



Social Media Neologisms; Made in Kenya for Kenyans: A case Study of Facebook

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ABSTRACT.

This study investigated the use of Kenyan generated neologisms in the social media. This study was informed by the fact that human language is a dynamic and an ever-changing phenomenon only stable in performing its communicative function. The researcher conducted a survey of Facebook, one of the most common social networking sites in Kenya, where people from all walks of life engage one another on a litany of issues touching on their lives be they personal, social, economic or even political. Facebook was chosen specifically as it has a wider outreach than all the other social networking channels. The researcher purposely sampled 50 neologisms of Kenyan origin in Facebook and thereafter using a descriptive qualitative data analysis approach made a description of the word formation processes involved in their generation. This study was able to identify and document a large number of neologisms on Facebook of Kenyan origin and laced with a local flavor. The study also made an analysis of the word formation processes involved in their creation. This study will go a long way in illustrating the universal feature of language as a dynamic and a productive artifact at human disposal and in addition this study will highlight the critical role played by social media as huge contributor to the evolution of language.

KEYWORDS: Neologisms, Speech community, Social media, Idiosyncrasies, Word formation processes

INTRODUCTION

The vastness of language in terms of resources and its openness to manipulation has allowed humanity to speak differently and over time create new words and new senses, which are known as neologisms. A neologism is a new way to express an idea or a concept, which was previously expressed by other words or in some cases nonexistent at all. Neologisms allow for the succinct expression of the speaker's intended meaning; it is also a refreshing way of looking at what life has to offer and more so it gives people the opportunity to curry meaning in a flavour befitting the situational context of the communicative act.

This study was based on the dynamic property of human language, which allows it to change its form to reflect a speech community's communicative needs in an everchanging social, political, economic and technological environment. The dynamic and the malleable nature of human language has allowed humanity to give a fresher outlook to everyday concerns to meet the insatiable human desire for novelty, the malleability of language also gives chance for people to exploit their creativity in self-expression.

The social media in Kenya is the new front of communication where people can instantly exchange information with a swipe of the screen. The five biggest social media platforms in Kenya include WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Linked-in, Twitter and Facebook. It is from the point of departure that Facebook is the most popular and accessible social networking site that



this study chose to make a study of it in order to discover and document neologisms of Kenyan origin and given this popularity, Facebook is the melting pot of diverse speech peculiarities existing among members of the Kenyan speech community who commune online every day to shape, reshape and share their experiences using a language best modified to capture their feelings, events, experiences and their environment. From Facebook interactions among Kenyans it was noted that language being a vehicle of expressing thought was remoulded in a manner fit to express the Kenyan mind and the ultimate effect of this was a variety of neologisms created out neologisms.

This study focused on Facebook with the intent of revealing new words and senses that are uniquely Kenyan in origin and flavour. It also went ahead to foreground Kenya as a unique speech community with own peculiar interests all imprinted in their language.

The Study Problem

The media and especially the social media has grown tremendously worldwide as a fast and a reliable means of communication for sharing pertinent and urgent information on all aspects of life across the wide spectrum of members in society. The influence of social media interaction on language use cannot be down looked and this study chose to make an analysis of Facebook interactions among Kenyans in order to document linguistic peculiarities in the form of Kenyan generated neologisms which mark Kenya as a unique speech community, this study also was interested in the word formation processes employed in the creation of the new linguistic artefacts with a Kenyan flavour witnessed in Facebook interactions among Kenyans.

Research Objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives:

To identify neologisms of Kenyan origin with Kenyan flavour employed in the social media.

To document the word formation processes employed in the creation of the social media neologisms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Facebook use in Kenya is so pervasive especially in an era where a large proportion of the populace own smart phones. Many Kenyans confess to logging to Facebook site in order to be updated and to understand what is going on in the world. In the words of Wyche, S (2015), “You get on Facebook you feel advanced, you have friends, you can send them snaps and they can exchange.” She also adds that almost all Kenyans have a Facebook account. According to Dotsavvy.com, Facebook is the biggest social media platform of all in Kenya with over six million active users; it further goes on to state that this figure is increasing, it further adds, “Facebook has gone so mainstream that even Kenyan grandparents use the platform to stay in touch. Therefore, from this perspective, it’s no brainer that you need to use Facebook to make any kind of decent impact via social media in Kenya.”

