

# Local Colouration in Mobile Text Messaging in Nigeria: A Sociolinguistic Study

B.M Mbah,

Department of Linguistics, Igbo and other Nigerian Languages, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

J.E. Ogbonna,

Department of Linguistics, African and Asian Studies, University of Lagos

## Abstract

Mobile phone text messaging in Nigeria brought with it a variety of English that is orthographically unique, circumstantially distinct and context sensitive. This study tries to examine how Nigerian youths employed their innovative and innate abilities in mobile phone text messaging to exhibit local colouration. Out of the 160 mobile phone text message samples collected in Lagos and Ibadan areas of southwest Nigeria, and Nsukka area of southeast Nigeria, 17 text messages were randomly selected for analysis. These data were classified under the following types of text messages: religious, inspirational, romantic and humorous, and analysed with Ethnography of Speaking propounded by Hymes (1962). The analyses focused on how the contents of these text messages manifest Nigeria socio-linguistic and cultural features through creative and innovative English usage. The result shows that Nigerian youths use innovative expressions in text messaging, which are Nigerian specific, to compose prayer, words of encouragement, critique of government and some of its agencies, affection and laughter. Analysis also shows how figures of speech such as metaphor, hyperbole, pun and symbolism are employed by Nigerian youths to convey mobile phone text messages that manifest local colouration of Nigerian socio-linguistic and cultural context.

**Keywords:** mobile phone, text messaging, SMS, texters, language use, sociolinguistics, culture, innovation, local colouration.

## 1. Introduction

In a computer literate society today, text-based communication in various forms thrives in the lives of most people. Instances of such text-based communication techniques are e-mail, chat on-line and text messaging. However, the focus of this study is to explore the innovative language use that reflects Nigerian style in mobile phone text messaging.

According to BBC (2003) cited in Proysen (2009:30), “the first mobile phone emerged on March 6, 1983...By the end of 1984, there were 300,000 users worldwide, even though the mobile phone was extremely expensive, colossal in size and not very practical in use. In 2003, over 1.2 billion people had mobile phones”. In Nigeria, however, mobile phone was introduced in 2001 with the evolution of Global System for Mobile communication (henceforth, GSM). Following Chilwa (2008a), GSM came to Nigeria with the licensing of MTN and ECONET (now Airtel<sup>1</sup>) in 2001 during the Obasanjo administration, after many years of decaying telecommunication infrastructure. According to *Wikipedia*'s<sup>2</sup> list of countries, their population and number of mobile phone in use; the population of Nigeria as at February, 2011 was 104 million and the number of mobile phone in use was 90,583,306 million, though the Business News of Lagos Degue Broadcasting Network (DBN) television on November, 28, 2011 reported that Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) registered 93 million<sup>3</sup> mobile phone lines. This number of users signifies that mobile phone is now relatively inexpensive to buy and the subscription rate to any particular network company is also not expensive. In effect, young children often own mobile phones even before they learn to read and write properly (Proysen 2009). This paper, however, studies the way Nigerians in general, and youths<sup>4</sup> in particular innovatively compose text messages that reflect local colouration, through the medium of this information technology gadget known as mobile phone.

“The term text messaging or texting refers to the brief typed messages sent using the SMS<sup>5</sup> (short message service) of mobile phones/cell phone, PDAs personal digital assistants), smart phones or web browsers” (Thurlow and Poff 2011:1). In other words, mobile phone text messaging is a kind of written communication sent or received via SMS of mobile phones. The first SMS message was a Christmas greeting sent out in Britain in 1992 (Bodomo, 2010:112). Thurlow and Poff (2011:1) assert that “texting was initially developed and released commercially in the early mid 1990s and has since seen a huge rise in popularity around the world following rapid spread of mobile telephony in general”. This suggests that mobile phones were used for making telephone calls at

first. However, when the technology improved, text messages evolved and became more and more popular worldwide. Today, Mobile phone text messaging has emerged as one of the major digital communication media, “with an estimation of over one billion messages exchanged per day around the world” (Bodomo, 2010: 112).

