

American Journal of Communication (AJC)



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Abstract

Purpose: This paper discusses the findings of a research study that sought to investigate the factors that lead to the change of spelling for some English language words by WhatsApp users in Botswana. The investigation was informed by some unconventional spelling of some words in the English language, which otherwise would seem easy to spell. Although writers on social media platforms do not have to conform to standard language rules, some nonstandard forms of spelling similar to those collected from the chat groups, have now evidenced to be cropping in the academic writing.

Methodology: Data were collected from WhatsApp chat groups. The chat groups comprised of young (university class groups) and a mixture of young and middle aged (in church, social and family groups) users. Daily observations and documentations of strikingly modified spellings of words on WhatsApp were done over a period of 12 months. The Content

Analysis data collection method was employed to collect data from a set of written texts on WhatsApp chat groups mentioned.

Findings: The findings of the study unearthed a metamorphosis and alterations of words, replacement of /s/ with /z/, excision of some letters in the normal spelling of some words and substitution of letters with numbers. Factors such as being innovative, wanting to belong and speed of typing a text message amid the hype of everyday life, were realized.

Recommendations: It is hoped that the paper will influence social media users, particularly students, to be spelling sensitive and conform to standard rules when they write in more formal platforms such as school assignments.

Keywords: *Social Media, Spelling, Non-Standard, Conventional, Modification.*

INTRODUCTION

Technology has developed so much that it has become a part of most people's lives. Admittedly, the rise of technology based platforms such as the internet; blogs, online news, email, Facebook WhatsApp, twitter and many others, has been a welcome transformation in various communication setups. Communication has never been easier since the advent of social media. The effect has not just been a faster and easier means of communicating with others in various forms of human relations; it has also helped users to trace long lost friends and reunited many who had lost contact with one another for a period spanning years and even decades. People can now trace friends and relatives at the click of a button. In addition, it has reshaped the means to stay in touch with those who would otherwise be physically out of reach. The business world has not been left out as they advertise their products and services; post job advertisements and other information on social media; and life could not have been easier. In a nutshell, technology has now been woven into the everyday life of human existence.

“The evolution of the internet technology created a suitable, easiest, cost efficient and fast medium of communication, whereby majority of the world's population two-third statistically participate fully in blogging as well as social media activities in order to satisfy their thirst for information, and entertainment, hence such platforms serve as tools for connection and creation of mutual understanding,” (Wilson, 2018).

In all the hype surrounding social media, one thing that cannot be ignored is the fact that writing is hugely involved in this form of communication. Some people without even realizing it, have become perpetual writers on these platforms, for various reasons such as: venting out, sharing and/or rallying support on personal issues and experiences, finding love on dating sites, and generally conversing with the world; to get updates on what is trending in the world. Thus, in addition to other forms of communication such as typographic expressions like emoticons, voice over/video recordings, pictorials, the written discourse has become a common phenomenon in social-media platforms. This resulted in what is termed online communicative language, (OCL). The linguistic characteristics of OCL include reduced lexical and syntactic structures, use of abbreviations, emoticons, shortenings, clippings, contractions, nonconventional spellings, non-alphabetic symbols and the use of letter or number homophones (Hashim, Soopar & Hamid ,2017; Zaemah, Marlyna & Bahiyah 2012).

Botswana has not been left out in this life changing phenomena. Many people in Botswana use these platforms for reasons ranging from personal to business. In all these, writing is largely involved, that presupposes the use of languages such as English to a large extent. It is paramount to note that the English Language is one of the major international languages, a national language in Botswana. Its prominence in the country has seen it dominant in the Botswana schools curricula as a compulsory subject from primary to secondary education as well as being a language of instruction up to tertiary level. Having been a teacher of English for over 19 years at secondary level, the researcher witnessed the deterioration of the quality of spelling English language words' more especially among students and on some social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Short Message Service (SMS). Since English is considered a global language (Rao, 2019), “it has probably been affected by the digital phenomenon even

more than other languages have”, (Jenkins, 2003). Suffice to say is that in as much as these platforms are considered social platforms, with no requirement for the application of language rules, it has become interesting to see how people given such liberty could change the spelling of words to the extent of some being unrecognizable.

