Word Formation Processes in The Context of Social Media Discourse: A Case of Chuka University Students

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Abstract

The social media discourse is a hybrid of both written text and spoken discourse and therefore exhibits unique linguistic features that researchers can explore. This paper reveals the new dynamics of word formation processes in the social media discourse context, which is apparently a new genre. Morphological processes have in the past been analyzed in the context of spoken and written discourse. However, due to the evolution of the social media discourses that emanate from the communications that is mediated by divergent media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagrams and twitter, there is a need to shed light on how language is used in social media. This paper focuses on one aspect of such usage; how words are formed in the social media milieu. This paper therefore analyses the morphological processes drawing from Chuka University students' social media discourse on WhatsApp platform. Students exhibits similar language usage due to the fact that they share a lot in common as a speech community. The paper therefore utilizes the social network theory to show how the interactants exploits the linguistic artifacts available at their social media network to interact meaningfully. Particularly, the focus is on the morphological processes that are evident in their interactions. The research design used is descriptive and the approach to data analysis is qualitative. The data used to inform this paper is drawn from the researcher's thesis (2019). The findings revealed that students' social media discourse results in the formation of new lexical items, use of symbols, Arabic numerals and letters to represent morphemes or words that are used in their day-to-day interactions. Similarly, morphological processes such as compounding, blending, clipping, borrowing, abbreviations and acronyms are common in the students' social media discourse.

Keywords: word formation processes, Social media Discourse WhatsApp, Morphological Processes, identity & accommodation

1.0 INTRODUCTION

As people interact with one another using any form of media, the end result is a discourse. Initially, the focus was on two types of discourses; written and spoken. This was the case before the technological advancement that has made interaction through the social media to be a common phenomenon among people. Interestingly, the social media interactions combines both written and spoken discourse hence a form of hybrid between the two is realised. In other words, social media discourse is a hybrid between spoken and written discourses. Social media discourse being a new genre requires scholars to undertake research especially in the manner in which language is used in an endeavour to unravel the dynamics of language usage in this context. This paper analyses the language usage in the context of social media

discourse. Specifically, this paper focusses on the morphological processes as evident in Chuka University students' social media discourse emanating from their WhatsApp interaction platforms.

Chuka University students are students that come from diverse cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds but are united in one factor; that they are all students undertaking various degree programmes. It is worth noting that these students just like any other students in any Kenyan university share a lot in common despite their diverse backgrounds; they belong to the same age group and once they are together, English, Kiswahili and a code known as Sheng are used in their communications. Just like any other group belonging to a given speech community, students make use of various platforms to communicate and socialise with one another hence resulting into social ties that make them bond with one another. Of interest to this study is the manner in which these students make use of social media platforms (WhatsApp) and particularly how they form new words in the process. This study therefore focused on the morphological processes that emanate from the social media discourse.

Word formation processes also referred to as morphological processes entail formation of new words. Every language has different ways of forming new words. Some of the morphological processes include: blending, clipping, back formation, compounding, borrowing, acronym, conversion, derivation, reduplication and coinage. This paper explores the morphological processes exhibited in students' social media discourse to reveal the new dynamics in the word forming processes.

2.0 RESEARCH QUESTION
What are the morphological processes inherent in Chuka University students' social media discourse?

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Social media users exhibit diverse usage of language and with various aspects of language being integrated in their language use. Intertextuality is therefore a salient feature of their language usage (Gervasio, 2021). Greenfield and Subrahmanyan (2003) perceived netspeak as a form of language that shares common features of written and spoken genres. On the other hand, Crystal (2006) views the arrival of Facebook as a new phenomenon with a remarkable diversity and creativity. It is on the basis of this creativity that new words are formed every day and creative use of language is normally exhibited in social media discourses. Katamba (1993) observes that productivity which is sometimes referred to as creativity is the capacity that human languages are endowed to produce unlimited number of words and utterances. In morphology, such creativity is manifested in two discrete ways; rule-governed and rule bending creativity. This creativity is not only manifested in the formal spoken and written discourses but also in the social media discourse. For the purpose of this paper, the main concern is the way social media users ingeniously come up with new word forms and use them in their interactions. This paper attempts to demonstrate how new words are formed in the context of social media.