At inception in 2001, phone calls were extremely expensive in Nigeria. The subscribers to the mobile communication companies: MTN and Econet (now Airtel) were paying as much as fifty naira (N50) per minute call while text message was fifteen naira (N15) per message of 160 characters. This was said to be the highest rate in Africa, causing many subscribers to opt for text messaging as a cheaper alternative (Awonusi 2004, Chilwa 2008a). This novel communication medium has quickly emerged as a frequent daily linguistic or “general communicative practice in which two people or more exchange messages by coding and decoding texts received and sent from their cell phones” (Bodomo, 2010:110). This communication technique can be witnessed in schools, in offices, in buses, in eateries/restaurants, in markets, at homes, in airports, in churches and so on and so forth. However, Mobile phone text messaging emerged with a new language, that is, the language of text messaging. As we shall see from the data in the findings section, this new language according to Prosen (2009) resembles speech, with simple syntax, incomplete sentences, informal structure, use of unconventional abbreviations and spelling.

It is based on the linguistic features of this new language, that is, the language of mobile phone text messaging, the increasing interest of Nigerian youths in text messaging and the language (English) style in texting that inspire this study. The study therefore, seeks to investigate the types, contents and purposes of text messaging, as well as the English style employed by Nigerian youths in texting. It proposes that the contents of these text messages reflect the Nigeria socio-linguistic and cultural features through creative and innovative English usage.

## 2.2 Empirical Studies

The habit of texting is flourishing among Nigeria youths; however, scholarly works on the use of this phenomenon are still few. They are Awonusi (2004), Chilwa (2008a and 2008b), Iloelunachi (2011), Nwankwo (2011) and Ifeagwazi (forthcoming).

Awonusi (2004) examines text messages as register and discourse in Nigeria. He observes that apart from the peculiar phonetic representation such as “D for ‘the’, U for ‘you’ Y for ‘why’”, etc and orthographic representations such as “luv for ‘love’, n for ‘and’, @ for ‘at’, etc, Nigerian texts also attest to telegraphic style of communication, in which case, abbreviation of names are reduced to initials, pet-names, nicknames anglicized forms, etc. for example: ID for ‘Idowu’, Chuks for ‘Chukwuka’, ABJ for ‘Abuja’, etc. He also observed grammatical peculiarities, text multilingualism and discourse structure. He concludes therefore, that “texts have shown that informal lect within a written electronic setting is thriving as part of an urban-based educated English in Nigeria”. As a result “the view that informal English is not a virile lect of Nigerian English needs a rethink” (Awonusi, 2004:58).

Chilwa (2008a) in his attempt to establish the extent to which Nigerian English appears in SMS, studies the thematic content of Nigerian text messages. He classified Nigerian texts into three broad categories: economic text (business and commerce), social text (religion, politics, education and other social concerns), and personal text (greetings, feelings, prayers, etc), and found that 60% of text messages fell into this last category. Chilwa (2008b) examines the functional orientation of Nigerian texts, and result shows that text messaging is used to disseminate messages associated with faith-based pronouncements, prayer and well-wishing, admonition and assurance, appreciation and praise, season’s greetings and general information/announcements. These functions, according to him, tend to promote love and cooperation among church members.

Iloelunachi (2011) investigates the relationship between SMS text style and language of media using the syntactic structure of text messages. The result shows that text messages are structured in a way that prompts people to regard them as being filled with grammatical errors. He therefore recommends that to curb the temptation of using SMS text style in formal writing, teachers should tutor learners how to distinguish between formal and informal context when writing.

Nwankwo (2011) and Ifeagwazi (in progress) center on morpho-syntactic structure of GSM text messaging. Nwankwo’s study examines the GSM language errors among GSM users. They are morphological errors such as use of abbreviation and letter number combinations; and syntactic errors such as omission of punctuation marks, use of abbreviations for sentences, etc. She advises users and language learners to be conscious of these errors in order not to fall victim of the effect of such errors in writing. On the other hand, Ifeagwazi (in progress) wishes to carry out a linguistic study of the GSM.

