
RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN ASSESSMENT OF SLANG AND MOBILEPHONE MESSAGE LANGUAGE USE BY SENIOR SECODARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA: A CASE FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION ADVANCEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates slang and mobilephone message language use by senior secondary school students in Kwara State, Nigeria. Ninety students (fifteen males and fifteen females each) were selected each of the three Senatorial Districts of Kwara North, Kwara Central and Kwara South through a stratified random sampling technique. The instrument used was a thirty-item researcher-designed standard British English, slang and mobilephone message language use questionnaire which was given to two English language experts for its validity. The instrument was subjected to test re-test technique of three weeks interval after the first administration of the instrument. The scores obtained in the two administrations were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistic 0.05 significant level, which resulted in 0.61reliability index. The findings revealed that high significant differences existed between standard British English and slang use by the students, as well as high significant differences between standard British English and mobilephone message language use by the students. As a result of the findings and the conclusion, it was recommended that teachers should as much as possible discourage the use of slang and mobilephone message language use among students by constantly engaging the students in oral drill and short-gun tests to awaken their standard British grammatical consciousness. It was also recommended English experts should be invited to give talks on the danger inherent in the use of slang or mobilephone message language, among other recommendations.

KEYWORDS: *Standard British English, slang, mobilephone message language*

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INTRODUCTION

Literacy, the skill of reading, writing and computing is important and significant for it to have engaged the attention of the whole world since the invention of the art of reading and writing about five thousand years ago. Oracy (oral culture) and literacy (print culture) have co-existed since then with literacy gaining where oracy loses (Oyedeji 1997). Oyedeji further observes that as long as people live in small groups, villages, communities with little or no noticeable linkages, oral persisted and was adequate since members understood the monolingual cultures of such groups as existed; the cultures were then handed down orally through generations.

But in the cotemporary universe, communities have assumed lager dimensions and have mingled with commerce and industries; wars have taken place, resulting in the conquest and absorption or colonization of communities, communities thus become bilingual or multi-lingual which made communication became difficult. In such situations, oracy was becoming inadequate and inefficient; inadequate because of the multiplicity of cultures that emerged, and inefficient because the details needed handing over cultures, history, political and economic practices from one generation to another.

In another development, Francis in Termah-Abah (2010) views literacy (language by implication), as an important instrument for communication, is remarkably varied from place to place, and from persons to persons, and that no language spoken by more than a very small number of people is homogeneous. Any language has considerable internal variations and speakers make constant use of the many different possibilities offered them, thus making people to constantly exploit nuances of language they speak for a wide variety of purpose. In another instance, Jowitt (1991) opines that varieties of language used by many speakers indicate the speakers' regional, social, ethnic, gender and even their pronunciation. In support of the above, Ursel (2001) argues that social context, age, degree of formality, degree of interaction and intimacy of the interlocutors and the subject of discourse, among others contribute variations in language use with the aim of encouraging mutual, social interaction and international intelligibility, and that there are special slang vocabulary items for both male and female students, with male students speaking more slang than their female counterparts evident by 55% and 46% respectively.

In the same vein, Jowitt (1991) posits that a variety of a language can be thought of as one of many general and complete language systems each used by a substantial number of people and each possessing characteristics that clearly distinguished it from other systems without requiring it to be classified as a different language. It is in the light of this that Nigerian English, British English, American English, among others are referred to as varieties of the English language, and as such, use of slang takes sustenance from the various varieties of Englishes at the disposal of these inquisitive students.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE OF TELEPHONE AND LANGUAGE OF MOBILEPHONE MESSAGE

Telephone language, as an important variety message language started when an American man was unavoidably separated by miles from his wife, who he loved so dearly. He often wished to speak directly with her, to hear her voice even across the distance separating them (Aneke 2011). Aneke asserts that many people all over the earth were circumstanced like these two people. Some had no immediate need to communicate with anybody over long distances, but they conjured up that situation in their imaginations. Similarly, Navv (2013) posited that if long man experiences on earth is a prompting and an opportunity for man to exercise his creativity supplying his needs from the spiritual world, where everything exists in perfection and abundance. It is this creativity that is taking recourse to the spiritual world and finds solutions to problems and supplies needs that made Alexander Graham Bell to invent the telephone that is very sublimity (Navv, 2013).

