

Emerging Trends in English among Youths in Nigeria – An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the potential impact of emerging trends in the formal written English language of youths which hitherto is uninvestigated in South-east Nigeria. Through a random sampling process, 2000 copies of pretested and validated questionnaire written in English were administered to undergraduates at five federal universities in south-east Nigeria. In addition, print-out of a couple of group conversations on Facebook and WhatsApp and Key Person Interview (KPI) was used to supplement the questionnaire data. In all, 1940 copies of questionnaire representing 97.00% were completed and returned for analysis. Results showed that emerging trends in written English conversation as social media convention is common among students in tertiary institutions. Findings revealed that 98.87% of participants used emerging trends during classes which indicates a massive infiltration of formal written English with social media trivialities while a statistically significant 34.54% have had to use these emerging trends though unconsciously during exams which reflects their deep and deliberate learning of these most potentially contentious tools of informal written conversation. Ultimately, the study confirmed that activities on social media was taking its toll on the students' performance in written English as they can no longer tell the appropriateness of one variety or another. In conclusion, the study established that emerging trends have profound negative impact on written English and recommends that teachers/instructors must make purposeful efforts to unteach that which has been wrongly learned by insisting that students begin to imbibe the culture of standard and formal writing regardless of the purpose of the writing.

Key words: Emerging Trends, Youths, Written English, Nigeria, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Oral and written English conversations fall within the broad spectrum of communication in every human society. It is abundantly clear that the goal of communication is to convey intents and meaning to the addressee employing the instrument of communication which is language. Languages in general and more specifically the English language are known to have origin, form, structure, use, function etc. It is also established that language is dynamic and dynamism entails that language changes over time and in which case we may find certain alterations in terms of phonology, morphology, syntax as well as semantics of the language.

Quite like other languages of the world, the English language has over the years undergone several changes. According to Abati (2016) "the English language is without doubt quite dynamic. In the last 200 years, it has lent itself to many innovations, as cultural, religious and situational codes have transformed the language and extended the dictionary with new words and idioms". As a rule-governed phenomenon, there exists rules, theories, hypotheses supporting already existing literature on English language particularly in the

areas of vocabulary development, word formation processes, orthography etc.

With the advent of technology, there has been an insurrection of terms used largely by the youths in written English conversation. Examples of these terms include; AFAP-as far as possible, AIT-alright, 9T-night, 2F4U- too fast for you, 8-ate, BRB-be right back, BBM-born by mistake, CU-see you, C-see, D4-therefore, 2MAO-tomorrow, 4GT-forget, 4-for, GUD-good, 1CE-once, L8R-later, DUNNO-don't know, FYN-fine, HAND-have a nice day, HAUS-house, EPP-help, IDK- I don't know DMGW-don't get me wrong, LAF-laugh, LWKMD-laugh wan kill me die, N/ND-and XUP-what's up etc. It is difficult to capture in print or by rote the origin, form, structure, use, classification or even function of these terms.

Previous studies show that these terms are gradually influencing formal writing by students. For instance, studies by Strain-Moritz (2016) on perceptions of technology use and its effects on students' writing showed that students used shorter forms of expression which they considered easier than using longer and complicated expressions. Also,

Abati (2016) in his study on Social media and the English Language in Nigeria reported that existing terms in English were turned into meaningless abbreviations by its users. These problems are more evident amongst second language learners of English, since they grapple with a lot of challenges associated with the basics of learning English language (Ama, 2018). The fact remains that language particularly second language learning poses myriads of problems but this problem is compounded when it is not taken seriously to facilitate learning. The implication is that English language is subject to forms of modification/change and learners may apply inappropriate forms for academic and formal purposes. However, the extent and usage of these new trends in formal communication by youths is yet to be investigated in Nigeria, which is the most populous country in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) where second language learners of English abound and English is the official language of the nation and medium of instruction for formal education. It is therefore against this background that the present study seeks:

- To investigate the possible origin, meaning, as well as the reach of these terms among youths in Nigeria
- To explore the potential impact of these emerging trends on formal communication
- To find means to unteach and correct that which has been mistakenly imbibed

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The research is founded on two theoretical frameworks and they are: The Word Formation Theory and The Theory of Second Language acquisition.