From the forgoing review on the uses of mobile phone text messaging, the theoretical and the empirical studies, none of the works examine the new innovation in Nigerian English employed by Nigerian youths in text

messaging with the view of findings the local colourations. It is against this backdrop that this study attempts to investigate the local ideas, attitudes, culture and experiences, which Nigerians innovatively apply when composing text messages. As will be seen in our findings in section (4) below, these young Nigerians text message composers have been able to blend their knowledge of Nigeria social, linguistic, cultural, religious, political and economic environments with their knowledge of conventions of organisation of mobile phone text messaging, to create text messages that are meaningful within the Nigerian context

### **3. Research Methodology**

This section examines the methods and procedures as well as the theoretical framework used in the study. The section consists of the research design, area of study, sources of data, sampling techniques, methods of analysis and theoretical framework adopted for analysis.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The design of this study is survey research design. The researcher engaged four research assistants. These assistants collected the text messages in Lagos, Ibadan and Nsukka from the targeted population, which are the youths. The data came from all parts of Nigeria.

#### **3.2. Area of Study**

This study reports an investigation based on 160 mobile phone text messages written and sent in Nigeria. The area of study is the whole Nigerian nation because of the nature of the data. The age range of texters used is from sixteen to thirty five years. This youth was targeted because of the potentiality of generating the creative text messages with innovative English usage that reflect local colouration in the text messages.

#### **3.3 Sources of Data**

The study adopted the following methods of data collection. They are mobile phone, library source and the internet. The researcher used the purposive sampling method. However, out of the 160 samples of text messages collected, only 17 text messages were used for the study.

##### **3.3.1 Mobile Phone**

Mobile phones were the primary sources of data for the study. The 160 text messages used for the analysis were collected from mobile phones by the researcher and her four research assistants. The research assistants retrieved text messages from the mobile phones of their fellow youths, which they had sent or received, and transcribed them as accurately as possible (i.e. exactly as they appeared on the monitor). Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. This was especially important given the personal nature of some text messages. The data were collected over a six-month<sup>6</sup> period of the research.

##### **3.3.2 Library Source and the Internet**

Library and the internet being the secondary sources of data were consulted several times in search of useful materials that are related to the research topic. Books, journals seminar and conference papers, which are relevant to the study constitute the main sources of literature review. My supervisor also provided materials which were of invaluable help to the study.

#### **3.5 Methods of Data Analysis**

Out of the corpus of 160 different text messages collected, 17 text messages were randomly selected for analysis. These data were classified under the following types of text messages: religious, inspirational, romantic and humorous. The analysis was descriptive and focused on how the contents of these text messages manifested Nigeria socio-linguistic and cultural features through creative and innovative English usage.

#### **3.6 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is Ethnography of Speaking as proposed in Hymes (1962). In this framework, Hymes proposes incorporating ethnography in the analysis of language. Such a synthesis would elucidate important relationships between language and culture. The theory was modified in Hymes (1974) and applied in Saville-Troike (2003), Sadiq (2007) and, Ray and Biswas (2011).

Ethnography of Speaking analyses speech behaviour in its widest cultural and social contexts in order to discover culturally distinctive variations. It is concerned with the linguistic resources people use in context, the ways of speaking of a speech community, functions of language, patterns of use, routine, speech act, etc. According to Saville-Troike (2003), there is no single best method of collecting data on the pattern of speech or language use within a speech community. Appropriate procedures depend on the relationship of the researcher and the speech community, the type of data to be collected, and the particular situation in which field-work is being conducted.

To make it easy to remember, he made an acronym of the initial letters of each of the keyword and called it SPEAKING, these eight main elements have other subcomponents. This is because in order to speak a language correctly, one needs not only learn its vocabulary and grammar, but also the context in which words are used (Hymes 1974). This framework is intended to be used to look at any naturally occurring speech to discover the rules for speaking such as modes of speaking, topics, message forms within particular settings and activities. Moreover, it looks at contexts, the cultural impacts and factors that shape a particular speech event. Below is a summary of the key elements of the

SPEAKING model as explained in Hymes (1974: 54-60) and as applicable to our research topic:

