



Innovations and Reproduction in Second Language (L2) New Media: A Discursive- Semiotic Study of Selected SMS Text Messages in Nigeria

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Abstract

Since the turn of the new millennium, the new media has continued to alter the communication configuration in modern societies. The social media tools have been influencing the way we interact and communicate. These wireless networks have confirmed that our world has indeed become a global village by creating a superhighway for communication possibilities never witnessed in human history. While scholars have explored the roles of some of the new media platforms e.g. Facebook blogging, and twitter for private and public discourses(e.g., Taiwo, 2010; Presley, 2010, 2012), previous studies in the use of SMS in Nigeria have concentrated more on sociolinguistic, lexical, or morpho-syntactic features of text messages (e.g., Awonusi, 2004; Chilwa, 2010). The present study, however, considers aspects of the new media discourse strategies as resources in a second language setting that demonstrate users' bilingual creativity. It adopts a discursive-semiotic approach in its analytical paradigm to examine how participants, sharing the mobile protocols, deploy linguistic and non-linguistic facilities as well as contextual resources to create relationship and to enact meaning. The approaches of Discourse Analysis (DA) and Semiotics (Schiffrin, 1994; Chandler, 2001) as well as insight from Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), and Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA)(Herring 2001, 2004; O'Riley, 2005; Herring, 2007) provide the theoretical underpinning for this study. CMC and CMDA, for instance, have been used as tool kits to study and to explain how the new media technologies influence the strategies with which language users within a given virtual sphere engage a wide range of audience through the virtual protocols. The study finds that the use of text messages has opened up creative ways of deploying the resources of a non-native language (English) among bilinguals in Nigeria. The outcome of this innovative and reproduction process confirms the emergence of varieties of new media-based discursive practices in English that reflect the socio-cultural contexts of the communicative event.

Keywords: New media; discursive-semiotic features; discourse strategies; Text messages (SMS); bilingual creativity

1. Introduction

Since the emergence of the New Media Technologies (NMT), the modern societies are now vastly interconnected in a way that has never been witnessed in human history. Physical, geographical, and perhaps psychological boundaries that had before separated peoples and nations are being obliterated through computer-mediated communication platforms. Studies (e.g., Castells, 2004; Eid & Ward, 2009; Coleman, *et al.*,2008) have observed that the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution that hit our world in the 1970s has grown into a global phenomenon, turning our world into a networked society. They also argue that the emergence of the social media has resulted in the creation of virtual interacting environments, on-line communities and public spheres that create and re-align relationships. Although our world is presently linguistically and culturally-diverse, it has now become more globalised, more open and more interconnected.

Given this multifaceted and multi-dimensional versatility of the new media, evolving socio-cultural and context-sensitive discursive practices are now improving relationships and communications laterally and horizontally.

In Nigeria, for instance, the onset of the new millennium witnessed the introduction of the Global System of Mobile Communication (popularly known as GSM in Nigeria). This singular technological advancement has given rise to a phenomenal growth in the deployment of the wireless communication tools for personal and official communication purposes, marketing products and services, wooing voters during electioneering periods, warning or advising friends and citizens during emergencies or danger, and inviting friends and acquaintances to social events. At the institutional and governmental levels, the country has also been trying to harness the benefits of the New Media by using it to interact with citizens, stakeholders, the elite communities and to promote civic engagements.

One defining feature of the new media is the central role that language plays in the whole process of crafting, deployment and delivery of the messages, as well as, the impact the messages have on the receivers. Language use generally forms the bedrock of interactions and the development of relationships in any communities, whether physical or virtual. Although the emergence of information technology has changed the face of communication, language remains the indispensable resource for processing these communicative possibilities via the new media.

Arguably, communication technologies have changed the way Nigerians maintain connections and foster relationships. The New Media has helped Nigerian mobile telephone users to overcome geographical and physical barriers. This is indicative of the tremendous growth of the subscriber base of mobile phones users over these few years.

Apart from aiding the spread of English globally, mobile phone technology is helping to transform the features and functions of English with the possibility of evolving varieties of English that include technologically-mediated varieties in environments that are non-natives. The SMS texts collected and described in this study exhibit linguistic, discourse and communicative features that reveal not only the general and conventional features but also some peculiar socio-cultural and sociolinguistic contexts of the Nigerian environment.

While some previous efforts (Taiwo, Ifukor, op.cit.) have considered aspects of text messaging among Nigerians, very little has been done on using discourse analysis framework to explore some of the evolving innovative strategies. The present study adopts the approaches of discourse analysis (Schiffrin, 1994) and Semiotics (Peirce, 1933; Chandler 2001) to discuss bilingual creativity and discursive practices in text messaging among selected Nigerians. It finds that both the structural and functional components of the texts and their linguistic features are deliberately 'manipulated' by the senders to communicate specific meanings to the receivers. The study was motivated by the need to bridge the gap between the growing importance of new media in private and public spheres against the backdrop of the paucity of works on the systematic description of computer-mediated non-native English language discourse in Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

Language use in text messages can be viewed as a means of expressing feelings, sharing information, contracting and sustaining relationships, communicating 'unspoken' messages as well as a tool for accomplishing some personal and social goals.