According to blog.oxforddictionaries.com (2014), the words that surround us every day influence the words we use. Since so much of the written language we see is now on the screens of our computers, tablets, and smartphones, human language now evolves partly through our interaction with technology and because the language we use to communicate with each other tends to be more malleable than formal writing, the combination of informal, personal communication and



the mass audience afforded by social media is a recipe for rapid language change. According to Crystal, (2005) quoted in Onyedum, (2012), the internet will bear the biggest impact on English language in the 21st century and this by no means is applicable to all human languages. Katamba 2005; in Schulein, (2017), states that one of the external sociolinguistic factors for language change is the influence of technology and the related digitization, it further states that the internet-based platforms have gone a long way in the introduction and propagation of new linguistic items and terminologies.

According to the Wikipedia – free encyclopedia, a neologism is a terminology derived from Greek *neo* – “new” and *logos* – “speech/utterance”. This term is used in reference for a relatively recent or isolated term, word or phrase that may be in the process of entering common use but has not yet been fully accepted into common language. Neologisms are often directly attributable to a specific person, publication, period or event.

According to *Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders* (2013), neologisms are words that have been created by a speaker and are not considered to be part of the lexicon of a given at a given point in time. It further goes on to link neologisms with linguistic idiosyncrasies. In Kandie’s dissertation (2010), the term neologism has a broader meaning that includes not only an entirely new lexical item but also an existing word whose meaning has been altered in what is called semantic shifting or semantic extension, he further states that neologisms are usually introduced when an individual or individuals find lack of equivalence in existent lexemes to express the desired meaning.

Neologisms with a local flavor and Kenyan origin are used by Facebook users in Kenya not only to express new concepts but to also give a local interpretation of issues and to anchor them in a Kenyan perspective which otherwise would not be interpreted nor understood in a much succinct manner than when expressed with a local taste.

From research, it was established that there exist a number of mechanisms involved in the generation of neologisms; Facebook users in Kenya to generate neologisms laced with a Kenyan touch used some of the mechanisms discussed here. It is also worth noting that “*boda boda*”, a neologism of East African descent has entered the English dictionary and is now in mainstream usage as an English language lexeme, this is according to the *Star Newspaper, Kenya* (2017). It is also the presumption of this study that many more of the neologisms encountered in this study are likely to filter into mainstream usage of world languages like English, Swahili and even Kenyan native languages.

In *Neologisms in Mass Media* uploaded by Andrew Druta, neologisms tend to occur more often in cultures which are rapidly changing and also in situations where there is easy and fast propagation of information just like in the case of Facebook. Reed, (2014) states that the social plays a very big role in contributing to language evolution, he further states that the social media can be a tool in gauging trends in language and furthermore he asks people who like make new inventions in language to employ the social media.

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Derivation: This is the commonest method of creating neologisms by adding affixes to existing words.

Back formation: This is the creation of a new root word by removal of a phantom suffix.

Compounding: This is the juxtaposition of two existing words to create a word with a new sense.

Repurposing: This is the taking of a word from one context and applying it to another e.g. “*baba*” in Kenya is a Swahili word in reference to a *father* but in Kenyan context it is a political reference to leading figure in Kenyan politics.

Conversion: Involves the transformation of a word from one class to another in terms of meaning and function.

Eponyms: words named created in reference to the name of a person or a place.

Abbreviations: This is inclusive of clippings, acronyms and initialism.

Loan word: Involves the borrowing of words from one language to another, such borrowed words are put into regular use within the borrowing language.

Onomatopoeia: The creation of words in relation to the sound associated with the meaning created by the new word, for example the word *shizzle* in English is onomatopoeic.

Reduplication: refers to the repetition or the near repetition of a word or a sound. This is seen in the English words such as *lovey-dovey* or *flip fop*.

Coinage: This pure creation of new words.

Loan translation: A special kind of borrowing involving the direct translation of an element into the borrowing language.

Error: used in reference to misspellings, mishearings, mispronunciations and mistranscriptions.

Blending: This involves taking the beginning of one word and joining it to the end of another word to create a new word, which shares the properties of both. E examples of such words in English include; *modem*, *infotainment*, *brunch* etc.

Some of the techniques discussed above were replicate in the creation of neologisms encountered in this study. Mworira, (2015), made a study on use of English based neologisms on social media where she did a case study of Twitter, in her study she advocates for the study of Kenyan generated neologisms in the social media, it is from this point that this study departs.

Mahianyu (2016), studied lexeme based morphological analysis of English based Facebook neologisms whereas this study looks at indigenous Kenyan neologisms encountered on Facebook.