- S - Setting and Scene: “Setting refers to time and place of speech act, and in general, to the physical circumstances” (p.55). For instance, time of texting may be in the morning, at night, first day of the month, Christmas, new year, valentine’s day, ‘Sallah’, birthday, etc. and place can be anywhere in Nigeria. Scene is the “psychological setting” or “cultural definition” of scene, including characteristics such as range of formality and sense of play or seriousness (pp.55-56). For instance, some text messages may be playful in nature while some may be serious.
- P – Participants: refer to speaker and audience (p.56). Participants in text messaging are sender and receiver.
- E – Ends: refer to purposes, goals, and outcome (pp.56-57). The purpose or goal of Texting may be reflection, hope, social change, emotional attraction and laughter.
- A- Act Sequence: refers to form and order of the event. In other words, this element deals with words and expressions used in text messaging and how they are arranged to bring about communication.
- K – Cues that establish the “tone, manner, or spirit” of the speech act (p.57). The tone and manner in which a text message is given may be serious, light hearted, sarcastic, humorous, etc.
- I – Instrumentality: refers to forms and style of speech (p.58-60). It is the choice of channel through which communication can be examined. It may be verbal or non-verbal as in text messaging.
- N - Norms: refer to social rules governing the event and the participants’ actions and reaction. In texting, the norm is sending and to receiving.
- G – Genre: refers to the type of linguistic event involved, for example text messaging may be prayer, inspirational, romantic, humorous, etc.

The justification for adopting this theoretical framework is in the fact that the study wishes to investigate the types, contents and purpose of text messaging, as well as the English style employed by Nigerian youths in texting. In addition, the study proposes that the contents of these text messages reflect the Nigerian socio-linguistic and cultural features through creative and innovative English usage. Language and culture are inseparable. As a matter of fact, language is an expression of culture. In every speech community, there are conventions, customs and practices observed by members in their verbal interactions. Hymes ‘Ethnography of Speaking’ as highlighted above takes into account the various factors involved in speaking, it is therefore adequate to analyse the sociolinguistic and cultural factors involved in text messaging of Nigerian youths.

#### **4. Discussions and Findings**

Our findings show some flavours or colourations that are not found in formal Nigerian English. These range from phonological, morphological, syntactic as well as orthographic colourations. Since our focus is not on the theoretical study of the language of text messaging but on aspects that relate to the content and cultural background of the messages, we do not provide a theoretical account in those domains. Our findings also show that young Nigerians employed innovative English usage that are specific to Nigeria socio-linguistic and cultural context in different types of text messages. However, for the purpose of this study, we will focus on only four types of text messages. They are religious, inspirational, romantic, and humorous text messages. Innovation in

mobile phone text messaging is stimulated by space constraints, giving Nigerian youths the opportunity to exhibit their ingenuity through playing with words, not just for entertainment purposes but also for social and critical reasons.

One outstanding advantage of mobile phone text messaging is that it allows Nigerians to create images by playing with words, thereby exhibiting their naturally endowed stylistic nature. Innovation is achieved when the composer is able to draw on the shared practical knowledge of the context in which the text message is being used to bring about some kinds of symbols, images and associations, which will evoke appropriate reactions such as victory and reflection, hope and social change, emotional attraction and laughter. The adoption of mobile phone text messaging has provided avenues for many young Nigerians to play with orthography and words, and create an imaginary state of wellbeing in Nigeria, where there are gloomy political, social, religious and economic situation. This, the Nigerian youths achieved through the above four mentioned types of text messages as follows:

#### 4.1 Religious Text Messages

Composing prayers and sending them through text messages is one of the way Southern Nigerians Christians promote love and cooperation among Christians (Chiluwa 2008b). These text messages are also reflective mechanism and serve as coping strategies for Christians in particular, and Nigerians in general in the context of political, social, religious and economic problems they face on daily basis. Prayer text messages can be sent at any time but they are more prevalent in some notable periods such as first day of the month, early morning, late night, anniversaries, birthdays, and so on. One of the most common types of prayers used in mobile phone text messaging is termed ‘dangerous prayer’ by some Pentecostal churches. This is a kind of prayer where evil or doom is declared upon real or perceived enemies. Dangerous prayer is a common feature of prayer in some Pentecostal assemblies in Nigeria. Though this sort of prayer is often condemned by traditional churches, some Pentecostal churches justify the use of dangerous prayer, claiming it is extract from the Bible. Below are some examples of dangerous prayer from the corpus of our data:

- M1: D LORD says HE wil use His mighty power 2contend against dose contendin against u. HE’l feed ur enemies wit their own flesh and dey shal be drunk wit rivers of their own blood (Isa 49:26). Congrats, u wil laf ur enemies to scorn. Hapi New Mnth.
- M2: Every arrow of ur enemies directed towards u wil backfires and pierce their heads and dat of their entire households, which wil result 2closing their family trees. Gud mornng!
- M3: As u sleep, heavenly thunder wil make ur enemies deaf, dumb & blind. God wil turn ur sorrow to joy, weepin to lafin, bitternes 2 sweetnes nd pity to party. Sweet drms.