The word formation theory advanced by Yule (1985) emphasized the processes by which new words come into existence in a language and enhanced to fulfill the purpose for which they are formed. For Yule, word formation does not solely mean the creation of entirely new terms or words but also applies to already existing terms whose meanings were not readily acceptable at one time but which have been extended and modified to vary in meaning and interpretation and subsequently gained acceptance. The primary concern of the word formation theory advocated by Yule does not aim to denigrate a language but in keeping with the gradual directional change to meet the communicative needs of language users. Hence Yule made the following taxonomy of word formation processes and each having a deep and abiding rule – “Coinage, Borrowing, Compounding, Blending, Clipping, Backformation, Conversion, Acronyms and Derivation”. The paradigm therefore is such that any attempt at word formation that does not align or identify with Yule’s 1985 classification which captures in detail the origin and composition of various new terms not only makes a mockery of the theory of word formation but amounts to gross meaninglessness.

The theory of second language acquisition provided by Krashen (1987) accounts for the basics of second language (L_2) learning which involves several intermediate stages unlike the first language (L_1) which is believed to be

subconsciously acquired by virtue of the natural and informal platforms upon which it thrives. Krashen’s theory noted that second language learning is not quite as seamless as first language acquisition as it requires great effort to achieve learning and mastery of the target language more so as there is an already existing language in the learner’s repertoire which may at one point or the other interface. Krashen tried to delineate language acquisition as a natural exercise which does not entail detailed and deliberate application of grammatical codes and rules but more of an innate disposition to grasp that which occurs around one. On the other hand, the theory defined language learning as a conscious exercise geared towards comprehension of the rules of a target language with a view to appreciating the fundamentals of the language. Krashen’s theory of second language acquisition comprises five key hypotheses and they include – “the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis, the Monitor hypothesis, the Natural Order hypothesis, the Input hypothesis and the Affective Filter hypothesis”. The model thus postulates that second language acquisition involves the onerous task of sequential, systematic and conscious learning and relearning as well as mastery of the nitty-gritty, function, use, rules, applications, grammar, etc of the target language which is largely dependent on correction aimed at enhancing proficiency in second language learning and use. It therefore follows that experimenting with ideas, practices, variants or even forms which are not in tandem with Krashen’s 1987 renowned theory of second language acquisition only defeats the aim of language learning which is competence.

Explication of Key Terms

Emerging trends is a concept depicting a recent development marked by a rise in new and uncommon terms and expressions which have become fashionable and are fast taking over the place of formal, original and established forms in English language. The study however tries to ascertain the reach, extent of use, acceptability of these uncommon terms and its impact on English as a second language among its users.

Youths would refer collectively to young persons in general but particularly persons in their late teens and transitioning into adulthood. Youths in the study are characterized by age as well as level of education as they are predominantly students of tertiary institutions.

Previous Studies

As second language learners and teachers, learning and teaching English the correct way has been the focus of several studies particularly as language is believed to be dynamic. The implication is that the language is subject to forms of modifications/change and learners are likely to blunder especially when the inappropriate forms are deployed for academic and formal purposes. More so, in a non-native environment it is essential to know how these changes come about as well as its impact on the learners’ overall proficiency.

Adams (2007), surveyed student’s perceptions of the impact of instant messaging on academic writing and not-

ed that the subjects were found to be rather carefree with their writing as they admitted to not paying much attention to the tasks ahead of them. The attitude was as a result of their deep commitment to online activities and the consequence of which was always a haphazard performance as opposed to optimal performance embracing all four skills of language learning. The study concluded that online activities were adversely militating against the possibility of the students' academic writing excellence as it posed a lot of distractions and reflected in their poor performance.

Also, Miles (2013) explored the effects of social media on language indicating that social media has tremendously changed the manner we relate with one another. The study noted that among other effects, social media has impacted positively in terms of: speeding up the rate of communication, encouraging creation and use of entirely new terms/meanings which are informal, concise and often going contrary to the rules of grammar. However it is important to note that a huge downside to the study remains that these informal and new forms of language are moving into formal and academic writing as users are not able to draw a line between formality and informality as the case may be.

Furthermore, Harris and Dilts (2015) studied social media and its changes on students' formal writing by examining common errors found on the Facebook page in addition to instructor interview to validate findings. The result revealed that social media was taking its toll on the subjects' ability to direct their academic and formal writing. The study noted particularly; spelling, capitalization and homonym errors as well as subjects' inability to differentiate between formal and informal writing. In essence, the study indicates that errors which are commonplace on social media have remarkable effect on formal and academic writing.

Similarly, Strain-Moritz (2016) examined perceptions of technology use and its effects on students writing. A very significant finding of the study revealed that subjects were more accustomed to shorter forms of expressions which they considered a lot easier as opposed to longer and complicated expressions which show mastery. Again, the study showed that subjects were using these short forms even in their formal writing thus demonstrating that they were losing grip of appropriateness of use of these uncommon terms.