In the process, the era of social- media has brought about immense and interesting creations in the spelling of words, in particular the English Language. These modified spelling of words can be described as “unconventional” as the words produced deviate from the conventional and standard forms. Some platforms have a limited number of characters to use in one message, and this could be attributed to people resorting to modified spelling of words in an effort to put their thoughts in one message. Strain-Moritz (2016), mentions that Twitter limits characters to 140 in one tweet. In some cases, the change was based on pronunciation which would be dictated by their localized accent, and making words to be short enough to be accommodated in a single message. “Many such spellings can be considered ‘phonetic’, in that they cohere, in one way or another, with plausible pronunciations,” (Eisenstein, 2015). In some ways, the group dynamics such as composition or purpose, has had some influence on the way the participants choose to spell some words. This resulted in unconventional spellings of words by shortening the words, usually in a non-standard form, and using the non-standard abbreviated forms of such words. It is for that reason that words such as “you”, would be spelt as “U”, “I am” would be written as “Um”.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of factors have been attributed to the newly invented spelling of English Language words by some social media users. Research has unearthed that pronunciation has taken precedence over correct spelling of some words in today’s communication. “The orality maxim relates to the fact that the register in many forms of informal CMC is to a large extent conceptually oral, reflecting oral communication rather than classical written communication,” (Hilte *et al*, 2019). How a speaker pronounces words, or generally how they speak, has taken prominence over the standard spelling of words. It informs how these individuals choose to spell words, particularly on social media. In addition, “Technology is enabling new patterns of communication in ways which have implications for language patterns,” (Graddol, 2006).

Gone are the days when language users took pride in the good English they spoke and wrote. Technology has largely impacted the writing skills for many, if what is seen on social media is anything to go by. A plethora of reasons are attributed to social media users resorting to modify words when communicating in such platforms, and writing correct English is the least of them. In support, Hilte *et al* (2019); (Grondelaers *et al*. 2016: 119, 132) state that “...new types of prestige have emerged and have become increasingly important, such as “dynamism” and “media cool” or “modern media prestige.” The essence of innovation, following the masses and wanting to “belong” in the social media circles is not just limited to graphics; people now seem to be looking for creativity in everything, and the spelling of words in English has not escaped such ingenuity.

“This coolness-factor in particular may impact youths’ online writing, since adolescents tend to intensively engage in identity construction and are extremely sensitive to peer group evaluation (in terms of desire for acceptance and fear of rejection;....., and since self-profiling is an inherent part of most social media communication.....”(Hilte *et al*, 2019).

Hilte *et al* (2019), also quote (Giles & Billings 2004: 195) that “it has been attested repeatedly that non-standard speakers “are upgraded on traits relating to solidarity, integrity, benevolence, and social attractiveness.” In addition, Hilte *et al*, (2019); Grondelaers *et al*. (2016:130) affirm that “In this respect, all kinds of CMC conventions and chatspeak features are potentially useful “linguistic tool[s] for modern self-portrayal”.

This study focuses on words whose spelling has been deliberately altered to fit user’s supposed needs and preferences; thus even though noticed, some aspects of grammar have not been discussed. Some of the spellings were quite unrecognizable (considering the fact that they were supposed to be English words), because even the users could not give clear reasons why they spell such words the way do. Of most influence, particularly among Batswana¹, is the mother tongue Setswana. It has to be noted that varieties of the English language, in particular the accent part of it, has been realized to be determined by geographical location, mother tongue influence among other factors. This study, just like other studies (see Hashim *et al*, 2017; Stappa & Shaari, 2012), discovered that localized pronunciation has a great impact on the newly created spelling on social media. One needs to clearly understand how people from that area pronounce some English words in order to understand some of the newly spelt words. In support, Crystal, (2001) noted that there is a similarity among chat group members in terms of linguistic features and the strategies the members employ in communication.

The research also observed that some writers on social media tend to disregard the fact that the new spelling of words they created, could actually be a completely different word that is in actual existence, thus hampering the intended meaning. In such instances, the context plays a much bigger role in understanding what was being said. Sometimes, the writer would have been in a hurry to write a message, thus speedily creating the best possible (in their thinking) way to write such messages. In the process, though grammar rules are also flouted, it has been realized that the spelling of words suffered the most. “We compromise correct English usage for the urgency of the task at hand; not only do we abbreviate words for fast and efficient communication but we are further blurring the distinction of correct English spelling,” (ZeddaSampson, 2013).