Dangerous prayer portrays weapons of warfare aimed at destroying the enemy. In M1-M3, ‘God’s mighty power’, ‘arrow’ and ‘thunder’ are the imagined weapons. Dangerous prayer gives a sense of victory to the receiver in that it gives him/her a feeling of conquering the power of the enemies, which is a major source of fear in Nigeria and other African countries. Innovative ingenuity is manifested here where the text message composer perceives an enemy as an object of attack for the receiver and therefore, constructs some desire weapons of warfare for the attack.

Another innovative skill employed by young Nigerians in prayer text message is building imagery on the names of reputable eateries and financial institutions, and using Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) terminologies to portray some messages that are specific to the Nigerian socio-cultural setting.

Consider the following messages (M4 – M6):

- M4: My broda, God wil TANTALIZE u wit His grace. Angels wil be on guard 2give u a SWEET SENSE favor. God wil make u MR BIGS among equals. U wil MUNCH til u are ful. Have a FINICKY & TASTEE month.
- M5: I pray dat God wil take u FIRST 2d ZENITH of joy, GUARANTEE ur ACCESS 2success, put DIAMOND in ur SKY, make u 2SPRING up nd at last, u’ll give Him INTERCONTENIENTAL testimonies. Hapi new month.
- M6: As u log out of April and browse in2 May. May u double click success, unspeakable joy, gud health & enter [www.divine xpansion.com](http://www.divinexpansion.com). Happy Independence day.

In the above samples, M5 and M6 portray names of well-known eateries and financial institutions in Nigeria. These names appear like brand names but metaphorically, they say something about the images they project in

advertisements of the organizations. In M4, ‘Tantalizer’, ‘Sweet Sensation’, ‘Mr Biggs’, ‘Munchies’, ‘Finicky’ and ‘Tastee Fried Chicken’ are foremost eateries in Nigeria. Similarly, ‘First’, ‘Zenith’, ‘Guarantee’, ‘Access’, ‘Diamond’, ‘SKYE’, ‘Spring’ and ‘Intercontinental’ are names of popular banks in Nigeria. Anybody who is familiar with Nigerian socio-cultural setting will cleverly recognise the source of these organisational names used in text messages to create prayer despite the fact that some of them, for instance, ‘Tantalizer’, ‘Sweet Sensation’, ‘Munchies’, ‘Tastee fried Chicken’ and ‘Skye’ were not fully reproduced in the text messages. In M6, internet terminologies were used to depict local colouration. They are ‘log out’, ‘browse’, ‘double click’, and ‘www.com’.

#### 4.2 Inspirational Text Messages

Inspirational text messages can come in various forms. It can be composed to be a source of encouragement to a receiver who is going through life challenges; it can be an instrument for mobilising the masses for protest against Government decisions that are not favourable to the masses; it can also serve as a medium of critique to leaders, organisations and Government agencies. Below are some inspirational text messages in our data:

- M7:               Wen in tears, dnt give up, rememba dat d darkest part of d nite  
                      is closest 2 d dawn. Ur condition shal stil improve. No condition  
                      is permanent.
- M8:               Say no 2 fuel subsidy removal, yes 2 removal of corruption.  
                      N65 or nothing. Enof is enof, be at Ojota tmoro.
- M9:               “I had no shoes”. May u nt hav golden shoes & use it 2 grind  
                      d toes dat pushed u 2 power.
- M10:             Ur light wil nt fluctuate like PHCN, it wil remain stable & eva  
                      shinning.
- M11:             God’s luv is nt expensive like MTN, it’s nt proud like GLO,  
                      it doesn’t change ownership like AIRTEL and does nt have  
                      NAFDAC no, so it cant expire.