Research has shown that communication occurring within a computer-mediated framework impacts on different aspect of an interaction. Texting, SMS text messages have become an important language behaviour, a sub-part of the new media tools, that modern man now rely on to communicate and socialize. Some scholars argue that text messages bear more resemblance to a code than a standard language. A text filled with code language expressions is not necessarily accessible to an outsider. The unique writing style provides opportunities for creativity (Kasesniemi & Rautiainen, 2002: p.183).

It is interesting to note that discourse analysts often use the term 'text' in a sense that refers to any piece of language that is performing some function in some context. Halliday and Hasan (1985) assert that "any instance of a living language that is playing some part in a context of situation is referred to as a text" (p.10-11). Elsewhere, it is argued that a text is made up of words and sentences whose importance is its meaning. These meanings (i.e. communicative, cognitive, or socio-cultural) are coded in words and sentences (Opeibi, 2009).

Discourse analysis is concerned with language in use in social contexts and examines how stretches of language considered in their full *textual*, *social* and *psychological* context become meaningful and unified for their users. Since SMS text messages may be viewed as language use in social contexts, it may, therefore, be considered the study of discourse (Brown & Yule, 1983; Stubbs, 1983; Cook, 1992; Fasold, 1990).

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) has been used as tool kits to study and explain how the new media technologies influence the strategies in which language users within a given virtual sphere engage a wide range of audience through the virtual protocols (Herring, 2001).

While academic and research literature on Computer-Mediated Communication(CMC) has continued to grow, this expanding field is yet to systematically account for evolving creativity and innovations in bilingual communities where though internet access may be limited, the platform of the global system of mobile communication(GSM) has provided the compensatory medium for on-line, real-time communication.

A recent news report quoting the Nigerian Communications Commission, the mobile communication regulatory agency, states that: "*The country's mobile telephone subscriber base has continued to record strong growth with the number of active mobile lines hitting 105.2 million in August....(The Punch, October 5, 2012:21).*" This implies that over a hundred million Nigerians now send and receive text messages daily. The sociolinguistic implication of the huge volume of e-messages being exchanged among Nigerians will provide interesting objects of study.

Interestingly, with more social media tools becoming available almost every day, more windows are being opened for people to engage fellow citizens, friends, colleagues, and even political leaders on issues of mutual interest. Both private and public spheres are witnessing a flurry of activity initiated by computer-mediated communications.

If we may add, communication is also being encouraged at the horizontal level more than along the vertical level through the help of cell phones and text messages. Differences in age, class and economic status are often obliterated through the impersonal medium of text messages. What one may not be willing to say or write via face-to-face medium is easily being conveyed through short messages devices.

One may therefore support the view that CMC, as a platform for social information exchange, has improved relationships across social and economic classes, having helped different people with different social and educational backgrounds to interact and exchange meaning without ever having face-to-face contacts. In Walther (1996), this virtual communication process is described as hyperpersonal interaction because it gives allowance for quick intimacy and interpersonal intensity.

Most recent efforts in new media discourse in Nigeria (e.g., Taiwo, 2010; Ifukor, 2010) have concentrated more on the use of Facebook, Youtube, Twitters, and blogs in selected communicative events with very limited attention paid to the systematic analysis of SMS text messages as a linguistic and social event.

While those studies identify some of the benefits and constraints of the social media tools, this present study, situated within the evolving Text-Messages Discourse (TMD) framework, investigates how the new media advances bilingual creativity in communication; and fosters relationships based on socio-cultural dynamics.

This study confirms that discourse occurs in specific and definable contexts, and argues that the contexts in which a piece of discourse occurs assign meaning and functions to it. It demonstrates that English as second language in Nigeria's socio-cultural and sociolinguistic contexts has assumed definable character and features that set it apart from English usages in other speech communities. This analysis of SMS text messages in Nigeria shows that new media discourse can yield features that are general and specific in response to the sociolinguistic environment.

2.1 SMS Text Messages as Discourse

Since text messages are taken as instances of language users' attempt to communicate meaning for the purposes of accomplishing some purpose, they may, therefore, be said to assume the properties of discourse (Schiffrin, 1987; Brown and Yule, 1983). Discourse analysis, as an investigative paradigm, considers a piece of language that is functional in some context. Thus text messaging as a discursive practice becomes a tool through which language users, within a public or private sphere, achieve some goals.

