SMS) shows that it is non-standard in view of how text messages are written. The Applied Linguist is faced with the problem of carry over effects of use of English Language due to text messaging service on student and on the English learnt at school. Studies have revealed some of the negative effect of SMS on the ESL writing class. It is now difficult for students to write appropriate and appreciable lengthy essays because they are used to the skeletal messages sent on hand phones. There exist misplacement of punctuation marks; the use of small letters for capital letters, non-conventional spellings all these have dire consequences on the written English of Nigerian students mainly at the post primary level of education.

Suggestions

Appropriate moves taking to improve lives are a way forward. Technological advancement in communication is one of such areas of man's attempt in making the whole world a global village where communication flows faster. In as much as youths have come up with text message as preferred means of communication, the concern of Applied Linguist are as follows:

i. Train the ESL class to understand that text messaging service is an informal way of communicating, so its slight different should not be transferred into formal educational activities.

ii. Educators should give students more academic task that enhances their writing exercise to equip the students to be able to write lengthy essay.

iii. Educate the students to know the right vocabularies so that there will be no mix-up even when they come in contact with text messaging style of writing.

iv. It is good to consider the correct spellings of the English language with the incorrect spellings of text messaging service.

v. Handling the students in a kind manner, based on their knowledge of the sources of linguistic friction will enhance their level and zeal to learning.

vi. Educating the youths on the fact that the vocabulary of text messages in English has become a variety within variety of English and it is non standard variety of English.

References

Akinyele, T.A. (2008). *Business communication*. Ibadan: Clemente Media Konsult.

Akmajian, A., Demers, R.A, Farmer, A.K, Harnish, R. (2006). Linguistics: *An introduction to language and communication*. New Delhi: Prentice Hall.

Alo, M.A. (1995). *Applied English linguistics: An introduction*. Port-Harcourt: Aeddy Link.

Kolawole, C.O and Akinyele, T.A. (2002). Communication skills for corporate managers. Ibadan: Clemente Media Konsult.

Olaseinde, J.A. (2010). Socio-engineering and the realities of SMS in language pedagogy. *Journal of the school of languages*. Vol. 5: 123 – 135.

Reid, D and Reid, F. (2004). "Insight into social and psychological effect of SMS "Text messaging" http://www.160characters.org.

Rotimi, T. (2007). *Language and society*. Lagos: Simon Printers.

Tengan, A. (1994). "European language in African society and culture: A view on cultural authenticity" in Martins Putz (1994) *Language contact and language conflict*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company.

Thurlow, C. (2003). "Generation bid? The Sociolinguistics of young people's text messaging" In Discourse Analysis Online http://extrashu.ac.ukdaol/articles//vi//at/ihurlow20020013.paper.html retind on 10/06/14.

Yule, G. (2003). *The study of language*. India: Gopsons.

Goodnews Chinasa Ihezuonu
Department of Nigerian Languages
College of Education Agbor
Delta State, Nigeria
&
Chinedum Enweonye
Department of Igbo Language
Anambra State University
Igbariam Campus, Nigeria