In the same way, Abati (2016) reviewed social media and the English Language in Nigeria. The author enumerated a litany of a new kind of English being used and written by youths particularly on twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook and other social media platforms and aptly described these new forms as "meta-English". Abati noted that these new forms were already existing terms in English but its users had bastardized them into meaningless abbreviations and lingo. The study concluded that the rise of a breed of young Nigerians who have no mastery of spellings, punctuations, tenses as a result of social media influence spell doom for use of English in Nigeria.

In addition, Bamgbose (2018) evaluated the effects of social media on English language in Nigeria. The study noted that activities on social media was an addiction as young people rely on the "autocorrect" applications on their devices to complete their wrong spelling without efforts to learn

the proper thing. Also, the author reported that the use of wrong spelling forms for instance: "iz, dat, kk, u, yu, btw," etc on social media which has begun to feature in students' academic writing was a serious issue indicative of a lack of proficiency in the language. The study concluded that though social media may have some benefits, its demerits far outweigh its merits as linguistic choices of users must be checked to avert the ugly consequences the abuse of the language may cause in the not too distant future.

The existing body of literature offers insight into the existence and use of uncommon terms in the English language conversation of youths as well as its impact on the target language proficiency of learners. The reviews have shown very substantial evidence of the root and link of these emerging trends to social media as its primary sphere of influence and from where they characteristically creep into the formal and academic domain. However, while these studies have attempted to provide a general knowledge of the use of some of these emerging trends among young people on the social media and beyond, no study has empirically catalogued these emerging trends/meanings or detailed the extent of use by language learners as well as its impact on learners overall competence. Hence this study will fill the gaps in existing knowledge and expand research on these emerging trends among users.

METHOD

Study Design

The study was a cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey study. In order to meet the research objective of investigating emerging trends, its potential impact on formal communication as well as finding means to unteach that which has been erroneously imbibed among youths in Nigeria, these emerging trends were investigated using a seventeen-item structured questionnaire. Also Key Person Interview was used to validate questionnaire data. The study was conducted in the first or harmattan semester of the 2017/2018 academic session. The study area was the south-eastern Nigeria where the native language is Igbo but the medium of instruction in Universities is the English which is the nation's official/second language.

Participants

The study investigated a variegated population of undergraduate students (males and females) at five Federal Universities in the south-east Nigeria. The participants were young adults and adult Nigerians aged 17 years and above, of different social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds drawn from five states in south-east Nigeria namely; Imo State, Enugu State, Ebonyi State, Abia State and Anambra State. A total of 2000 respondents who gave consent were enrolled in the study.

Sampling Technique

The Systematic Sampling Process (SSP) was applied to select faculties to be represented while a self-designed ballot-

ing strategy was used to select various disciplines. The 2000 participants were randomly selected from the Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO) Imo State represented by School of Engineering, University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) Enugu State represented by Faculty of Arts, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo (AEFUNAI) Ebonyi State represented by Faculty of Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike (MOUAU) Abia State represented by Faculty of Agriculture and Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU) Awka Anambra State represented by College of Medicine. Four hundred respondents were selected across disciplines and levels from each of the institutions for the study. The participants were randomly picked from a larger pool of students who indicated interest and consented after the objective of the study was explained to them. In addition, Key Person Interview (KPI) was used to verify/supplement the information obtained from the questionnaire study. The persons used for the KPI were 15 teaching staff of the institutions (3 per institution) of study that examined, evaluated and graded essays written in English at various stages of learning in a semester to ascertain whether the standard of the students' written continuous assessment, examination and other presentations was replete with these incursions. The KPI addressed the following issues: (a) Are there instances of the use of emerging trends by students in their formal writing? (b) What do you think are the reasons for use these terms? (c) Does this usage affect their use of English language? (d) Are there ways to correct/stop the use of these emerging trends?

Study Instrument and Data Collection

The major instrument for data collection was a seventeen-item pretested questionnaire. Following a brief introductory part explaining the purpose of the study, the questionnaire was in two parts. The first part contained information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents namely; institution of study, discipline, gender, age and student's level of study. The second part contained seventeen items addressing key issues which are; (1) What is your Mother tongue/native language? (2) When did you start receiving formal instruction in English? (3) How well do you understand/use the English language? (4) How would you rate your fluency in English language? (5) How would you rate your written English? (6) Does your mother tongue/native language or any other language affect your use of the English language? (7) Are you conversant with Social Media? (8) Which of the platforms do you use most? (9) What form of language do you employ in your social media interactions? (10) What is the common form of language used by your peers and others on Social media? (11) Give as many examples as you can and their meanings. (12) How did you come across these terms? (13) Do you find yourself using any of the above examples when taking notes in class? (14) If yes, how often do you do that? (15) Do you do that consciously or unconsciously? (16) Do you also use such informal or abbreviated forms in your examinations? (17) If yes, do you do that consciously or unconsciously?