It has been observed that text-messaging was initially intended for purely commercial purposes (Bellis, 2002). However, its usage within our contemporary social situations has now demonstrated another example of how the human need for social intercourse – a kind of 'communication imperative' – bends and ultimately co-opts technology to suit its own ends, regardless of any commercial or military ambition for the technology (Thurlow and Brown, 2003).

As Herring (2001) also notes, language will necessarily be affected by technological (or medium) variables such as synchronicity (e.g., where instant messaging is synchronous, email is asynchronous), granularity (i.e. how long or short text may be), and multimodality (e.g., whether or not graphics, audio, and video are included), as well as other non-linguistic variables such as participants' relationships, expectations, and levels of motivation. SMS discourse may therefore be broadly defined as asynchronous, text-based, and technologically mediated discourse (Thurlow & Brown, op. cit.).

Halliday (1976, 1994) has observed that language itself is a social-semiotic, a resource with a network of options for language users to create or express his world, contract relationships and communicate meaning via different communication platforms.

Chiad(2008) asserts that the language of SMS is asynchronous, a single-channel, text-based, technologically-mediated discourse with relatively small granularity, that is messages are typically short. SMS falls within the mode of CMC because it relies on text-based format like instant messaging and online chat. Grinter and Eldridge,(2001, p. 219) assert that cellular phones are "mini-terminals for text-based communication" while Spitzberg(2006) argues that cellular phone is a computer and will increasingly converge with all the various characteristics currently associated exclusively with computers. Interactions through text messages can be considered interpersonal computer-mediated interactions in which there are interdependent message response capabilities. Bernartchez (2008) said that text messages are sent to subscribers through service providers' web page or by visiting some web sites that offer to send text messages free of charge.

In recent times, corporate organizations and/or business owners have also found this channel a potent means of advertising their products, informing their customers and clients about new products, promotions, and opportunities, among others. Bulk SMS with 'no reply' format has now gradually become more fashionable in Nigeria.

In terms of language and style, SMS is believed to combine both traditional method of the Standard English and the new conventional linguistic and communicative practices with technological constraints permitted by the service providers. Depending on the mobile phone being used or the cellular phone service provider, there are some writing features that are automatically generated, especially, date, time, addresser, addressee while the sender composes the texts.

As discursive practice therefore, text messages fulfil important personal and social roles, providing tools for individuals and groups to interact and communicate across this electronic communication channel. Although fears have been expressed about possible abuse, the new media has however succeeded in overcoming some of the shortcoming of traditional modes of communication. Herring (2001, 2004) observes that SMS Text Messages serve as an important mode of communication technology.

Caroline Tagg (2009, pp. 20-21) provides a summary of several studies done in SMS. Apart from the several approaches adopted, she highlights some of the communicative functions of text-messaging as reported in those studies. Based on Brinker's (2001) text type theory, some of the communicative functions found in Doring's (2002) study are:

Contact function including appointments and greetings and emotional support, Information, Appeal, Obligation, Declaration.

Faulkner and Culwin's (2005) messages are classified into the following groups with questions, sign offs and dates the most frequent and rendezvous the least popular. Adverts, questions, rendezvous immediate and ongoing, rendezvous near future, events, instructions, reminders, jokes, sign on, sign off, gossip, dates, information-personal, information-commercial, information-operational

In Nigeria, some studies (e.g. Awonusi, 2004; Chiluwa, 2010) have shown that the linguistic forms and practices of the English of SMS text messages have become so popular among the youth (16-25) and young adults (25-45).

Awonusi (op cit) uses geographical/regional location, education, sex, age as part of the variables to examine some sociolinguistic features that characterize text messaging discourse among selected young people. Some of these are: special phonological representations, orthographic conventions which include the use of abbreviations, telegraphic forms, punctuation peculiarities, informal language contractions, and text multilingualism. The study explains that the texts have shown that an informal variety of English within a written electronic setting is thriving as part of an urban-based educated English in Nigeria (p. 58). While some of these previous studies have adopted other linguistic and sociolinguistic approaches, this present study uses a discursive-semiotic framework to discuss SMS text messages in Nigeria as part of the growing deployment of New Media platforms for several communication purposes.

Basically, intimate and interpersonal functions appear to be more predominant in the studies of text messaging. Users craft and communicate messages on personal and intimate issues based on the shared knowledge. As the use of cellular phones becomes more popular, users also become more creative in the ways messages and linguistic items are manipulated to achieve communicative effects.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Computer-mediated Discourse (CMD) has been viewed as a study of the forms of communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked computers or similar electronic devices. It focuses on *language and language use* in computer networked environments, and by its use of methods of *discourse analysis* to address that focus (Herring, 2004 p.338). Androutsopoulos and Beißwenger (2008) observe that, in describing how language is used in a networked environments, computer-mediated discourse analysis identifies linguistic and paralinguistic features including pragmatics, sociolects, styles and registers specific to the given environment. It may be inferred that CMD recognizes the shared context of the interactants as part of the necessary interpretive framework for decoding the meaning of the shared messages.