Crystal (2001) posits that there exist various morphological processes that point to the different ways through which words are formed or created in the internet. Some of these morphological processes include: compounding, derivation, coinage, and use of abbreviations as well as acronyms. An analysis of word formation processes in everyday communication on Facebook among Malaysian participants used three most common word formation processes; abbreviations, clipping, acronyms, blending and use of emoticons (Prasita, Antari & Damanik 2002). This paper analyses new words and phrases that are used in WhatsApp in order to reveal the peculiar language usage by the university students as they interact with one another. From the findings, it is affirmed that new forms emerge on daily basis. The words formed in

these processes aid in marking identity as well as in the accommodation process (Gervasio 2019).

Prasita et al (2022) carried out a study on word formation processes on social media discourse using qualitative method from a semantic perspective. The study reviewed that word formation processes such as borrowing, coinage, compounding, acronyms, blending and clipping were evident. These findings corroborate with the finding of this study since similar morphological processes are evident.

This paper is anchored on Social Networking Theory. Social networking theory is a theory that describes the relationship in a social structure. Social network is a generic way by set of nodes that encompasses individuals or organizations or actors who are connected by a set of social relationships ties or specified type of ties by one or more specified types of interdependence such as friendships, kinship, financial exchange, dislikes or relationships of beliefs, knowledge or prestige. Social network focuses on understanding how patterns of relationships connect individuals, people, groups or organizations (Kadushin 2004 &Brass 1992). Chuka University students comprise a speech community that has bonded together by virtue of being students pursuing various degrees and using various platforms for interactions. This study narrowed down to the WhatsApp interaction platform. WhatsApp platform has increasingly become one of the social networking sites and therefore people establish ties and bond. The manner in which language is used by netzens as they interact needs to be studied. It is on this pedestal that this paper has focused on one aspect; word formation processes in order to establish how new forms emerge in the social media context.

4.0 METHODS

The data used in this paper was obtained from the social media discourse of Chuka University students in their WhatsApp platforms. Qualitative research technique and descriptive research design were used. Snowballing was used in the identification of the WhatsApp groups that were used while purposive sampling was utilized in the collection of the texts from the WhatsApp groups. The texts that answered the research questions were selected, recorded and later content analysis done. Moreover, tables were used to aid in the discussion and presentation of the results.

5.0 DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

5.1 Formation of Acronyms and Abbreviations

Social media users have a way of coming up with their own forms as they interact with one another. We have different morphemes, words, abbreviations and acronyms that emerge and are mostly used in social media discourse. University students being part and parcel of the society, make use of them and more importantly, 'invent' new ones and make use of them in their communication; hence, making their language usage peculiar.

For instance, *"nkt"* stands for 'not kindly taken' but in context, it conveys annoyance, "*LoL*"stands for 'laughing out loudly' while *"ASAP"* stands for 'as soon as possible', *"TBT***"** stands for 'Throw Back Thursday', "*OMG***"** stands for 'Oh My God' and "*TM"* 'team mafisi' which is term used to derogatively refer to people with inappropriate behaviour in matters related to sexual engagements'.

TEXT 1

A*: Tuna daro …… qwani hautakam?* (There is a class…. Are you not coming?)

B*: Nakam ASAP*

(I'm coming as soon as possible)

A2: C u there

(See you there.)

TEXT 2

A: *Btw huyo jamaa 2tai mmeet*

(By the way, will we ever meet that guy?)

B: *Cthani*

(I don't think so.)

A2: *Huyo jamaa alimek sem kuwa lively 2 sanaaaa* (That guy made the semester to be so lively.)

B2: *Nkt !!! Ckumpenda huyo jamaa, alikuwa sadist*

(Nkt!!! (Expression of annoyance meaning not kindly taken) I didn't like that guy he is a sadist)

From the above example, *"ASAP"* is an acronym that stands for 'as soon as possible' while *"NKT"* is an abbreviation for 'not kindly taken'. These short forms are common among the young generation of which university students are included. These forms save time that would have been spent typing, the space that would have been used and they ease communication making it faster. Similarly, this language usage marks the identity of its users and in extension enhances accommodation among interactants.

5.2 Use of Symbols

Symbols are used to stand for certain words or morphemes. Students make use of symbols such as @ to stand for 'either at or heart'.

TEXT 3

A: *Niletee mbili … yangu na ya sweet@*

(Bring for me two…mine and for my sweet heart.)

B: *Poa but sweet@ amekula mob*

(It's Ok but sweet heart has eaten a lot.)

TEXT 4

A: *Get your gas refilled @850 with free delivery + selling gas cylinders @ an affordable price.*

(Get your gas refilled at 850 Shillings with free delivery.