The inspirational text messages in M7 is an example of text composed to bring comfort to someone going through difficult life challenges. It creates an image that the receiver is almost out of the tunnel of difficulty. The receiver knowing that his/her condition shall improve since ‘no condition is permanent’ will not give up.

The use of text message as an instrument for mobilising the masses for protest against corrupt leaders started with the Philippines in 2001, where over a million Manila residents were mobilised and coordinated by the use of text messages. This action led to a peaceful demonstration against Estrada, which brought his downfall (Rhinegold 2002). A similar case is where the Nigerian youths used text messages to organize demonstration against fuel subsidy removal by the federal Government in January 2012. M8 is a sample of the text messages that motivated ‘Lagosians’ to peaceful demonstration at Gani Fawehinmi Park, (aka Freedom Park) Ojota, Lagos and in other parts of the country. That demonstration was the most heavily attended mass protest in the history of Nigerian. As a result of this peaceful protest, the N141 fuel tariff announced by the Federal Government was brought down to N97.

Apart from encouragement and mass mobilisation as seen above, the adoption of text messaging in Nigeria is also targeted as a medium to transform the political and social settings through critique by Nigerian youths. Regardless of the fact that these innovative text messages only circulate among young Nigerians, they say volumes about how other Nigerians feel about the Government and some of its agencies. M9 - M11 are samples of where text messages serve as medium of critique to the leaders and some government agencies. M9 quoted a campaigning statement “I had no shoes” made by a leader who seems not to be living up to the expectations of the average Nigerian, hence the image of now using ‘golden shoes’ to step on the toes of the masses that voted the leader to power. In the same way, M10 is targeted at the nations unstable power supply by Power Holdings Company of Nigeria (PHCN). Although the message is constructed as a wish, the aim is to draw attention to the problem of instability and fluctuation of electricity in Nigeria. M11 was targeted at other service providers such as MTN and GLO for their high tariffs, and AIRTEL for instability in ownership. However, comparing God’s love with the services of these telecommunication companies and that of NAFDAC reflect the supremacy of God’s love over human services. While NAFDAC certification is temporary, God’s love is everlasting.



### 4.3 Romantic Text Messages

Construction of romantic expressions by lovers is another aspect of young Nigerians way of life, which mobile phone text messaging has been useful in fulfilling. The technology has helped to develop the poetic intuitions of many youths particularly the introverts, who can now sit down in the confines of their rooms and express what they feel for others using familiar socio-linguistic, cultural, symbolic and poetic license to either establish or maintain relationships or to woo new lovers. The innovative ability in romantic text messages is manifested in the use of hyperbolic expression in M12, court scenario in M13 and pictures in M14 and M15 to narrate their love stories. Consider these samples of romantic text messages from the pool of our data:

M12: If sayin I luv u is a crime, kirikiri could b my homeplace 4eva  
 If thinkin of u was a disease, I could suffer 2death  
 If bn wit u is a sin, I could pay a ticket to hell

M13: U're accused of trespassin into my life & hijacking  
 my heart wit ur smile & kindness  
 Can u plead innocence?  
 U're hereby sentenced 2be my SWEET HEART 4eva

In M12, the sender used hyperbolic expressions to describe the depth of his/her love to the receiver. The depth and value of love were compared with negative things and their consequences, which the sender was ready to suffer. They are 'crime and kirikiri' (jail); 'disease and death'; and 'sin and hell'. This figure of speech, actually amplified the magnitude of the value of the sender's love for the receiver. M13 creates a court scenario where the receiver was accused of trespassing, with good virtues: 'smile and kindness', as a result, the receiver was sentenced not to serve jail terms but to be the sender's 'sweet heart for ever'.

The ability of young Nigerians to use the symbols of mobile phone to draw picture that accompanies some romantic text messages reflects creativity. M14 and M15 are some of the examples in our data:

M14: TITANIC \_||\_  
 \_," "=\_./t\_""  
 \_\_\_\_\_/  
 My babe, see how special u are 2me  
 dat I came by ship 2say I LUV u.

M15: ,-.-.-.^/'\_-.-.-.  
 "-.-.-.@"'.-.-.,"  
 '-.-.-.O-.-.-'  
 My beautifl butterfly pls go & tell my frnd  
 dat i truly luv & miss her.