Herring's view on the specific methodology for online discourse analysis provides some useful insights on key features of computer-mediated discourse (Herring, 2001, 2004, 2004a, 2004b). Although the methodology is language-focused, it allows the inclusion of aspects of communication or context which are specifically related to computer-mediated communication (Noel Fitzpatrick & Roisin Donnelly, 2010). In the broadest sense, any analysis of online behavior that is grounded in empirical or textual observations is computer-mediated discourse analysis (Herring, op cit.).

A discursive-semiotic analytical framework uses insights from both discourse analysis and semiotics in describing texts. Halliday (1976) had earlier hinted on the inevitability of the connection between the two by describing language from a social-semiotic perspective. As argued elsewhere, the study of semiotics focuses mainly on signs and the analysis of their systems and meanings in different socio-cultural contexts. Sometimes *sign* and *symbol* are used interchangeably to indicate something that stands for or refers to something else in a meaningful way when the users recognize them as signs (Opeibi, 2011).

Icons and indices which are other types of signs show varying degrees of motivation, and must be interpreted within the framework of the culture in which they are used.

Halliday (1978) sees semiotics as the study of "meaning" in its most general sense. For him, meanings are created by the social system and are exchanged by the members in the form of text" (p.141). He sees language as semiotic, that is, it is a process of making meanings by selecting "from the total set of options that constitute what can be meant" (p. 53). He also coined the term *social semiotic* to refer to the definition of social system, a culture as a system, or a culture as a system of meanings" (p. 39). Semiotics, therefore, as a framework, provides the basis for interpreting meanings that are conveyed through non-linguistic items found in text messages. Umberto Eco (1976) says 'semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign' (p.7).

Chandler (2001), however, takes this further by arguing that semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as 'signs' in everyday speech, but also of anything which 'stands for' something else. In a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, and objects.

Semiotics is often employed in the analysis of texts (although it is far more than just a mode of textual analysis). For him, the term *text* usually refers to a message which has been recorded in some way (e.g., writing, audio- and video-recording) so that it is physically independent of sender or receiver (p. 2).

His insights on the nature of text provide some illuminating perspective for this present study. He observes that 'a text is an assemblage of signs (such as words, images, sounds, and/or gestures) constructed (and interpreted) with reference to the conventions associated with a genre and in a particular medium of communication' (Chandler, 2001, p. 2).

Graphological features such as the deliberate deployment of special writing style, use of upper or lower case letters, bold or italics, numerals, colours, drawings, and symbols among several other non-linguistic properties have become discourse strategies employed in text messages.

3. Data Description and Analysis

The data set consists of text messages collected from the mobile phones of the researchers, selected adults, students of the University of Lagos at different times and seasons and in different locations in Lagos, Nigeria. It is noteworthy to further add that some of the text messages were collected and stored for research purposes over a couple of years. The interesting structures of the text messages present good examples of socio-cultural, linguistic, and communicative functions to which the users put them. Some text messages also exhibit a mixture of uni-directional and bi-directional models; some emanate directly from service providers and corporate organizations advertising their products, while others show dialogic/interactional communicative relationships (e.g., mother vs daughter) between the sender and the receiver. Some of the customized or branded text messages emanating from individuals and organizations do not have reply/response mechanism.

The analysis of the data reveals great possibilities in the process of innovation and re-invention in language through the use of SMS text messages. Apart from conventional linguistic features that are associated with computer-mediated discourse genres, there are also instances of bilingual properties often associated with language use in English as Second Language (ESL) environments. These include codeswitching, code mixing, and loans. Pragmatic and discourse features that connect texts with contexts to communicate specific meanings are also displayed through the texts.

3.1 Discourse Features in the Texts

Thurlow (2003) observes that discursive culture is reflective in the use of SMS text messages among groups of users with strong implications in producing close-knit relationships. He argues that text messages also serve the principle of sociality by observing the maxims of brevity and speed, paralinguistic restitution, and phonological approximation.

As observed by Awonusi (2004, p. 51), most users, constrained by time and space, tend to craft or input the texts in the forms that reflect racy, semi-formal, or informal telegraphic styles. Depending on the configuration of the mobile handset (constrained by economic status), the consciousness to minimize cost, and maximizing communication channels, 'texters' tend to seek the most effective linguistic means of shortening words and syntactic elements to couch their messages. Interestingly, most Nigerians have become familiar with some of these SMS-linguistic features whose meanings are easily decoded and interpreted.