In addition, I'm selling gas cylinders at an affordable price)

B: *Where r u situated?* (Where are you situated?) A2: *Ky energy solutions* (Ky Energy Solutions.)

From the above examples, the first @ in TEXT 3 is used to stand for a free morpheme *'heart'* while the one used in TEXT 5 is used to stand for the bound morpheme 'at'. Just like acronyms and abbreviations, use of symbols saves time, energy, space and makes communication easy.

5.3 Use of Letters and numbers

Letters and Arabic numerals are generally used to represent a whole morpheme or a word. In this case, a letter or an Arabic number may be used to stand for a morpheme or a word.

TEXT 5

A: *Eti Erickoo class iko wapi?*

(Eric, where is the venue for our class?)

B: *Clas rep r u there?*

(Class representative are you there?)

TEXT 6

A*: I must come 4 u*

(I must come for you)

B: *Mm ctaki my inbox, biashara should b ok then done here*

(I don't want inbox; all business should be done here)

A2: *Ok then, utatoa ngapi nikuzie infinix note 5?*

(Ok then how much will you pay I sell to you Infinix note 5)

B2:*4 K.*

(Four thousand)

A3: *Make it 5 k bas.*

(Make it five thousand then.)

C: *leaders u r so quiet ..... hii sem mao 2 hama?*

(Our leaders are so quiet…. this semester, is it because of mathematics or what?)

TEXT 7

A: I feel like Y wa2 wanalala mapema hivi.

(I feel like why people are sleeping early of late)

B: *May b juu ya egzam 2morrow*

(Maybe it is because of the exam that we are doing tomorrow)

In the above examples, the students have used *'r'* to stand for the auxiliary verb *are* and *'u'* for the second person pronoun (you) and *"b"* for '*be'. 'K'* on the hand, is not related to the way the word is pronounced but refers to a thousand hence '*4k'* means four thousand and *"5k"* five thousand. *C* is normally used to negate something and students mostly combine it with Kiswahili words meticulously to realize a form that is common among the university students as well as the young generation. For instance, '*ctaki',* (I don't want) '*cthani'* (I don't think), *'ctaanalyse'* (I will not analyse) while '*Y'* stands for why. The use of such forms saves on space and ensures communication is done faster. This language usage also enhances the marking of identity and solidarity among the group members. In an endeavour to show solidarity, social media users, in this case, university students, may use language in a similar manner that is agreeable to them. They may combine letters and Arabic numbers as they chat on WhatsApp. Consider the examples below

TEXT 8

A: Wa2 wa Nai wazikane huko CC ha2taki jam shags tym ya matanga. Mara ooh maji moto ya wageni, tent ya wageni ku2ka Nai, maji ya chupa !!!malizeni service yenu Nairobi m2achie ushago 2 zikane.

(People from Nairobi should burry their people there, we don't want commotions upcountry during burial time. Mara oh, warm water for visitors, tent for visitors from Nairobi, bottled water for people from Nairobi!!! Finish your requiem mass in Nairobi and just leave us upcountry people we burry our people.)

TEXT 9

A.Utapata jawabu 2

(You will soon be answered)

C.   R u 4getting that kesho tuko na CAT ya mao?

(Are you forgetting that tomorrow we have mathematics CAT?)

A2: *That people should b revising*

(People should be revising then.)

TEXT 10

A: *Everyone get informed 2 meet for micro teaching rehearsal*

(Everyone should be informed to meet for a microteaching rehearsal)

B: *208 wapi?*
(Where should we meet?)
C: *Bsr coming mbio*
(I am in BSR (lecture hall) coming fast.)

It is evident as exemplified in TEXT8,9 and 10 that letters and numbers or any of them can stand for a morpheme or a word. In TEXT10 for instance '*208*' means 'tuonane' (let us meet) while *'2'* stand for tu (you). In example two, *'R u 4'* getting (Are you forgetting) is a phrase that has combined both letters and numbers. The students' ability to use both numbers and letters in a rule-governed manner and communicate a unified message is a manifestation of their competency in the language they are using. The fact that the members of the group are able to encode the messages coded in such a manner implies that they share some common knowledge in that form of language usage and they have their own register and style of communicating. This common usage of language depicts their identity and in extension their solidarity.

The table below shows the summary of the various letters and numbers used by the students in their social media and what they represent.