Spelling words in the “social media” manner unfortunately is not limited to the social media platforms. Considering the fact that social media spelling is perceived as “non-standard” as it is used in informal setups, had its use been limited to such platforms, there would be no concern about it. But, as a Lecturer in Academic Literacy and Communication Skills, the researcher has come across some of these types of words in the school assignments. This indicates far deeper spelling problems than would be expected, especially in academics. It has surfaced that some

¹ Plural noun used to refer to people from Botswana, (Motswana for singular).

students do not differentiate writing an academic assignment/test from writing on social media. “.....text-words, slang or newly created words; and it is no surprise many of these language variations are turning up in students class work, (Zedda-Sampson, 2013). In further support, Wilson (2018) says that “... the usage of social media by students affects their spelling ability negatively more especially when writing examination and letters, which in turn affects conventional way of writing.” Wilson’s study further determined that virtual platforms negatively impact the ability for students to spell words correctly. The study supposes that learners spend much of their time on social media than they would in their school work; this in turn affects their writing skills such as spelling.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In his paper, Bandura (1977) discusses the social learning theory which he spearheaded. In as much as the publication was done decades back, it still transcends in the current researches (Wilson (2018), and is still applicable in many ways. He posits a view that in learning, both cognitive and behavioral approaches are applied. He further details the acquisition of patterns of behavior through the social learning analysis. Of interest to this study are the aspects of Learning by direct experience and Learning through modelling. Social media users tend to model what others are doing, that is, the language used as well as the aspect of spelling words on such platforms. In an effort to fit in the WhatsApp group and ward off negative comments on how one writes, the users model the masses so that they “belong” to that group. On a similar note, the exposure they get through the use of various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and others, gives them the experience needed to fit in the social media society. All these make learning through experience and through modelling a perfect fit for this research.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to report how some social media communicators spelt some English Language words on WhatsApp, and the reasons behind their choice of spelling in identified instances. The research looked more on the spelling of individual words than any other aspect of language use such as the grammaticality of structures as in tenses, lexical fitness and correctness, and so on.

METHODOLOGY

A Content Analysis method of data collection was used in this study. This is because the method is applicable where patterns in recorded communication need to be identified. Content Analysis can also be used to collect data where a broad range of texts are involved, as it was the case in this study. The method was found to be suitable for naturally produced content and has been found to be highly reliable. The data was collected systematically from sets of social media posts, specifically WhatsApp group chats.

The study further employed quantitative and qualitative methods in the analysis of data. A quantitative method of data collection was relevant to this study because it involves the use of numbers, in this case for the presentation of the participants’ group dynamics of age and gender. In the analysis of the data collected, a qualitative approach was used to explain the findings and provide in-depth insights into the same, (Streefkerk, 2020).

A broad range of data were collected over a period of one year from WhatsApp group chats, selecting words that have been modified in spelling. The objective was to find out what informed the participants to use non-standard linguistic features in the spelling of some words on the platform as opposed to standard forms. A comparison with the findings of similar researches from other parts of the world has also been done.

Three groups used in the study were university students WhatsApp groups from the Faculty of Social Sciences labelled as: **A=45** students, **B=64** students & **C=62** students. The other groups were **D=** church group with **119** members, **E=**family group with **18** people & **F=** social group consisting of **39** members.

Table 1: Group Analysis by Age

Group	20 years & below	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	Above 40 years	Total
A	24	21	-	-	-	-	45
B	33	29	-	-	2	-	64
C	35	26	-	1	-	-	62
D	16	22	26	26	17	12	119
E	2	3	4	2	3	4	18
F	-	-	-	9	11	19	39
Total	110 (31.7%)	101 (29.1%)	30 (8.6%)	38 (11%)	33 (9.5%)	35 (10.1%)	347

The WhatsApp users in the groups used in the study comprised 80.4% of the youth (ages 20-35). These are the people who use social media mostly as researchers have reported. 49% of the respondents were university students. They had created WhatsApp groups in their Communication & Academic Literacy course to communicate issues pertaining assignments, announcements and general discussions related to the course. At 34%, the church WhatsApp group made the second largest in the study.