Slang, on the other hand is another variety of the English language which originally is the speech of people involved in the criminal underworld, hooligans, bandits and criminals (Termah-Abah 2010). Termah-Abah submits further that slang has become the speech of many who use it as an alternative vocabulary encoding their communal values, and that slag is now associated with armed forces such as the Army, Navy, the Air force, and even the Police force, the entertainment world in television programmes, music, politics, gambling and in the speech of prisoners, and now very pronouncedly among secondary school students (Boylan 2005). In line with the above, Eble (1996) posits that the use of slang among students of higher learning across the globe has become a common phenomenon. Eble argues further that the creative use of language by college students to grumble to each other about their lot in life, and about those in authority over them must date back in Western Europe to the earliest days of universities. In the United States of America for instance, Eble opines that the reconstruction of college slang during the nineteenth century relied heavily on three sources: 1. B. H. Hall's College words and Customs 1856; 2. Lyman Bagg's Four Years at Yale 1871; and the novel Students' Life at Harvard 1876. These three sources revealed that slang vocabularies were concerned with campus landmarks, rivalry among the classes, making fashionable appearances, eating, socializing and studying as little as possible.

The use of slang among students is not restricted to the United States of America and other parts of the developed world alone, there is hardly any institution of higher learning in Nigeria today where slang is not used by students especially at the informal contexts [http://www.ngex.com/entertainment/oncampus/campus slang](http://www.ngex.com/entertainment/oncampus/campus%20slang) which is exclusively for Nigerian universities sent in slang vocabularies and their meanings as used in such campuses (Termah-Abah, 2010) In Green and Kittredge, (1902) views slang as a particular kind of vagabond language always hanging on the outskirts of legitimate speech but continually straying or forcing its way into the most respected company. Although slang is still informal, it cannot be seen as illegitimate as it is now more accepted by the public than it was during its early days as in the submission above. But in the contrary, scholars like Bight (2003) condemn use of slang as an accepted correct social

grammar because it undermines the standard language (English) which inadvertently reflects poorly upon its users. He argued that slang is a language of highly colloquial type which is considered as below the level of standard educated speech and consisting either of new words or of current words employed in some special sense. However, Eble (1996) argued that despite the fact that slang is viewed by Bight (2003) as below the level of standard educated speech, it is an ever changing and fashionable set of vocabulary of sociability used to establish or reinforce identity cohesiveness within a group with a trend or fashion a society at large, just as Ellis (2006) also corroborated Eble (1996) that slang is a variety of language used in certain contexts by means of which people express their sense of belonging to a particular group within the community which is not specific any geographical location.

While lending support to the submissions above, Navv (2013) posits that slang is a characteristic of speech which is rhetoric, while the message of mobilephone, another form of slang is a written type used by students to freely express themselves informally and often outside the confines of correct social grammar or social niceties with cheeky and amusing stances but all the same they enhance communication at least for social intelligibility. Also, the electronic messaging (EM), text messages (TM) chat room messages (CRM) and sometimes emails can be written using the smallest number of letters possible. Pronouns, prepositions and articles may be omitted and abbreviations are widely used. Examples are:

1. '2night', for tonight;
2. 'CUL8ta', for see you later;
3. 'Gr8', for grate or great;
4. 'ILU', for I love you; among other examples.

In the light of the above, Asher and Simpson (1994) asserted that they “vocabulary in limbo” that it is an applicant language that is waiting acceptance or rejection by standard users or endlessly awaiting neither, and perhaps, quiet withdrawal. Zinka (2011) also argues that in most tertiary institutions, there is general awareness that most students, especially the female students no longer learn to listen well, speak well, read well and write well in English due to the mobilephone message language use (MMLU) and other unofficial or ungrammatical English (slang) which critically goes against sustainable education reforms.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, English language, particularly the standard British English has continued to enjoy maximum attention as the medium of formal communication especially as a language of instruction. Parents and proprietors of schools have often accepted the use of English language as a mark of prestige (Bello 2011). Admissions into tertiary institutions these days require candidates to pass English language at credit level Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) or National Examination Commission (NECO). The tool for sustainable education advancement is through the use of global language i.e. English. Sustainable education advancement is wide concept that