3.1.1 Lexico—grammatical Features

In some of the text messages, there are instances of some lexico-grammatical properties that demonstrate innovations and reproduction phenomena. The study shows that users have become increasingly creative in composing text messages. Some of these examples include: Shortening(yr~year; wks~weeks, hrs~hours, DIS~This, schl~school, mng~morning), Contraction(Hw's~how is, ur~your, U~you, R~are, dat~That, tinkng~thinking, z-is, tnks~thanks, cald~called), Clippings(lik~like, suces~success, av~have, wil~will, nd~and), Letter/Number Homophones(B~be, 2~to, U~you, 10Q~ thank you, 2reload~to reload, 2me~to me,), Abbreviation(A/C~account,) Misspellings(rember~remember, realy~really) Non-conventional spellings (moni~money, dats~that is, @~at, b/c~because) Accent stylization(hapi~happy, nu~new).

3.1.2 Discursive-Semiotic Features

Some studies (e.g , Ong, 1982; Crook, 1985; Peyton, 1986) describe the structural and functional properties of SMS text-messages that suggest the intrusion of semiotic strategies in communicating meaning. It is believed that when communication is electronically mediated through computers, the computer-mediated communication system reshapes the forms and functions of language (Kwang-kyu Ko, 1996). Semiotically-shaped features of language are used to communicate meaning and messages among the users. As Herring (op.cit) observed, users have also developed some compensatory strategies to replace social cues normally conveyed by other channels in face-to-face interactions. These are often conveyed through semiotic features (symbols and signs).

One significant dimension that this study finds is the growing phenomenon where there is a deliberate interplay of words and symbols to communicate intentions in the text messages. Although these discursive and semiotic features have not enjoyed serious attention in previous studies, their significance and communicative power have made some of these texts unique. The outcome of the study has shown the possibility of the emergence of new varieties of English in Nigeria resulting from the evolving discursive practices in text messaging.

In the section that follows, the present study discusses some of the specially-crafted physical structures of the texts as well as signs and symbols that are used in the SMS text messages to communicate meaning.

(a) Graphological devices

Foregrounding appears to be one of the devices that senders use to make some words and phrases stand out for special attention in the messages. This strategy has the tendency to force the attention of the reader on that aspect of the message the sender wishes to emphasize. Such lexico-grammatical structures are written in different graphological styles. The use of lettering, upper case, lower case, typefaces bold, italics, alpha-numeric among others functions in a special way to communicate meaning in the text messages. These visual aspects of the texts including lay-out images are discursive instruments for communicating meaning in discourse (Beard, 2000).

Text 1

'THIS NEW-YEAR, May GOD convert yr conflicts to comfort, ur pains to gains, ur minimums to maximums, ur scars to stars, ur LOSSES TO PROFITS! BE BLESSED..

Text 2

May ur suces b wide as MTN coverage. may u be sufficient lik VMOBILE. May u continue 2 glo like GLOBACOM & ur enemy will be confused lik MTEL till ur STARCOMS

In texts 1 & 2, the sender relies on deliberate deployment of semiotic devices in communicating the messages. The foregrounding of some words and phrases (in upper case letters), that are made to stand out, conveys special meaning and achieve special impact. 'THIS NEW-YEAR', 'GOD', 'LOSSES TO PROFITS', 'BE BLESSED', are key items that are foregrounded which function as the centrepoint of the message. Apart from functioning as attention-getter, they also carry potential information and messages the senders wish to convey to the receiver.

Text 3

May ur suces b wide as MTN coverage. may u be sufficient lik VMOBILE. May u continue 2 glo like GLOBACOM & ur enemy will be confused lik MTEL till ur STARCOMS Sender: Seun Adewole 2348032378801 Sent: 4-Sept-2005 23:54:45

The names of the mobile telecommunication service providers in Nigeria that are MTN, GLOBACOM, VMOBILE, MTEL, and STARCOMMS are alluded to in the text as a way of sending good wishes to the receiver. It is interesting to note how the types of services these companies provide in terms of quality, efficiency, and coverage become a tool for wishes among Nigerians. The admixture of lower case and upper case letters within the body of the texts create some special visual effect that in itself serves as a message conveyer. The sociolinguistic and culturally-shared knowledge exchanged in the message provides the interesting dimension. The deliberate positioning of STARCOMS in the concluding section of the message demonstrates the use of pun, a play on the word, a creative discursive style of language use to communicate a special meaning in this context.

The various features identified above are becoming gradually institutionalized in the sociolinguistic repertoire of many young Nigerians leading to the emergence of a linguistic sub-culture among these groups of SMS users confirm that this is part of the process of domestication of English in L2 environment identified in literature (Adegbija, 2004).

One may then argue that SMS text messages have joined written and spoken corpuses of L2 English to add to the varieties of English in Nigeria.

(b) Symbols and Signs as Discourse

In the texts, some uses of symbols and signs that communicate meaning were found. Some examples are given below:

Text 4

*

See this Star?

** it never dims ** it's a symbol * of His love.. ** a promise * that God 'll never leave u.

Text 5

I WISH U 12 MONTHS of happiness, 52 wks of fun, 365days of laughter, 8760 hrs of favour, 525600 mins of joy d 3,536000 secs of success in 2004 hapi nu year.