Form	Description of the form	What is represented by the form	Actual form
U	letter	Word	You
R	letter	Word	Are
Y	Letter	Word	why
B	Letter	Word	be
K	Letter	Word	Okay/ thousand
Cc	letters	Word	Sisi (we)
C	Letter	Word	see
4	number	Word	For, four
2	number	Word	Two, too, to
208	numbers	Sentence	Tuonane (let us meet.
4n	A number; a letter	Word	phone
L8r	Letters and a number	Word	later
9t	A number and a letter	Word	night
Rai8	Letters and a number	Word	right
Ctakam	Letter "c" for negation, Kiswahili tense morpheme (ta) and a word (kam for come)	Sentence	I will not come

@	Symbol	A morpheme or a word	At, heart
+	Symbol	Word	Plus or addition

5.4 Coinage

In coinage, new forms of words are invented. In social media discourse, a number of words have been coined. Consider the following examples.

TEXT 11

A: *Y don't you mind your own business* (Why don't you mind your own business?) B*: Y tag me then* (Why mention me then)

C: *It is better to check ..... or what do you mean?* (It is better if you check, or what do you mean)

D*: Or we are in the wrong group .... Tell us you misleaders of this group* (Or we are in the wrong group… Tell us you are misleaders of this group)

From the above example, there is the addition of the negative morpheme "mis" to the word 'leaders' to form a new word "misleaders" which is not an English word per see, but a social media coinage. Another example is the addition of an English morpheme "less" to the word "form" which according to social media means 'plan'. The word '*formless'* means 'having no plan'. The same case with the word "*utotology"* which is from a Kiswahili word "*utoto***" which means 'childish' becomes "*utotology"* after the addition of the morpheme –*logy*. The word acquires a new meaning; an act of being childish or being immature. The manner in which these words are formed, completely conform to the rules of grammar. This confirms Katamba's (1993) observation that productivity is sometimes used to refer to creativity that entails the human languages' capacity to utilize finite means so as to come up with infinite/unlimited number of words and utterances. In morphology, creativity manifests itself in two different ways; rule-governed and rule bending creativity. It is clear in the writer's argument that most of the words are formed following general principles and rules that have been internalized by the speakers in the language acquisition process. For example, in the formation of the words **"***utotology***"** and *"formless***",** the word formation rules are followed in such a way that anybody competent in the English language is likely to know the meanings of such coined words.

It should however be noted that sometimes coinage in the social media is not rule governed.

Consider the words "*lefting"* and "*lefted"* which are mostly used in social media. The word *"lefting",* in the light of grammar, is ungrammatical since the word is derived from 'left' which a past tense of leave. The grammatical rules do not allow one to add an –"ing" morpheme to word already in the past tense. The form "lefting" is nowadays used by virtually everyone to mean leaving the group. Similarly, "lefted" which is equally grammatically unacceptable form is used in the social media. It should be noted that the word left is the past tense of the word leave and one cannot expect the addition of the past tense morpheme *"ed***"** to a form that is already in the past tense. This entails rule bending creativity. Coinage in social media therefore happens through rule-governed and rule bending creativity.

Another example of coinage is the word *"inbox"*, in social media words like "*inbox me* or *hit somebody's inbox*" are very common. These expressions mean to send a message directly to a person's WhatsApp account as shown in the following example:

TEXT 12

A: *kindly hit my inbox* (Kindly send to my account)

B: *no need to inbox you, nothing personal, I will post the prices on the wall* (There is no need, since the

information is not personal, I will post the prices on the wall)

A1: okay, hakuna wasi (Okay, no problem)

In the conversation, student A requests that student B sends the prices to his personal WhatsApp account (the prices for various items that B had hinted that he was selling). It is clear from this discussion that students coin words or borrow words coined in other contexts and use them in their social media discourse. The students make use the coined words to mark their identity and converge in their communication; hence, accommodation.

5.5 Blending

This kind of word formation process involves clipping a part of one word and then clipping another part of another word and then combining the two parts to form a new word. This occurs in social media idiosyncratically compared to the manner it occurs in other circumstances.

TEXT 13

A: Prac iko?

(Where is the venue for the practical?)