concerns all levels of development in an international scale. It is the basis for international classifications such as developing countries, developing countries and least countries. But despite this importance of the English language, its teaching in Nigeria has continued to witness a lot of problems with dwindling performance by students due to the fact that slang words and mobilephone message language and expressions get their ways into students' write-ups thereby hampering meanings, hence, effective communication especially when such slang and mobilephone message language are the same with those of the standard English but of different meanings depending on whether they are used as slang, mobilephone message language or otherwise are marred. Similarly, because of the infiltration of slang and mobilephone message language use, some students these days find it difficult to draw a line between formal and informal use of Standard English. A very good number of senior secondary students are found of using, saying and writing such expressions as "bo" for but, "fashy" for neglecting something, "fuck you" for being stupid, "fuck up" for making a mistake, "how ar u" for how are you, "2geda 4ever" for together forever, "bai it 4me" for buy it for me, "shei u understand" for did you understand, "chill" for exercise patience, "me I want to..." instead of I want to..., starting a sentence with "as in", among other several examples. These, therefore show the declining interest of students to perfecting their use of English rather, they prefer to identify with that which is "now popular", that is the use of slang has consequences for effective communication in Standard English.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess slang and mobilephone message language usage by the senior secondary students in Kwara State, Nigeria as a result of the fact that students nowadays spend more time acquiring the latest slang items and fiddling with mobilephone for messages to people of interest (which neglects sustainable education reforms in Nigeria) instead of improving upon their use of Standard British English which is the only yardstick for measuring their level of competence in the language.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were generated for testing in this study:

Ho1: There is no significant difference between standard British English and slang use among male senior secondary school students.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between standard British English and slag use among female senior secondary school students.

Ho3: There is no significant difference between standard British English and mobilephone message language use among male senior secondary school students.

Ho4: There is no significant difference between standard British English and mobilephone message language use among female senior secondary school students.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive survey type. The population for the study was all the senior secondary school students in Kwara State. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 30 students (15 males and 15 females) from each of the three Senatorial Districts Kwara South, Kwara Central and Kwara North, making a total of 90 respondents. A thirty-item researcher-designed standard British English, slang and mobilephone message language use questionnaire was used as instrument for the study. The instrument was given to two English language experts for its content validity. The experts’ suggestions and corrections were used to draft the final questionnaire used for the study, while for the reliability of the instrument, the questionnaire was subjected to test re-test technique of three weeks interval after the first administration of the instrument. The scores obtained in the two administrations were correlated Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics at 0.05alpha level of significance and yielded 0.61 reliability index. T-test statistical method was to test the four hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significant.

DATA ANALYSES AND RESULTS

The data collected from the study were analysed using t-test statistical technique as reported below:

H01: There is no significant difference between standard British English and slang use by male senior secondary school students.

Table 1: T-test Analysis of the Difference between Standard British English and Slang Use by Male Senior Secondary School Students

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Df	Critical t-value	Calculated t-value	Decision
SBEUNS	90	9.47	2.30				
				89	1.960	0.335	Ho1 rejected
SUMS	90	9.88	2.51				

Key:

SBEUMS= Standard British English use by male students.

SUMS= Slang use by male students.

The results in the Table 1 indicated that the Mean scores of SBEUMS and SUM are 9.47 and 9.88 respectively. The result further showed that the calculated t-value of 0.335 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 significant level, an indicative of high significant difference between standard British English and slang use by the male secondary school students, and as such the null hypothesis which says that is no significant difference between standard British English and slang use by senior secondary school students is rejected.

H02: There is no significant difference between standard British English and slang use by female senior secondary school students.

Table 2: T-test Analysis of the Difference between Standard British English and Slang Use by Female Senior Secondary School Students

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Df	Critical t-value	Calculated t-value	Decision
SBEUFS	90	35.35	7.36				
				89	1.960	1.331	Ho2 rejected
SUFS	90	33.90	7.95				

Key:

SBEUFS=Standard British English use by female students.

SUFS= Slang use by female students.

Table 2 indicated that Mean scores of 35.36 and 33.90 respectively SBEUFS and SUFS, also showed that the calculated t-value of 1.331 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 significant level, indicating high significant difference between standard British English and slang use by female students, thus rejecting the null hypothesis that says there is no significant difference between standard British English use and slang use by female students.