The participants took approximately 18 minutes to complete the questionnaire. In addition, a printout of a couple of

group conversations on Facebook and WhatsApp platforms of some of the participants who gave consent were studied as firsthand/on the spot assessment of the samples' natural flow of conversation without external interference. The choice of Facebook and WhatsApp platforms was made as samples indicated greater frequency of use.

Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaire study were collated, aggregated and analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentage calculations. A bar chart was constructed to graphically represent information on means to unteach and correct that which has been mistakenly imbibed.

Ethical Considerations

As the study centered on human subjects, ethical concerns were taken into account in the recruitment of study participants. The objective of the study was explained to them and the ones who gave consent were recruited for the study.

RESULTS

Study Institutions, Questionnaire Distribution and Gender of Respondents

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of questionnaire and response rate according to the institutions as well as gender of respondents. Clearly a total of 2000 Questionnaires were evenly distributed among the institutions of study and high overall response rate of 97% was received. The returns varied slightly across institutions as AEFUNAI recorded the highest percentage (98.05%) of returns. This was followed by MOUAU and FUTO that recorded 97.75% while UNN recorded the least returns at 94.00%. Also, the distribution for gender from each institution is also shown on Table 1.

Characteristics of the Students Studied

The distribution for the characteristics of the students studied is presented on Table 2. The highest proportion of the students (32.37%) came from the 300 level while the least (20.52%) was drawn from the 200 level. Again, the majority (59.64%) of the respondents were aged between 21 and 24 years followed by the 17-20 age brackets which came to 34.79% and finally the 25-28 age brackets that came to 5.57%. There were more females (51.44%) than males (48.56%) in the study.

The respondents were predominantly Igbo. Table 2 indicates that 85.72% of respondents are native Igbo speakers while 14.28% are native speakers of other indigenous languages in Nigeria.

Origin, Meaning, and the Reach of Emerging Trends in English among youths in Nigeria

The distribution for the origin, meaning, and the reach of emerging terms in English among youths in Nigeria is presented on Table 3. Up to 76.08% of respondents came in

Table 1. Distribution and return of questionnaire by institution and gender of respondents

Institutions	No of questionnaire distribution	No (%) of questionnaire returned	Male		Female	
			Frequency	%	Frequency	%
MOUAU	400	391 (97.75)	188	48.08	203	51.92
NAU	400	388 (97.00)	198	51.03	190	48.97
AEFUNAI	400	394 (98.05)	198	50.25	196	49.75
UNN	400	376 (94.00)	200	53.19	176	46.80
FUTO	400	391 (97.75)	158	40.04	233	59.06
Total	2000	1940 (97.00)	942	48.56	998	51.44

MOUAU Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike
 NAU Nnamdi Azikwe University Awka
 AEFUNAI Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo
 UNN University of Nigeria Nsukka
 FUTO Federal University of Technology Owerri

Table 2. The distribution for the characteristics of the students studied

Students Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Level of study		
100 level	483	24.89
200 level	398	20.52
300 level	628	32.37
400 level	431	22.22
Total	1940	100.00
Respondents' age (in years)		
17 – 20	675	34.79
21 – 24	1157	59.64
25 – 28	108	5.57
29 & Above	Nil	0
Total	1940	100.00
Gender		
Male	942	48.56
Female	998	51.44
Total	1940	100.00
Mother tongue of respondents		
Igbo	1663	85.72
English	0	0
Others (Hausa, Yoruba, Efik, etc)	277	14.28
Total	1940	100.00

first contact with the English language early enough at the kindergarten, while the remaining 23.9% was at primary education with none at secondary education level. Also, 98.92% of the study population is aware and conversant with the social media and their most commonly used platforms are WhatsApp/Facebook at 63.94%. Majority (97.76%) attest to picking up these emerging trends from social media and similar proportion (98.87%) agrees to frequent use of these emerging trends including note-taking in class though 56.88% perceived it as a conscious act and 32.06% considered it an unconscious act. The list of some commonly used emerging trend terms and meanings as used by the respondents is presented on Table 4.

Potential Impact of Emerging Trends in English on formal Communication among Youths in Nigeria

The result on Table 5 represents the potential impact of emerging trends in English on formal communication among Nigerian youths. First, the Self-assessment of English language understanding considering the use of the terms indicate that up to 63.2% indicate that their English language understanding is “very well” while about half of them (50.15%) indicate that they have good fluency in English Language and up to 43.35% opted for “Good” in describing their written English language. Also, Mother tongue showed slight interference in the use of English Language. There were 34.54% who responded that they use the emerging trend terms in their examinations, and surprisingly 98.96% of respondents use them unconsciously.