Table 2: Group Analysis by Gender

Group	Males	Females
A	17	28
B	22	42
C	25	37
D	41	78
E	7	11
F	-	39
Total	112 (32.3%)	235 (67.7%)

The population of study indicates a disparity in numbers between males and females. In all the groups studied, the females were of a very high number as compared to their male counterparts.

The possibility for such a scenario could be that Botswana generally has a high number of females than males (Statistics Botswana Annual Report, 2019, p. 33; Tladi & Nleya, 2017).

FINDINGS

The study unearthed an inundation of spelling changes, innovations and modifications, which resulted in lexical structures that could require some kind of decoding skill if one is not an avid social media user, or belong to the group. The data collected for the study will be categorized and discussed on the basis of the modification characteristics. Vowel omissions, excision of some letters, a combination of letters and number homophones, and shortening of words are some of the modifications found to be common among this study's participants' writing. In their study, Zaemah et al, (2012) noted a similar trend. A number of instances yielded the use of letter homophones to represent a word that has a similar pronunciation. In this, an occasional "*k*" would be used to mean *okay/ok*, "*n*" used for *and*, whereas "*u*" would mean *you*. A pattern of inconsistency among the different participant was noticed. This surfaced as the participants would use a modified spelling form of a word in one instance, and change the spelling of the same word in the next chat. For example: using "*n*" in one instance, and in the next chat they would use the symbol & or the complete word *and*.

What influenced the change of spelling falls across a variety of factors, from writing messages in the interest of time, thus speed would be a factor, to just being creative and following a pattern in the group one belongs to. Some of the reasons raised by the respondents for spelling words identified include: wanting to belong. (Hashim et al, 2017) refer to this as "reducing social distance and social power". Other reasons included facetiousness, innovation, and the coolness factor, among others. The study found that since all the groups had participants who are termed "the youth", the very same group that is active in other social media platforms, the linguistics patterns noted were transferred across these platforms. Similar patterns were noted by Facebook based investigations; (Hashim et al, 2017; Wilson, 2018).

Table 3: Sample Sentences from WhatsApp Chats

Sentence as Written on WhatsApp Chats	Intended Sentence
1. <i>U nid 2 spik 2 ur bradar.</i>	You need to speak to your brother.
2. <i>Daz y I nid 1.</i>	That's why I need one.
3. <i>Y r u l8?</i>	Why are you late?
4. I did <i>nt c dem.</i>	I did not see them.
5. <i>U're welcum / u a welcum</i>	You are welcome/You're welcome.
6. <i>Um in de uth choir.</i>	I'm in the youth choir.
7. I <i>hv thri</i> of <i>thoze.</i>	I have three of those.
8. I <i>nid ma buk today.</i>	I need my book today.
9. Where <i>hv u byn?</i>	Where have you been?
10. I <i>thot u</i> were <i>nt cumin</i>	I thought you were not coming
11. <i>Waz it becuz</i> I left?	Was it because I left?
12. <i>Dat iz wat I dnt undrstnd.</i>	That is what I don't understand
13. <i>U nid to tich hm</i> a lesson.	You need to teach him a lesson.
14. <i>Daz a sili</i> joke.	That's a silly joke.

15. I hv 2 rid de msg.	I have to read the message.
16. Plis col me.	Please call me.
17. De grup iz 4 galz only.	The group if for girls only.
18. Um nt hapi wth de mrk I gt.	I'm not happy with the marks I got.
19. He broke mi fone.	He broke my phone.
20. Madam, where iz mi mani?	Madam, where is my money?
21. Sori I missed ur col.	Sorry, I missed your call
22. Did u nt rid ma txt?	Did you not read my text?
23. We gave dam ol de moni.	We gave them all the money.
24. I left mi tomato sos at ur hse.	I left my tomato sauce at your house.
25. Daz ma husband.	That's my husband.