In the use of pictures to accompany romantic texts, young Nigerians involve artistic and poetic skills. The artistic skill requires knowing the appropriate symbols to combine to form the different pictographic images while the poetic skill entails knowing the appropriate kinds of words to go with the image created. M14 and M15 have one thing in common, there are agents in each case to convey the romantic message. They are ship (that carried the sender) and butterfly.

### 4.4 Humorous Text Messages

Humorous text messages is another category of mobile phone text messaging where young Nigerians draw positive symbols out of ideas that will naturally evoke negative ones. In other words, some humorous text messages allow wider interpretation of meaning beyond the literal conceptual representation. Consider the following examples:

M16 God is lookin 4 someone 2 SLAP: S-save, L-lift, A-assist,  
 P-promote. May God SLAP d hell out of u b4 d end of 2day.

M17 I want 2give u POISON, ready 2take it: P-progress, O-overcoming,  
 I-independence, S-success, O-opportunities, N-new dawn. Come on,

---

 Swallow d POISON!

M16 and M17 will naturally elude surprise from the receiver at first, but it will not be long before he/she sees the dimension of the hidden humour in them. The first clause of this kind of text message appears like threat, because of the sort of image (surprise) it is likely to conjure in the mind of the receiver. Telling someone about ‘God slapping him/her’ and ‘giving him/her poison’ will surprise the person at first. However, the following clause puts the expression in context by making the person understand that it was not abusive, but humorous.

### 5. Summary and Conclusion

The study investigates the types, contents and purposes of text messaging, as well as the English style employed by Nigerian youths in texting. In our analysis using Hymes (1962) *Ethnography of Speaking*, we establish that young Nigerians text composers blend their knowledge of Nigeria social, linguistic, cultural, political and economic environments with their knowledge of conventions of organisation of mobile phone text messaging, to create different types of text messages that are meaningful within Nigerian context. However, for this study, we focus only on four types of text messages which are religious, inspirational, romantic and humorous text messages.

It is observed that for many Nigerian youths, sending text message serves different purposes. First and foremost, it is used for social bonding. However, beyond this major role, the study shows that expressions that are Nigerian specific are used by these young Nigerians to compose prayer, words of encouragement, critique of government and some of its agencies, affection and laughter.

The study also shows how figures of speech such as metaphor, hyperbole, pun and symbolism are employed by Nigerian youths to convey text messages that manifest local colouration of Nigerian socio-linguistic and cultural context. These findings confirm our assumption that the contents of text messages in Nigeria reflect the Nigeria socio-linguistic and cultural features through innovation.

### Endnotes

1. The current name of Celtel is Airtel. It changed from Econet to Celtel, to Vodacom, to Zain and now Airtel.
2. Wikipedia’s source of information is Industry Statistics: Subscriber Data, Nigerian Telecommunication Commission, retrieved by Wikipedia on 18-04-2011.
3. This however, does not necessarily mean that every other citizen in Nigeria has a mobile phone, because many people own more than one mobile phone.
4. *Chambers 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary* defines youth as “the early part of life, often specifically that between childhood and adulthood”. However, our definition of youth in this study covers the age range of 16 to 35years.
5. A text message is also refers to as SMS (Short Message Service). Although messages nowadays often include images, videos and music, hence the newer term MMS (Multimedia Message Service). Hence, the terms SMS, mobile texting, texting and text messaging are used interchangeably.
6. They were collected from November 2011 to May 2012.

### References

- Al.Qomoul, M. (2011). “Effectiveness of using English SMS on the Development of the Tertiary Students’ Spoken and Written Communication”. *European Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol. 22, No 3: 342-351.
- Awonusi, S. (2004). “Little Englishes and the Law of Energetics: A sociolinguistic study of SMS text messages as register and discourse in Nigerian English”. In Segun Awonusi and E.A. Babalola (Eds.) *The domestication of English Nigeria: A festschrift for Abiodun Adetugbo*. Lagos: University of Lagos Press.
- Bodomo, A. and Lee, C. (2004). “Linguistic Features of SMS Texting in Hong Kong”. *Australia Journal of Communication*, Vol. 11: 63-85.
- Bodomo, A. B. (2010). *Computer-Mediated Communication for Linguistics and literacy: Technology and Natural Language Education*. New York: Information Science Reference.
- Chiluwa, I. (2008a). “Assessing the Nigerianness of SMS Text-Messages in English”. *EnglishToday*. Vol. 24: 51-56.