Perception on Means to Unteach and Correct the use of Emerging Trends Among Nigerian Youths

The result for the perception on means to unteach and correct the use of emerging trends was such that 73% were of the notion that sticking to the use of correct form of language irrespective of the situation involved would go a long way in checking the use of these terms. Also, 60% each were of the view that graded scripts should be returned to the students so that they can note their errors and consciously learn to correct them, and poor grading of works where such emerging trend terms were applied (Figure 1).

DISCUSSION

The present study reveals that emerging trends in written English conversation is common among students in tertiary institutions. The study shows that the respondents use these informal terms very extensively in everyday interaction particularly on social media as 98.92% of them are frequent users of various social media platforms which further confirms that these emerging trends are social media-generated. Consequently, this study is a substantiation that students in general and more specifically those of various federal universities in the south-eastern part of Nigeria equally use these terms in conversations.

Table 3. Distribution for origin, meaning, and the reach of emerging trends in english among youths in nigeria

S.No	Items	Response frequency	Percent (%)
1	First point of contact of formal instruction in English language		
	Kindergarten	1476	76.08
	Primary	464	23.92
	Secondary	0	0
2.	Conversance with the social media		
	Yes	1919	98.92
	No	21	1.08
	Not quite	0	0
3	Most frequently used platform		
	Facebook/Twitter	338	17.61
	WhatsApp/Facebook	1227	63.94
	Instagram/WhatsApp	354	18.45
4	Language used by self on social media interaction		
	Formal	48	2.50
	Informal	808	
	Semi formal	1063	55.39
5	Language used by peers/others on social media interaction		
	Formal	27	1.40
	Informal	733	38.20
	Semi formal	1159	60.40
6	How did you come across these terms		
	Social media	1876	97.76
	School	37	1.93
	Home	6	0.31
	Others		
7	Use of emerging trends during note-taking in class		
	Yes	1918	98.87
	No	17	0.88
	Not quite	5	0.26
8	If in affirmation, what is the frequency of use		
	Often	1898	98.96
	Rarely	20	1.04
	Never	0	0
9	What type of act would that be		
	Conscious	1091	56.88
	Unconscious	615	32.06
	Causal	212	11.05
	TOTAL		
10	Examples of Emerging Trends in English and their meanings	See Table 4 for list of commonly used emerging trend terms and meanings as used by the respondents	

Also, result showed that only an insignificant 2.50% of the sample population agree that they use formal English in their social media interactions as opposed to 42.11% who use informal English language which implies the use of these emerging trends all through the length and breadth of

the conversation and 55.39% who use semi-formal English language which means an admixture of formal and informal terms in their social media interactions. That is to say that the majority of the sample population is taken to flippant and casual expressions even amidst their inadequate mastery of

Table 4: Commonly used emerging trends terms by respondents and their interpretations

143-I love you
1432 - I love you too
18U - I hate you
1DAFUL - wonderful
2 - to
2DAY - Today
2F4U - Too fast for you
2GEDA - together
2GT2BT - too good to be true
2M2H - too much to handle
2MAO - tomorrow
4 - for
4EVA - forever
4GT - forget
4RM - from
8 - ate
9T - night
@ - at
AFAP - as far as possible
AIT - alright
AKA - Also known as
AOC - area of concentration
ASAP - as soon as possible
ATM - at the moment
B - Be
B/COS - because
B3 - blah blah blah
B4 - before
BA3 - battery
BAM - below average mentality
BAMF - bad ass motherfucker
BBL - be back later
BBM - born by mistake
BESTIE - close friend
BFF - best friends forever
BFFL - best friend for life
BK - back
BRB - be right back
BTW - by the way
BUFFDAY - birthday
C - see
CB - crazy bitch
Cmon - come on
CNT - can't
COS - cause
CSL - can't stop laughing
CU - see you

(Contd...)

Table 4: (Continued)

D - the
D4 - therefore
D46 - down for sex
DAN - than
DAT - that
DEM - them
DEY - they
DGMW - don't get me wrong
DIA - their
DIS - this
DIY - do it yourself
DND - do not disturb
DNT - don't
DUNNO - don't know
EOD - end of discussion
F2F - face to face
FYI - for your information
FYN - fine
G2G - got to go
GIG - got to go
GN - good night
GR8 - great
GUD - good
HBD - happy birthday
HAND - have a nice day
HAUS - house
EPP-help
1CE - Once
IDC - I don't care
IDGAF - I don't give a fuck
IDK - I don't know
IKR - I know right
ILY/143 - I love you
IZ- is
K - okay
KMA - kiss my ass
KMF - kiss my feet
KUL - cool
L8R - later
LAF - laugh
LHM - Lord help me
LLNP - long life and prosperity
LMAO - laugh my ass out
LMFAO - laugh my fucking ass out
LMK - let me know
LOL - laugh out loud/lots of love
LTNS - long time no see
LUK - look

(Contd...)