Table 3 reflects samples of data written in sentence forms. However the research did not include the study of syntactic structures produced in the WhatsApp communication set up. But rather focused on the individual words therein and the way they have been spelt, more so if such a spelling deviated from the standard form. However, looking at the structures in table 3, the overall impression could be that the language there is not English, save for occasionally correctly spelt words. Taking sentence 1 for example- "*u nid 2 spik 2 ur bradar*", each of the words in the structure have been changed to the extent of having an unrecognizable language (in a sentence supposed to be in English). The same goes for sentences 3, 15, 17 and 18, where the only difference was patches of correctly spelt words like *I* and *only*. In other examples, one would suppose that there has been some code-switching, where the communication would consist of a part of correctly spelt words while the other part has words modified to participant's preference. Sentences 23 and 25 present such examples.

The study also identified modified contractions. For example: *Daz-* meaning *that's*, a contraction of *that is*. Another example is *u're-* meaning *you're*, also a contraction of *you are*. In these examples, the /s/ sound has been replaced by a /z/, while the word *you* was replaced with a /u/.

Table 4: Shortening of words

Word from WhatsApp	Number of letters	Standard Spelling	Number of letters	Difference
<i>sista</i>	5	sister	6	1
<i>tich</i>	4	teach	5	1
<i>tym</i>	3	time	4	1
<i>mani/moni</i>	4	money	5	1
<i>grup</i>	4	group	5	1
<i>cum</i>	3	come	4	1
<i>fone</i>	4	phone	5	1
<i>sili</i>	4	silly	5	1
<i>col</i>	3	call	4	1
<i>rid</i>	3	read	4	1
<i>hapi</i>	4	happy	5	1

<i>wat</i>	3	what	4	1
<i>buk</i>	3	book	4	1
<i>plis</i>	4	please	6	2
<i>thanx</i>	5	thanks	6	1

Table 4 shows the difference in the number of letters in each word, a comparison between the spelling from the WhatsApp chat and the standard spelling. The result of the modification in most cases was a word shorter by just one letter. The modified word does not apply the conventional shortening of words (see Bailey, (2011), p. 175). Rather it combines the clipping of some letters from a word and localized pronunciation, producing a shorter word. It was realized that the respondents' pronunciation played a part on how they would be creative in spelling words, but maintaining the sound in each word. In most instances, the conventional phonemic sound is not applied.

The fact that the difference between the created word and its standard spelling was just by one letter in the case identified, did not count much. One participant said "Short is short, whether is by a letter or two, it is still short." Another participant explained that, the total number of letters cut off from each words counts for something. Brevity in writing takes the center stage in these chat groups. The impression here was that what is important to the users was communication. As long as the message has been understood, spelling of words did not matter.

Table 5: Abbreviation

Word from WhatsApp Chats	Complete Word/phrase
<i>Nt</i>	not
<i>Dnt</i>	don't /do not
<i>Hm</i>	him
<i>Hr</i>	her
<i>Yr, Ur</i>	your
<i>U'r</i>	you're/you are
<i>U</i>	you
<i>Daz</i>	that's
<i>Um</i>	I'm / I am
<i>U're</i>	you're
<i>I c</i>	I see
<i>bn</i>	been
<i>cn</i>	seen
<i>pple</i>	people
<i>btwn</i>	between
<i>wk</i>	week
<i>bk</i>	back
<i>k</i>	ok/okay
<i>smtms</i>	sometimes
<i>smthng</i>	something

<i>wth</i>	with
<i>undrstnd</i>	understand
<i>coz/becuz</i>	because

Examples in table 5 could be labelled as abbreviation. Abbreviation is an acceptable form of writing. As Crystal (2008) says, “Abbreviating is not a new language; instead, it has been present for many decades”. In achieving this changed spelling, the participants simply clipped off some letters from the original words. Most common to have been cut off were vowels as in *yr* (*your*), *nt* (*not*), *hm* (*him*), *hr* (*her*), *smtm* for *sometimes*, *smthng* for *something*, *btwn* for *between* and so on. The abbreviation style of omitting vowels has been identified by a number of researchers such as Stapa, & Shaari, (2012) whose study also reported a resembling form of abbreviation by researchers like Al-kadi & Ahmed, (2018); Baron, (2006, 2008), and several others. Complementary to this study, is that the action of shortening words through the excision of letters has been attributed to the need for speed and brevity in writing. This led to the abbreviation of almost every word that is seemingly longer than two letters.