Sender: Akin Adeyemi +23480236626 sent 31-Dec-2003 22:51:12

In texts 4 & 5, symbols and signs are used to communicate meaning in the text messages. Text 4 opens with the symbol of a star followed by the rhetorical question, "See this Star?" There is a perfect connection between the symbol and the expression creating a special visual and psychological effect on the receiver. The symbol is then sandwiched in between the subsequent expressions that elaborate the message in the opening. The pragmatic functions of the messages are encoded in the succeeding expressions, that stars never dim, and that it is a symbol of His love, a promise that God will never leave the receiver. It is interesting to note the extended ideologically-based meaning expresses through the number of stars in the body of the text. For instance, most Christians believe that the number '7' symbolizes perfection and/or completeness. This texter, therefore deliberately, chooses 7 stars to convey that sense of completeness as well as to assure the receiver of God's perfect protection.

(c) Dialogic Discursive Features

SMS text messages also provide a bidirectional information exchange that highlights some interesting socio-cultural features within the Nigerian L2 context. In the interactions between a mother and her daughter in Text 6 below, these features are deftly projected.

Text 6

Sweetest Mi

Received 17/3/2012 @4:01pm

Dad Precious no. +447438012173(Mrs Oguntayo's no. 08023032779

Me:

Mummy they gave me 5,000. Pls say tnks to dem

Okay Ma

Hello ma.good evening ma. tnks for everytin.I was tinkng I shld suggest dat if you can send moni for me to buy my books@once for dis semester nd for my project. Book fair z going in schl. Dats if you av d moni. if you don't, don't bother I'll manage. Tnks ma.God bless nd enlarge ur coast mightily.

In the text, the dialogic nature of text messages comes forth in the exchanges between this mother and her daughter. The brevity of the messages from the Mother, described as "Sweetest Mi", demonstrates authority and top-down relationship, a reflection of some cultural background in Nigeria. There is, however, a counter-balancing from the tone of intimacy and affection demonstrated in the description of the Mother as "Sweetest Mi". Nigerian Mothers are also not as creative as their teenage daughters in the use of text messages. Most of the creative features of SMS texts identified above are found in the messages from the daughter. It confirms the popularity of text-styles among young people. While older people prefer to be direct and brief, young people will demonstrate their competence and youthful creativity in the use of different methods to send texts. The colloquial nature of the messages from the daughter as well as the use of 'Mi'[my/mine] in "Sweetest Mi" demonstrates an intrusion of linguistic elements from the Yoruba language system, the first language of the texters.

The notion of child's dependence on the parents is also conveyed vividly in the messages emanating from the daughter. The tone of deep politeness, appreciation, and consideration which hallmarks Yoruba culture in Nigeria runs through the message. The word 'Ma' is repeated three times in a single message. It's also obvious that the sender is a student and is deeply religious as found in his reference to God, prayer and some paraphrased Bible verses.

3.2 Discourse Strategies in the SMS Texts

As mentioned earlier, one unique feature of the text messages is the manifestation of some discourse features that bear the L2 context. Three varieties of Nigerian English continuum have been identified: Acrolectal, Mesolectal and Basilectal (Awonusi, 1985). In the texts, there are features of bilingual creativity that have the potential of creating other varieties of English. Text 7 below exhibits some sociolinguistic features that characterize English usages in Nigeria.

Text 7

FW: Awamaridi says dat ur enemies will not know de source of ur joy. Oyigiyigi says that ur enemies will not be able to spoil ur life. Asoromatase, says dat he will do as he has spoken concerning you. Alagbara giga says he will empower you to succeed. Arugbo ojo says you will live till good old age.

SOLA

Sender:

Sola – Mary

+2348056572485

Sent:

6-Oct-2005

18:35:45

[Translation: Awamaridi- *the One that can not be discovered*; Oyigiyigi: *the great One*; Asoromatase-*the One that speaks and it never fails*; Alagbara giga- *The One that has great power*; Arugbo ojo- *The ancient of days/ the one that is ageless*].

Here, we find words in a Nigerian local language (Yoruba) that describe God being mixed with English expressions. Instances of Code mixing, and code switching are seen here. They function to accommodate the receiver in the speech repertoire of the sender, demonstrating familiarity, solidarity, etc.

Again, we find an interesting appeal to the shared knowledge of the Christian concept of God between the communicators. The meaning of each local name of God is used to pray for the receiver of the message. For instance, "Awamaridi says dat ur enemies will not know de source of ur joy" simply conveys a sense in which the author says since the name of God remains a mystery or cannot be discovered, likewise the enemies will not be able to comprehend or understand ('discover') the source of joy of the receiver.