Table 4: (Continued)

LUV U – love you
LWKMD – laugh wan kill me die
MAD – making a difference
MGMT – management
MOG – man of God
N/ND – and
NEVA – never
NOYB – none of your business
NVM – never mind
NYT – night
OIC – oh I see
OMG – oh my God/gosh
OMO – on my own
OMW – on my way
OYO – on your own
PAW – parents are watching
PLS – Please
POS – parent over shoulder
PPL – people
R – are
RLY – really
ROTFL – rolling on the floor laughing
S2pid – stupid
SMH – shaking my head/somewhat
SOME1 – someone
SOWIE – sorry
STFU! – shut the fuck up!
Sup – what’s up
SYL – see you later
SYS – see you soon
TANX – thanks
TENQ – thank you
TGIF – thank God is Friday
TIN – thing
TTYL – talk to you later
TYT – take your time
TYVM – thank you very much
U – you
UR – your
UWC – you are welcome
VIP – very important person
VN – voice note
W8 – wait
WAT – what
WBU – what about you
WTF – what the fuck
WULLNP – wish you long life and prosperity
XOXO – hugs and kisses

Table 4: (Continued)

XUP – what’s up
Y – why
YOLO – you only live once
Z–is

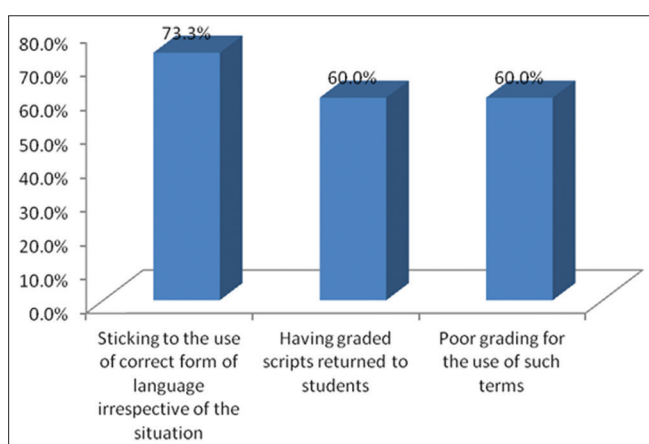
English as a second language. This supports previous findings by Abati (2016) that there is a generation of English users who do not pay attention to the core of the language and as such, they go against all rules of concord, punctuation, lexis and structure etc. Similarly, Bambose (2018) argues that because students generally devote so much time and channel a lot of energy on social media than elsewhere, that accounts for the falling standard for grammatical details as their formal writing is replete with subject-verb inconsistencies, run-on sentences, ambiguous expressions, dangling modifiers which show improper mastery of the language.

Furthermore, the checklist of these emerging trends used by respondents and their meanings show that they embody a world of interpretations among its users and the homogeneity of the individual responses as well as understanding speaks volumes for the spread, use and acceptance of these informal terms among youths. A closer look into the possible theory behind these formations reveals that they have no known word formation process rather they abound in (1) haphazard clipping e.g.: PPL-people, UR-your, BK-back, DNT-don't, CNT-cant; (2) chaotic acronyms e.g.: OYO-on your own, TTYL-talk to you later, GTG-got to go, SYL-see you later, MAD- making a difference, SMH-shaking my head, OMO-on my own, LLNP-long life and prosperity, BRB-be right back, OMW-on my way, LOL-laugh out loud/lots of laughter; (3) jumbled abbreviations e.g.: RLY-really, MGMT-management, K-okay, B-be, U-you, Y-why, C-see, CU-see you, R-are; (4) random fusion of letters and numbers e.g.: L8R-later, GR8-great, 4RM-from, 4EVER-forever, B4-before, 4GT-forget, D4-therefore, SOME1-someone, BA3-battery, 9T-night, 2DAY-today; (5) outright replacement of words by numbers e.g.: 4-for, 2-to, 8-ate, 143-I love you; (6) inordinate homophonic substitution/deliberate heterotrophy e.g.: 1DAFUL-wonderful, 2GEDA-together, DIS-this, DEY-they, DAT-that, DEN-then, DIA-their/there, TENQ/10Q-thank you, DEM-them, D-the, N/ND-and, BCOS-because, DAN-than, GUD-good, NEVA-never, KUL-cool, LUK-look, SOWIE-sorry, TIN-thing, FYN-fine, WAT-what, LAF-laugh, HAUS/AUS-house, AIT-alright, BUFFDAY-birthday; (7) pidginized forms e.g.: LWKMD-laugh wan kill me die, BBM-born by mistake; (8) meaningless coinages e.g.: XUP-what's up, DUNNO-don't know etc. It is clear that hundreds of English words have been subjected to one form of modification, alteration or another yet they make complete sense to this generational circle. This very significant finding is corroborated in previous studies by Abati (2016), who noted that “the kind of meta-English now being used by young people can be utterly confusing. The irony is that it makes sense to the young ones, and they can conduct long conversations in this strange version of the English language”. In addition, earlier research by Hezili (2010) established that chat users omitted copulas, articles