Ho3: There is no significant difference between standard British English and mobilephone message language use by male secondary school students.

Table 3: T-test Analysis of the Difference between Standard British English and Mobilephone Message Language Use by Male Senior Secondary School Students

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Df	Critical t-value	Calculated t-value	Decision
SBEUMS	90	46.94	10.19				
				89	1.960	1.242	Ho3 rejected
MMLUMS	90	52.61	8.26				

Key:

SBEUMS= Standard British English use by male students.

MMLUMS= Mobilephone message language use by male students.

Table 3 indicated that the Mean scores of SBEUMS and MMLUMS are 46.94 52.61 respectively. The table further indicated further that the calculated t-value of 1.242 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 significant level. This indicated also high significant difference between standard British English use and mobilephone message language use by male students, and so rejecting the null hypothesis that says there is no significant difference between standard British English use and mobilephone message language use by male students.

Ho4: There is no significant difference between standard British English and mobilephone message language use by female senior secondary school students.

Table 4: T-test Analysis of the Difference between Standard British English and Mobilephone Message Language Use by Female Senior Secondary School Students

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Df	Critical t-value	Calculated t-value	Decision
SBEUFS	90	42.44	8.45				
				89	1.960	0.346	Ho4 rejected
MMLUFS	90	46.91	6.11				

Key:

SBEUFS= Standard British English use by female students.

MMLUFS= Mobilephone message language use by female students.

Table 4 showed that the Mean scores of SBEUF and MMLUFS are 42.44 and 46.91 respectively. Similarly, the table showed that the calculated t-value of 0.346 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 level of significant, an indicative of high significant difference between standard British English and mobilephone message language use by female students, thus rejecting the null hypothesis that says that there is no significant difference between standard British English and mobilephone message language use by female students.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Results of the data collected and analysis in Table 1 indicated that the calculated t-value of 0.335 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 significant level, showing that there is high significant difference between standard British English and slang use by the female students. This is in agreement with the assertion of Bight (2003) who condemned use of slang as an acceptable correct social grammar because it undermines the standard language (English) which inadvertently reflects poorly upon its users.

Results in Table 2 showed that the calculated t-value of 1.331 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 significant level, an indicative of high significant difference between standard British English and slang use by the female students. This also is in conformity with the findings of Bight (2003) who condemned use of slang as an acceptable correct social grammar because it undermines the standard language (English) which does reflect poorly upon its users. Bight submitted further that slang is a language of highly colloquial type which is considered as below the level of standard educated speech.

Findings in Table 3 indicated that the calculated t-value of 1.242 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 significant level signifying that there is high significant difference between standard

British English and mobilephone message language use by male students. This is finding negates the assertion of Navv (2013) that slang is a characteristic of speech which is rhetoric, while the mobilephone message language is a written form of slang type used by students to freely themselves informally and often outside the confines of correct social grammar or social niceties with cheeky and amusing stances to enhance communication at least for social intelligibility.

Results in Table 4 showed that the calculated t-value of 0.346 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 significant level, indicating that there is high significant difference between standard British English and mobilephone message language use by female senior secondary school students. This finding connotes the findings of Zinka (2011) that in most tertiary institutions, there is general awareness that most students especially female students no longer learn to listen well, speak well, and write well in English due to mobilephone message language use and other unofficial or ungrammatical English (slang).

CONCLUSION

As a result of the analysis of the data collected and the results of the findings, it was concluded that there existed high significant differences between standard British English and slag use by both male female students, and similarly, high significant differences existed between standard British English and mobilephone message language use by both male and female students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the findings and the conclusion, it is therefore recommended teachers must as much as possible discourage the use of slang as well as mobilephone message language use by constantly engaging the students in oral drill and short-gun tests to awaken their standard British grammatical consciousness. Where possible, school authorities should discourage use of mobilephone as well as adulterated or pidgin English in the school premises during school hours. It is also recommended that experts could be invited to give talks on the danger of slang, ungrammatical expressions and mobilephone message language use. It is also recommended that other stakeholders such as parents should cooperate with the school authorities in this direction with an explanation that these days, many students find it very increasingly difficult to draw a line or distinguish between standard British English and slang / mobilephone message language, which is a contributing factor to the performance of students' academic pursuit especially in the English language which is the 'lubricant' for other academic subjects in Nigerian schools.

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