This text also highlights the place that religion occupies in the socio-cultural life of most Nigerians. Belief systems are very important to Nigerians and they appreciate text messages that express and capture those sociolinguistic dimensions.

(a) Contextual Cues in the Texts

Discursive practices thrive on the ability of interactants to decode meaning by relying on information cues also supplied through the context of the discourse. This also gives room for pragmatic features such as presupposition and entailment to contribute to the meanings being exchanged by the SMS users in the bi-directional communication event.

In Text 3 above, the use of MTN, GLO, VMOBILE, MTEL, STARCOMS are only understood by users sharing the Nigerian environment. These are GSM service providers in Nigeria. The sender clearly captures and describes the quality of their services in a creative and humorous manner. She uses the experience of Nigerians with the telecom service providers to express her seasonal wishes and prayers for the receiver.

3.3 Bulk SMS as Discourse Strategy

In recent times, both private and corporate citizens in Nigeria now deploy no-reply customized SMS text messages. Bulk SMS system of communication which is cheaper and time saving consists of message sent to a lot of people at the same time with just a click. Though this does not give room for immediate response on the same page, the message is, however, structured in a way to get and sustain the attention of the receivers. The contents of the message, for example, may be an invitation to attend a social function, notice of meeting, an advertisement to patronize a product or service and sometimes an item of breaking news. Some of these are illustrated in the following texts:

Text 8

INDEPENDENCE SALE ENDS DIS WEEK. 40% DISCOUNT ON ALL SHOES, SLIPPERS & SANDALS IN ALL OUR OUTLETS. MONAN SHOES4MEN 07028062361. Sat 5th Oct. 5:09 pm.

Text 9

U R CORDIALLY INVITED 2 D WEDDING CEREMONY BETWN PRECIOUS & BASSEY, OCT. 25 AT KM 6, EKET/ORON ROAD, EKET.FOR DONATION ECO BANK 0054817505 ENNODIEN BASSEY: Received 01:56:54pm 16/10/2012(no name)

It is noteworthy that these texters deploy graphological devices to communicate their messages. Apart from the use of conventional linguistic features of text messaging, the use of upper case letters attracts special attention to the message.

While text 8 is a promotional advertisement, text 9 is an invitation with additional subtle appeal for support towards the event. Relevant information (account number, telephone numbers) is supplied to enable people respond.

The tables below provide some pragmatic features of the bulk SMS messages (i.e. texts 8-9)

| CONTENT | FEATURE | COMMUNICATED MEANING |
|---------------|------------|----------------------|
| Advertisement | Graphology | Impactful |
| | | Convincing |

| CONTENT | FEATURE | COMMUNICATED MEANING |
|------------|------------|----------------------|
| Invitation | Pragmatics | Persuasive |

3.4 Nigerianisms as Discourse strategy

As argued in some sociolinguistic literature (e.g. Adegbiya, 2004), the non-native English environment in Nigeria usually invests discursive practices with bilingual features. Instances of codeswitching and code mixing are some of the outcomes of languages in contact. Text messaging as a linguistic and social event also has its fair share of the bilingual behaviour in this non-native English context.

Text 10 and 11 demonstrate instances of code switching with the use of Yoruba linguistic items, 'egbon mi' [my older brother], and 'ore' [friend] respectively. Both indicate the kind of unofficial relationship that exists between interactants, at each point. The codemixed strategy demonstrates the process of accommodation and affiliation. Scholars argue that bilinguals switch/mix codes to achieve any of the following: redefine the interaction as appropriate to a different social arena; avoiding through continual codeswitching, define the interaction in terms of any specific social arena; ease communication, that is, utilize the shortest and the easiest route; communicate more effectively; establish goodwill and support; or when one wishes to create a certain communication effect (Wei, 2003; Muthasamy, 1999).

Text 12 below is a clear instance of semantic expansion which highlights bilingual creativity that is common among many Nigerian users of English. 'Daddy' in English means an affectionate term for a biological father. In this context, however, the meaning reveals some features of Nigerianism which takes the word 'daddy' beyond its simple meaning to accommodate anyone who is old enough to be a father depending on the closeness of such to the addressee. In this instance, the 'daddy' here refers to the landlord who is old enough to be the father of the tenant and as well has an affectionate relationship with the tenant. The message is also signed off with 'ur son', still another instance of semantic

expansion common in Nigerian English. The 'son' here is not the biological male child of the landlord but his well-behaved tenant that himself has now taken as his own child.

Texts 10-13 present instances of presupposition indicating that the interactants function based on the knowledge of the context and previous information they knew about each other. It shows a religious setting where information is being dispersed to agree on the next line of action. It is assumed that the reasons for this kind of development are understood by all concerned.