(Contd...)

Table 5. Potential influence of emerging trends in English on formal communication among youths in Nigeria

S.No	Items	Response frequency	Percent (%)
1	Self-assessment of English language understanding		
	Fairly well	241	12.42
	Very well	1226	63.20
	Perfectly well	473	23.38
	Total	1940	100.0
2	Self assessment of Fluency in English language		
	Fair	345	17.78
	Good	973	50.15
	Very good	622	32.06
	Total	1940	100.0
3	Self-assessment of Written English language		
	Fair	526	27.11
	Good	841	43.35
	Very good	573	29.54
4	Any instances of mother tongue interference in your use of English language		
	Yes	723	37.27
	No	451	23.25
	Not quite	766	39.48
5	Ever applied such informal / abbreviated forms in examination		
	Yes	670	34.54
	No	1253	64.58
	Not quite	17	0.88
6	If in affirmation, what type of effort would that be		
	Conscious	0	0
	Unconscious	663	98.96
	Casual	7	1.04

**Figure 1.** Summary of Perception on means to unteach and correct the use of emerging trends

and subject pronouns. The study equally noted that social media hindered students' ability to communicate effectively in the written form as their academic preparations and presentations were abounding in misspelled words rapidly taking the place of original lexis and terminologies in the language.

Again, in trying to ascertain the samples' points of contact with these terms, 97.76% of them indicated that the social media was their first contact with these terms, while 1.93% said that they picked these terms from school and 0.31% agreed to have come in contact with them at home. As earlier reported by Miles (2013), "the social media provides a rich playground for experimenting with, developing, and subverting language" Clearly, social media has come to stay and like every innovation, it has its merits and demerits but Miles description of the activities on social media as it concerns the use of English succinctly portrays a serious joke that must not be taken for granted. Although the English language has become a part of the culture of Nigeria as a people by virtue of its role as the official language and medium of instruction but that does not preclude the possibility of inadequate learning and mastery of the target language more so with the growing tension associated with social media and its concomitants at the heart of which is the contrariety between formality/correctness and informality/style. It is therefore safe to say that since this overwhelming percentage came across these emerging trends on the social media, one may argue that social media has significantly affected written English communication as users are constantly in touch

with emerging new terms and are equally free to create yet another.

Moreover, in a bid to establish the extent and frequency of the use of this new form of communication, 98.87% of the study population agreed to using these terms during note-taking in class and 97.84% confirm the regularity of this application during classes. It is clear too from the figures that these new-found terms are fast moving beyond the very domain for which they were created and introduced. Although 56.24% believe that applying these terms during classes was a conscious act, 31.70% termed it an unconscious act while 12.06% considered it a casual act. A fact of basic importance remains that this group of users are well aware of their use/introduction of these otherwise informal forms into formal English and to this end we may infer that this introduction/application is not a mistake in any case and will require very conscious effort to stick to the use of standard forms especially academic/formal writings.

Furthermore, a reasonable proportion (34.54%) agreed to have applied though unconsciously such informal and abbreviated forms in examination while 64.58% never used such items in examination and 0.88% could not categorically state their use or nonuse of such items during examination. This clearly demonstrates that for the percentage of the study sample that have had to inject these emerging new forms in a situation as serious as examination, such practice is only a reflection of their deep and deliberate learning of these most potentially contentious tools of informal written conversation. This finding is corroborated in earlier studies by Strain-Moritz (2016) who noted that academic writing was increasingly becoming a struggle as the use of technology in schools was contributory to the failing writing ability seeing that the students could not differentiate when it is appropriate to use the social media variant and when it is not.