Onyedum, (2012), did a morpho –semantic analysis of English based neologisms on Facebook. This study is therefore an advance of the above studies in that it makes an exploration of indigenous Kenyan generated neologisms in the social media and on top of that this study makes an attempt at the analysis of word formation techniques employed by Kenyan s in manipulating



the readily available linguistic resources to create new ways of expressing meaning in a manner very reflective of the socio-economic and political Kenyan environment.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research methodology and more so the descriptive research designs. According to Creswell (2013), cited in Mahianyu(2016),“Qualitative research is innovative as well as emergent and is concerned with individuals and their perceptions rather than with numbers and figures which are abstract and out of context.”

This study did a survey of the Facebook as a representative of the social media in Kenya. Facebook was chosen purposely over other media in that it has the biggest outreach among Kenyans from all cadres of life in comparison to other the social Media such as Twitter which are viewed as *classy* by the local populace. It was the presumption of this study that Facebook is a reflection of peculiarities in linguistic habits in not only social media but the general populace making up the Kenyan speech community.

The research purposely sampled 50 neologisms deemed to be of Kenyan descend from a variety of interactions on Facebook by Kenya users on a diversity of socio-economic and political discourse. For the purpose of conciseness, only 30 of the sampled neologisms were discussed in this study.

Upon sampling, a qualitative, descriptive data analysis approach was employed in determining the word formation processes used in the creation of the neologisms. This study made a tabulation of the neologisms with a Kenyan touch encountered and the respective technique employed in their creation.

DISCUSSION

Upon data collection and analysis, this study was able to document the following as neologisms with a Kenyan descend in Facebook interactions among Kenyans.

No.	Neologism	Literal English gloss	A Kenyan interpretation
1.	<i>Tibim</i>	Tee beam/ T beam	A politician in many instances worth support. Its meaning can be extended to cover any other form of moral support.
2.	<i>Chaget</i>	Jacket	Common reference to jacket laced with ethnic reference.
3.	<i>Thitima</i>	Electricity	Anything of sensation
4.	<i>Fisi</i>	hyena	A man or woman of lax morals
5.	<i>Ficha white</i>	Hide the white ball	A concept of hiding very crucial information or items from someone.
6.	<i>Isorait</i>	It's all right	It's all right
7.	<i>Okuyus</i>	Kikuyus	A reference to the members of the Kikuyu community in Kenya
8.	<i>Kula nyama</i>	Eating meat	A Kenyan way of making



			reference of the benefits of being politically connected or aligned.
9.	<i>Kweraa</i>	Back off	An expression of discontent
10.	<i>Team hustlers</i>	A team of hustlers	A cadre of people who struggle to make ends meet or any other persons engaged in enterprise.
11.	<i>Muguka</i>	Khat/ miraa	A local stimulant chewed by some section of Kenyans.
12.	<i>Saitan / saitani</i>	Devil	A dismissive/derogatory term. Commonly used in the social media in reference to an object of irritation.
13	<i>Ulliam</i>	William	An informal reference to a top political figure in Kenyan politics.
13.	Uhunye	Uhuru Kenyatta	An informal reference to the Kenyan president
14.	Rech	Fish	Local reference to a meal of fish
15.	Ndani ndani ndani	Deep inside	An expression of unwavering political support
16.	Kaa rada	To be alert	A state of high alert
17.	Kula kwa macho	Feast with one's eyes/salivate	To lust over an object outside one's reach
18.	Brathe	brother	Informal reference to a brother
19.	Luo-pean	Dholuo speaker/ a person of Luo descend	Reference to luos and their attitude of living big
20.	Ticha	A teacher	A teacher
21.	Vindu vichenjanga	Things change	Political reference to change in political ideology.
22.	Furahiday	Friday	Concept of Friday being a fun day
23.	Momo	Plus size lady	Plus size lady
24.	Nduthi	A motor bike	A motor bike especially one on boda boda service
25.	Nganya	Passenger service vehicle	A well decorated matatu/souped up public service vehicle.
26.	Ulliam	William	A popular Kenyan Politian whose first name is William
27.	Mwaest	Superb/perfect	An exclamation acknowledging perfection especially on looks or taste
28.	Kuzo	Cousin	An informal reference to a cousin
29.	Nomaree	A tough situation	A troublesome situation



30.	Tialala	Shizzle	A reference to something dazzling/something enticing
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Word formation processes employed in creation of neologisms.