Text 10

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| November 26 2011 @ 0 11:57:00 | '2348023156894' | Dear Lara,gud mng.Hw was ur night?Pls I need 2reload my web2smspro A/C(eoaina)urgently;b/c I need 2send bulk sms out dis mng;Pls How do I do it?Urs: E.O Aina. |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--|

Text 11

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| November 9 2011 @ 0 13:26:00 | '2348022920476' | Egbon mi,gud mng.Hw`s ur family,health,wrk,biz&ur faith?Am sure u`r flourishing.Pls text ur A/C details 2me.Thanks&God bless u.Do hv a blissful day.Ur Son:EOA. |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|---|

Text 12

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| August 16 2011 @ 0 19:50:00 | '2348029163186' | Daddy,gud evening sir, Hw`s ur health?We blv u`r hale&hearty.We are still in Camp;But our house rent is ready,Pls which A/C do we pay it into? Ur son:E.O Aina |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--|

Text 13

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| November 9 2011 @ 0 13:35:00 | '2348035033421' | Ore,I cald ur line,but couldn`t get thru.Hw`s ur health now?Hw`s ur family2Pls take care of urself&take time 2rest during dis holiday.God wil heal u.Amen –Aina |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|---|

In the texts, findings indicate that there is a pragmatic element of presupposition (text 10) where the tone presupposes that the receiver is aware of the distance and may prefer to pay some money as his gift into the celebrant's account instead of having to travel the long distance with higher financial implications. Text 13 introduces the message with a Yoruba word, '*Ore*' [friend] to situate the content and the context of the message as emanating from a Yoruba-English bilingual. It is also observed that shared belief system between the sender and the receiver encodes elements of presupposition in interpreting the full import of the message.

A Brief Discussion of some key findings

This study has demonstrated that one of the key innovations Nigerians now adopt in text messaging is the deliberate mixture of symbols and texts to provide some visual reinforcement for the message that senders wish to communicate to receivers. An extract from the data set illustrates this point very vividly:

+ ”). “ +. “ +. “ +. “ + “ (“ + “ . + **BRIGHT DAY** +’ “ , + “ “ . ‘ + “ . ‘ + “ +.

* **May Ur Day * Be Bright Like Stars & May GOD Grant U Favor Always, **Amen**+**

- **Sender: TUNDE ADEDEJI +2348023076211, 2-June-2004, 10:13:41**

A closer probing of the structural composition of the text reveals a deeper meaning communicated through the semiotic properties. The sign, '+' (plus), a symbol of addition, is deliberately chosen to be twelve(12) to signify one full year, signifying the celebration of one additional year by the receiver. And the symbol of *star* *, signifying brightness and multiplicity of years, semiotically expresses the prayer of the sender. '**BRIGHT DAY**' written in upper case letters and sandwiched in between the symbols, is graphologically-foregrounded to mark out that special day, because the sender is celebrating his birthday. It functions as attention-getter in the text and carries the positive message of good wishes from the sender.

It is also found that discursive functions in the text messages analyzed above include, engaging in social contacts; need to maintain social relationships; exchange of information; expression of solidarity; well wishes, and season's greetings among others.

4. Conclusion

This study has argued that there exists emerging trends of these electronic-discursive practices that reflect the context and culture of their communicative spheres. Through samples of text messages collected from selected mobile phones,

findings indicate that the ubiquitous virtual spaces being created regularly by the new media can promote virile computer-mediated personal, institutional and public engagements. The use of customized or branded SMS text messages for personal and public purposes has become a new discursive practice among many private and corporate citizens attempting to reach a wider segment of the population with their messages. Features of L2 discourse stemming from the status of English as Second Language in Nigeria have also been shown to have the potential of impacting the emergence of L2 computer-mediated discourse in Nigeria. The study has equally shown how codemixing, as part of bilingual behaviour, fulfils social and personal roles.

As Herring (op.cit) rightly observes, Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD) study enables us to see interconnections between micro- and macro-levels of interaction that might otherwise not emerge by observing spoken or written communication, and potentially to forge more comprehensive theories of discourse and social action as a result. In this study, the researchers have been able to demonstrate how different users of English in Nigeria interact via SMS text messages, expressing feelings, emotions, felicitations, and sharing information.

One unique feature is the contribution of SMS text messages to the process of domestication of English in Nigeria leading to the emergence of new varieties of English. The study finds words and new expressions that demonstrate bilingual creativity in the text messages. It confirms the view that social and cultural factors -- carried over from communication in other media as well as internally generated in computer-mediated environments -- contribute importantly to the constellation of properties that characterize computer-mediated discourse (Herring, op cit). It has also been shown that some features of bilingual language behaviour demonstrated in the data can contribute to the emergence of 'new' varieties of computer-mediated non-native English discursive practice.

The use of a mixture of local languages and English to contextualize the discourse presents an interesting dimension in the study of SMS text messages among Nigerians. The level of linguistic and discursive creativity displayed in the texts further lend credence to the great possibilities English has made available to its users worldwide.

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