- Chiluwa, I. (2008b). "SMS Text-Messaging and the Nigerian Christian Context: *International Journal of Language, Society and Culture*. [http://www. Educ.utlas.au/users/tle/ JOURNAL/](http://www.Educ.utlas.au/users/tle/JOURNAL/) Retrieved: December 19, 2011.
- Crystal, D. (2008). *Txtng: the gr8 deb8*. Oxford: oxford University Press.
- Hymes, D. (1962). "The Ethnography of Speaking". In T. Gladwin and W. Sturtevant (Eds.) *Anthropology and Human Behaviour*. Washington DC: Anthropological Society of Washington.
- Hymes, D. (1974). *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An ethnographic approach*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Höfish, J. and Gebhardt, J. (2005). "Changing Cultures of Written Communication: Letter, e-mail, SMS". In R. Harper, L. Palen and A. Taylor (Eds.) *The Inside text: Social, cultural and design perspectives on SMS*. vol 4. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- Hoogvliet, M. (2009). "Bogging, Twittering, SMS, and Chat Improving Writing Skill. <http://www.one3rd.nl/blog/>. Retrieved, December 19, 2011.
- Ifeagwazi, P. A. (in progress). "A Linguistic Study of the Global System for Mobile Communication".
- Iloelunachi, R. K. (2011). "The Syntax of Short Message Service (SMS)". Unpublished B.A. Project, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Kasesniemi, E. (2003). *Mobile Messages: Young People and a New Communication Culture*. Finland: Tampere University Press.
- Kasesniemi, E. and Rautiainen, P. (2002). "Mobile Culture of Children and Teenagers in Finland". In J. E. Katz and M. Aakhus (Eds.) *Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk and Public Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ling, R. (2005). "The Socio-linguistics of SMS: An analysis of SMS use by a Random Sample of Norwegians". In Richard Seyer Ling and Per E. Pedersen (Eds.) *Mobile Communications: Re-negotiation of the Social Sphere*. London: Springer.
- Nwankwo, J.C. (2011). "Error Analysis of the Language of the Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM): A Morpho-Syntactic Approach". Unpublished B. A. Project, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Ray, M. and Biswas, C. (2011). "A Study on Ethnography of Communication: A discourse analysis with Hymes 'speaking model'. *Journal of Education and Practise*. [www.iiste.org/journal/index.php/JEP/article/download/524/410](http://www.iiste.org/journal/index.php/JEP/article/download/524/410). Retrieved: August 6, 2012.
- Reid, D. J. and Reid, F. J. (2005). "Textmates and Text Circle: Insights into the Social Ecology of SMS Text Messaging". In A. Lasen and L. Hamill (Eds.) *Mobile World, Past, Present and Future*. London: Springer.
- Sadiq, H. M. (2007). "Dell Hymes (Ethnography of Speaking) for a Study of Senior University Students' Communicative Competence". Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Salahaddin University.
- Segerstad, H. A. (2005). "Language in SMS-A Socio-Linguistic View". In R. Harper. L. Palen and A. Taylor. (Eds.) *The Inside Text: Social, Cultural and Design Perspectives*. London: Springer.
- Thurlow, C. (2003). *Generation Txt? The Sociolinguistics of Young Peoples' Text-Messaging. Discourse Analysis Online*. <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/daol/article/v1/nl/a3/thurlow2002003.html>
- Thurlow, C. and Poff, M. (2011). "Text Messaging". In S. U. Herring, D. Stein and T. Virtanen (Eds.) *Handbook of Pragmatics of CMC*. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

This academic article was published by The International Institute for Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open Access Publishing service based in the U.S. and Europe. The aim of the institute is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the publisher can be found in the IISTE's homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

## CALL FOR PAPERS

The IISTE is currently hosting more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals and collaborating with academic institutions around the world. There's no deadline for submission. **Prospective authors of IISTE journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:** <http://www.iiste.org/Journals/>

The IISTE editorial team promises to review and publish all the qualified submissions in a **fast** manner. All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Printed version of the journals is also available upon request from readers and authors.

### IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