In addition, a look at the printout of a couple of group conversations on Facebook and WhatsApp platforms of some of the participants for firsthand/on the spot assessment of the samples' natural flow without external interference showed that there were more of these internet creations than regular English words. It was almost impossible to make a head or tail of the conversation without recourse to interpretations on the checklist from the questionnaire survey as very lengthy conversations were carried out using these emerging trends. One may begin to wonder how everyone on the platform understood and used these items of communication seamlessly and the answer lies with the fact that, naturally, people tend to/make efforts to pick up "the-not-so-good" very quickly and that simply underscores the massive infiltration of formal written English with social media trivialities.

Moreover, the Key Person Interview (KPI) which aimed at verifying, supplementing as well as validating the findings of the questionnaire survey showed that teachers at various levels have encountered on many occasions students' introduction/use of terms that they considered inappropriate for English language communication. Apart from grammatical and a few spelling errors which they noted was common among some second language learners of English in the essays they reviewed from time to time as part of the teaching/learning process, they found some items which they reported

were not in keeping with the expected standards of written English. They equally pointed out that not every student was guilty of such blunders but the preponderance of these informal items on the scripts of those who used them was worrisome. A good number of them believe that activities on social media was taking its toll on the students performance in written English as they can no longer tell the appropriateness of one variety or another. This form of writing or usage is not an exclusive preserve of university students as key person interviews as well as personal encounter reveal that the usage has permeated the very adult/educated circles' informal communication. It is very important to underline the fact that Nigeria is a multilingual nation and English is only learned as a second language. There is a world of difference between that language (L1) which is instinctively acquired and that language (L2) which is deliberately learned. Suffice to say that instinctive acquisition of a language simply denotes that the language in question is natural to its owners while deliberate learning of a language indicates that the language in question is alien to its users. This therefore explains why the English language must be conscientiously learned and relearned in Nigeria until users achieve near-native competence in the language. A few of the key persons specifically pointed out that those informal items were social media inventions and that the danger in imbibing such a toxic culture is that it systematically pervades and more often than not causes the displacement of the original and correct version. Earlier studies by Adams (2007) confirms that students who were used to online activities have been found to keep away from higher level of vocabulary and this was attributed to the fact that it was not their natural way of speaking with their peers hence its profound negative effect on their academic writing.

However, these teachers believe and rely so much on feedbacks as corrective measures to this complex challenge. Thus they stress the need to always use the correct forms of the language in their written English communication and very importantly, note the readership of their various communications. They ensure that they review their essays, grade them accordingly and return same to them in order that they may begin to consciously note their areas of strength and weakness alike. They equally try to highlight the need to draw the line between formality and informality and that the use of social media variants in written English was adversely affecting their formal English language communication. The key person interview findings confirms earlier studies by Beasley (2013) that social media effects on students writing can be negative as they tend to write too fast without thinking through, use of text language such as abbreviations that are common in social media and their compositions are usually fraught with grammar and spelling errors. In the same vein, Belal (2014) reported that social networking sites otherwise called social media have obvious damaging impact on English language as the language learners have been found to apply casual and short forms of words in official/academic writing as well as in speaking and that depletes the strength and actual form of the language. In addition, Adams (2007) reported that students owned up to paying no attention or even thinking through their writing because of their multiple

engagement on social media at the same time and the result of which is decline in writing aptitude. Similarly, Harris and Dilts (2015) studies further strengthens the findings that social media was adversely affecting the students output in terms of writing as they hardly took into account the audience of their writing rather they were found to consistently replicate some of the nuances of the social media such as shorthand of internet slang as well as abbreviations in their academic work.

CONCLUSION

This study has established the possible origin and link of these emerging trends to social media. It has also found evidence to show that the meanings and reach of these emerging trends among youths in Nigeria is pervasive. Also, among other human errors in written English, emerging trends have been found to be largely responsible for the falling standards in use of English language among youths in Nigeria. From the findings of the study, we make a few recommendations as follows:

- a. The results which substantiate the fact that language undergoes forms of modifications and second language learners have challenges associated with proficiency capitulate a significant pedagogic implication which is the inclusion of word formation theory as an integral part of all English language texts to enable learners understand and appreciate word formation processes and its application in second language learning.
- b. Adopting social media as a teaching tool aimed at deliberately exposing students to social media norms with a view to correcting them as well drawing the fine line between formality and informality should be encouraged.
- c. Teachers and instructors must make purposeful efforts to unteach that which has been wrongly learned by insisting that students begin to imbibe the culture of standard and formal writing regardless of the purpose of the writing.
- d. Teachers and instructors should painstakingly make a classification between formality and informality to forestall the ugly consequences of the flagrant abuse of the English language.
- e. For specialization, authenticity and relevance, similar studies focusing on other language skills and contexts should be carried out to ascertain the extent of social media effects.

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