B*: A zn iko wapi?*

(In other words, where is the venue?) A2: *S403*

(Science block 403)

The words '*azn*' is a blend from 'as in' whereas the word *'isokey'* is a blend from the words 'it is okay'. Other words formed through this process include: '*isascam' which* is a blend from the words 'it is a scam', *'tis'* comes from 'it is', '*warratis'* is blended from 'what is this' and *"isoright"* is blended from the words 'it is alright'. These forms are not only formed through a morphological process of blending but also through a phonological process. For instance, other than blending, the word '*azn'* is as result of assimilation; which is a phonological process, while *'warratis'* is formed through linking, which is also a phonological process. Blending is motivated by the intrusion of speech in the social media which affirms that social media is a hybrid of both spoken and written discourses. The distinctive use of these blended words displays identity and convergence in that context; hence, enhancement of solidarity and accommodation.

5.6 Clipping

Clipping has to do with removing some part of a word. This word formation process is very common among the university students' social media discourse. Consider the examples below.

TEXT 14

A.Nyinyi mko pavi mtuambie vyenye Njoka atasema.

(Those who are at the pavilion will tell us what Njoka will say.)

B.Ndo anaendelea

(His speech is ongoing.)

TEXT 15

A: *Guys when are we submitting the group assigno?* (Colleagues when are we submitting the group assignment?)

B: *I guess ni next wic*

(I guess it's next week)

C*: I hear that comm. Skills lec has postponed*

(I hear that communication skills lecture was postponed.)

D: *Our class rep can you confirm that*

(Our class representative can you confirm that.).

Clipping is a common phenomenon in social media discourse. For instance, the word 'lecturer' is clipped to *'lec'*, 'practical' to *'prac'*, 'pavilion' to *'pavi'*, 'library' to *'lib'*, 'representative' to *'rep'*, 'anyway' to "*enwei*", 'by the way' to *'by tha'*, 'assignment' to '*assigno*' and 'week' to '*wic'*. Most of the words that students clip are those that they use on daily basis as they carry out their main business at the university. One can argue that these clipped words are unique to them and help in them in marking their identity which enhances accommodation among the students (Gervasio 2019).

5.7 Reduplication

Reduplication is a word formation process used by the students in their social media discourse. The following examples show instances of full reduplication.

TEXT 16

A: Hii video imenibamba (This video is fascinating)

B: (smilling emoji) *pabwaa* (Be thrilled)

C: Imetubamba qweliqweli (It has really fascinated us)

TEXT 17

A*: By tha, what do u think about this tabia ya madem kumeza tembe for their butt and boobs*

(By the way what do you think of this ladies' bahaviour of taking medicine in order to improve their looks)

B: *No problem juu ma boys upenda yellow yellow nowadays*

(There is no problem because men like women who are light skinned) C: *Let men get want they want at all cost*

(Let the men get what they want at whichever cost)

In TEXT 16, there is a full duplication of the word '*qweli*' which stands for '*kweli*'. After duplication we get the word *"qweli qweli,* (true true). In TEXT 17, there is a full duplication of the word *'yellow'* thus "*yellow yellow*" which means 'light skinned' according the social media language usage. Ladies are said to take pills that enhance their looks especially their body colour. The argument here is that men prefer ladies who are light skinned. They also take some tablets that enlarge their **"***butt***"** (buttocks) in order to appear pleasant. The word "*yellow yellow*" is used to refer to the light skinned girls. Similarly, '*Minji Minji'* and '*ndengu ndengu'* are also common in students' social media discourses to generally refer to the appearance of mostly girls where the former is a pleasant looking girl while the latter is the opposite. This morphological process demonstrates a peculiar way in which students mark their identity

5.8 Compounding

There are several instances where compounding as a word formation process is evident. However, there is an overlap whereby some words formed through coinage happen to be compounded. For instance, words like *'Ben Ten' (*a young man in relationship with a lady much older than him)*, and 'matter core'* (matako, which means buttock)**.** These words are compounded and at the same time coined. This morphological process is common in the students' social media discourse and enhances the marking of identity as well as accommodation.

6.0 CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, it is explicit that social media utilises word formation processes that are employed in other contexts. However, there is uniqueness in the manner in which new words are formed in social media, given that social media discourse is a hybrid between spoken and written discourses. The use of symbols, Arabic numerals and letters to either represent a morpheme or a word is a common phenomenon in social media. The use of these features makes the conversation in social media easy and economical. Use of letters, Arabic numerals and symbols are morphological processes unique to social media and may not be common in the normal written discourse. Blending and coinage in social media is done creatively and uniquely. Clipping is done by shortening words in a manner peculiar and understandable to the users. This study made use of the data that was collected from Chuka University students in their WhatsApp groups and recommends that similar study can be done in other contexts.

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