This study generally made the following discoveries on common techniques employed in creation of local neologisms among Facebook users in Kenya.

NO .	NEOLOGIS M	WORD CREATION TECHNIQUE	EXPLANATION
1.	Chaget	Loan translation	Word loosely translated from English <i>jacket</i> to the local Kalenjin accent.
2.	Thitima	Loan translation	Word translated from Swahili word <i>stima</i> , this is the equivalent of electricity.
3.	Fisi	Conversion	Word borrowed from Swahili word <i>Fisi</i> and given a new sense
4.	Ficha white	Compounding and borrowing	A Swahili and English roots compounded
5.	Isorait	Loan translation	This is a loose translation of the English language phrase “it is all right.”
6.	Okuyus	Coinage	This is a completely new term
7.	Kula nyama	Compounding	Two Kiswahili roots <i>Kula</i> [eat] and <i>nyama</i> [meat] compounded and given a new sense.
8.	Brathe	Error	The word <i>brother</i> is misspelled and mispronounced
9.	Kweraa	Error	The Swahili word ‘ <i>kwenda</i> ,’ the equivalent of the phrase “go away” has been mispronounced and misspelled.
10.	Team hustlers	Compounding	<i>Team</i> and <i>hustlers</i> compounded and given a local flavour in meaning.
11.	Muguka	Borrowing	The word is borrowed from a native language and given national outlook in meaning.
12.	Saitan /saitani	Error	The Swahili word <i>shetani</i> ; (devil) is misspelled and mispronounced to give it a fresh and a localized outlook.
13.	Uhunye	Back formation	The first name of Uhuru and the last name Kenyatta clipped and compounded
14.	Rech	borrowing	The word is borrowed from Dholuo and put to general use commonly understood and referred to by many users of Kenyan descent in Facebook.
15.	Kaa rada	Compounding	Swahili and English roots combined. Kiswahili root <i>kaa</i> (stay) and English word, ‘radar.’
16.	Ndani ndani ndani	reduplication	Swahili word ‘ <i>ndani</i> ’(inside), is reduplicated and lengthened for intensification
17.	Kula kwa	Compounding	Three Swahili words compounded and given a



	macho		local meaning
18.	Brathe	Error	English Word “brother,” misspelt and mispronounced to make it look and sound local.
19.	Luopean	Blending	The word luo and clipped from of European compounded
20.	Ticha	Error	English Word, “ <i>teacher</i> ” misspelt to give it a local touch.
21.	Vindu vichenjanga	Borrowing and compounding	The local Luhya language words: <i>vindu</i> , “ <i>things</i> ” and <i>vichenjanga</i> , “ <i>change</i> ”, compounded to make a political reference in undertones
22.	Furahiday	Loan translation	English word <i>Friday</i> loosely translated to Swahili to give it a local interpretation as a day for having fun.
23.	Momo	Borrowing	This is a word borrowed from a kikuyu language sense for a heavy truck.
24.	Nduthi	Borrowing	Borrowed from a local language to make reference to a motor bike.
25.	Nganya	borrowing	Word borrowed from Sheng variety; a marginal language in Kenya
26.	Ulliam	Error	Mispronunciation of the name William
27.	Mwaaest /Mwaest	Coinage	Purely new word without any connection to any other existent word. Mostly used as an adjective.
28.	Kuzo	Loan translation	The English word <i>cousin</i> is clipped and loosely translated with a local touch.
29.	Nomaree	Coinage	Purely new word
30.	Tialala	Onomatopoeia	Word mirrors a shizzle in reference to something dazzling in nature

RECOMMENDATION AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study recommends some areas that call for further research, these include:

The study of the impact of social media idiosyncrasies on the written and spoken discourse among the general Kenyan populace. This study also advocates for a research on how words and expressions from indigenous Kenyan languages are being adopted to the general discourse among the Kenyan speech community through the social media and general cross-cultural interactions.

CONCLUSION

From this study, it has been observed that language is a generally dynamic and an ever-changing phenomenon open to manipulation in order to create a fresher outlook of life and to reflect some new cultural inclinations amongst its users.

Also, of worth to be noted is the cooperative effort among Kenyans as a speech community both in the social media and outside in propagating and promoting development of new vocabulary and new senses with a local outlook.



Finally, it is evident the many linguistic word creation techniques are available to users of a language who may be in need to reflect their environment may use language to shape their experiences and thoughts.

It is also the presumption of this study that many of the neologisms encountered in this study are likely to seep into mainstream language use.

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