Table 6: Excision of letters combined with number homophones

Word from WhatsApp Chat	Intended Word/Phrase
<i>d8</i>	date
<i>2</i>	to/too
<i>4</i>	for
<i>w8</i>	wait/weight
<i>l8tr</i>	later
<i>2l8</i>	Too late
<i>2moro/2mrw</i>	tomorrow
<i>2dy</i>	today
<i>alr8</i>	alright
<i>b4</i>	before
<i>2gthr</i>	together
<i>gr8</i>	great
<i>str8</i>	straight
<i>h8</i>	height
<i>4giv</i>	forgive
<i>alr8</i>	alright

Excision of letters from words with a combination of number homophones has been found to be common in social media spelling. As seen in the examples in table 6, the affected words are those with a sound similar to the number 2 as in words beginning with or having *to* in their standard spelling, the number 4 replacing *for*, and the number 8 as in words ending with a sound similar to eight, e.g. *great*, *date*, *wait* etc. It was interesting to realize that some words with a similar sound as the last group, like *rate*, *late*, were written in full and in proper spelling by the respondents throughout the chats. The respondents could not give reasons for the criteria they

used in selecting words to spell different from the standard form in this category. A similar feature was identified by Stapa, & Shaari, (2012).

Table 7: Words whose spelling was changed for fun and/or personal preference:

Word from WhatsApp Chat	Standard Spelling	Effect of Change (length)
Denai	Deny	A longer word
Mi	my	none
Todai	today	none
Waz, woz	was	none
iz	is	none
coz	because	A shorter word

The examples in table 7, shows that the participants supposed the new spelling would be shorter than the normal spelling of the words. Prior to the fact being brought to their attention, a number of these respondents did not realize that the new spelling of most words did not produce a shorter word as they had initially thought. However, with further probing some reasoned that they did it for fun since it was on social media; as such they had the liberty to write as they pleased. “Besides, it was not a marked exercise,” one respondent reasoned. The common features in these words were: (1) where a word ends with a /y/, the letter will be replaced by /i/ because of the similar sound in pronunciation. (2) The /s/ was replaced by /z/ for the same reason.

Table 8: WhatsApp spelling versus existing words

Word from WhatsApp	Intended word
Rid- <i>noun</i> ; to be free of somebody/something annoying or unwanted.	Read- <i>Noun</i> - to go through written or printed words
Flue- <i>noun</i> ; a duct for smoke and waste gases produced by a fire, a gas heater, a power station or other fuel-burning installation.	Flu- <i>Noun</i> ; short form of influenza
Dam- <i>noun</i> ; a barrier built across a river to collect water.	Them- <i>Pronoun</i> -used to refer to 3 rd person plural
Sos- <i>noun</i> ; an urgent request for help	Sauce- <i>Noun</i> - a thick liquid that is eaten with food to add flavor.
Ma- <i>noun</i> ; mother (<i>informal</i>)	My- <i>Determiner</i> - possessive form of <i>I</i>

Col; *noun*; a low point between two higher points in a mountain range.

Call

1. *verb*-use of cell phone or telephone to talk to someone.
2. *noun*- the act of phoning someone

Definitions from Macmillan online Dictionary.

In instances where a new word spelt an existing word, the research concluded that the users concentrated more on the context to get the meaning of the text message. This brought to light a disregard of the fact that an existing word had been produced, which has a completely different meaning to what was intended. It was surmised that the readers being social media network users, were very much aware of how people would spell some of these words in such platforms. So, basically, the new spelling did not create problems of understanding the message. Interestingly, most respondents were not aware that some of these words existed.

CONCLUSION

The study unearthed a range of linguistic features which the participants came up with in an effort to fit in the social media community. It therefore concludes that factors such as brevity, informality, not being expected to follow language rules, innovativeness, preference, speed and wanting to belong, are some of the factors that influence social media users to spell words the way they see it fit. Similarly, a number of studies have been done on the social media language by different researchers; Crystal, (2006), Ross, (2006), Squires, (2010), Hassan & Hashim, (2009), Russell, (2010), Wilson, (2018), Songxaba, & Sincuba, (2019), to name but a few. “The construct of internet language glosses over many different patterns of variation in an extremely large sphere of discourse with many different types of speakers, the heterogeneity of which is typically erased” (Stapa, & Shaari, (2012); Squires, 2010, p. 483). The common discoveries to several of these studies were the features of: abbreviation, modified spelling of words, a combination of letters and number homophones and many others.

The findings in some studies found these features common across the world but with noticeable influence of localized accent, social media group demographics and the like. Many of these features have been identified in this study along with similar factors influencing the participants’ need to modify the spelling of words, particularly on social media. In their study, Stapa, & Shaari, (2012), also realized that online communication settings allow users to take advantage of the informality of language used therein and avoided spelling words correctly.

The interesting part is that some researchers who are also educators, have found the infiltration of this social media spelling of English words in the students’ academic work. For example, Wilson (2018) reported a resonating concern in his study. In as much as language teachers recommend the extended use of language beyond the classroom for practice purposes, the fact that too much of anything can sometimes bring about unwanted results cannot be ignored. It is next to impossible for teachers, and even parents, to keep track of what their school going children are exposed to when on social media. Research has shown that many students spend a lot of their time on social media. This alone can be a breeding ground for exposure to

nonbeneficial materials they come in contact with, like the type of language and spelling used on social media platforms.

“Social media is an enormous influence in children’s lives. Most students as young as eight have access to a computer, iPod or iPad, sometimes all three, and the ability to connect to anywhere in the world. This gives them an opportunity to see and use many forms of the English language”, (Zedda-Sampson, 2013). It is for this reason that in their endeavor to chat, to belong, and to be innovative, that they are involved in activities that compromise their spelling of words, thus leading to a compromise in the quality of their writing skills.

The ingress of the social media spelling into students’ academic work, could be attributed to the fact that they may not be able to differentiate the “**when and where**” such innovations are permitted.

“Academic accomplishment and its imperativeness in determining one’s success is multifaceted and largely depends on many factors some of which are, the ability to spell words correctly, the ability to phrase and write good sentences and the ability to use language appropriately”, (Wilson, 2018). The assertion impresses upon students who use social media to apply caution in balancing the use of formal and informal language, and knowing when to use each form.

In addition, the study found out the importance of emulating others and the influence people have on one another. One respondent from a university chat group mentioned that “they would laugh at you if you write as if you are writing an essay at school”. This indicates the level of pressure some people are under on social media. Wilson, (2018) ascribes to Badura’s Social Learning Theory that “people learn persistently using communication within their immediate environment and now the virtual environment known as the internet/social media. He explained that communal and virtual communal interaction exercise influences on the mind thus, innovations such as social media is a factor in determining the life events, believes, values and culture tenable in our societies today, (Wilson, 2018). Although learning on its own is necessary, but learning selectively should be drilled in students’ minds. This is more so that many students access social media platforms without the permission of their parents and teachers. Where there is permission, keeping track of what the students are exposed to is not always easy.

In the end, the study impresses upon the level of creativity that social media users could get to if given a chance. This is informed by the style of communication which in turn determines the semantic intent expressed through the users’ lexical options, and the possibility that the users could not care much about following language rules, (Baron, 1998; 2003).

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In their studies, researchers like Wilson (2018); Songxaba, & Sincuba, (2019) have observed that the social media spelling is becoming increasingly evident in students’ work when they write school assignments. This observation is indicative of a problem in the writing skill which needs to be attended to by educationists. Students need to be aware that they must differentiate between writing on social media and writing school assignments. The importation of the OCL into the academic forum could create further difficulties for students who genuinely have problems in spelling English language words correctly; thus making it difficult for teachers to

assist them accordingly. On the other hand, the use of unnecessary and non-standard abbreviations can have adverse effects on the students' performance in the language skills as they inhibit communication and slow down marking, (Songxaba, & Sincuba, 2019). The effect of social media language is not just restricted to spelling. In as much as this study did not cover other components of grammar in the structures identified, it cannot be ignored that the impact goes beyond instances of non-standard spelling. The aspects of syntax and general meaning of messages are affected. In a structure like ***Daz ma husband*** (meaning: *That's my husband.*), it could easily be read as *does my husband* assuming that the question is incomplete.

It is for these reasons that more research has to be done on Botswana learning institutions to unearth some of the emerging issues regarding the different ways the social media impacts the learners' language skills and how such issues can be dealt with. More research could have a profound impact on how Botswana policy and curriculum designers on language teaching and learning would address emerging issues on language skills from the grassroots.

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