

## NET GENERATION, NORM GENERATORS AND ENGLISH IN NIGERIA'S PUBLISHING ECOSYSTEM

Philip Chike Aghadiuno<sup>1</sup> and Simon Shachia Oryila<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Library and Information Science, Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia, Nigeria, P.M.B. 109, Lafia Nasarawa State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of English and Literary Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** *Online communication has seen the emergence of those who may be called 'norm generators'. Norm generators are producing changes in social practices and linguistic norms with implication on language use. The major culprit is English Language in Nigeria. Using data from online media platforms, this paper examines the emerging culture of netspeak within the Nigerian digital space and how it affects the various aspects of the publishing ecosystem. Findings from the corpus analysis of the data reveal that changes in the linguistic norms of English affect issues, such as writing, editing, typesetting and formatting of manuscripts. The paper concludes that if adequate care is not taken to harmonise and reinforce the conventional norms and practice, variations in the emerging English norms within the Nigerian digital space and publishing ecosystem will negatively affect proper English usage. Above all, it will adversely affect the quality of publishing generally in the ecosystem.*

**KEYWORDS:** Communication, Digital Literacy, Editing, Publishing Ecosystem, Social Media

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### INTRODUCTION

There is an apparent connection between the choice and use of a language and the quality of publishing in a language. This also means that poor linguistic output begets poor quality publishing. In the ecology of publishing, therefore, language becomes the vehicle of sound or poor publishing. This inevitably calls for proper language use in publishing.

The importance of sticking to standards and conventions of English usage is central to any writing, communication or publication. It helps a writer or speaker to communicate his or her message to the reader in a language accessible to the linguistic group. It helps the listeners or readers to follow and contribute to the speaker's or writer's thoughts and ideas. Within the domain of academic scholarship, it allows others to document and report research findings in a consistent and predictable manner in a particular field. In a nutshell, conventional expectation thus places on the writer or speaker of English Language an unsigned responsibility to use language in such a way that could be understood by the readers in diverse contexts. That does not mean regional varieties of a language are not recognised. But, as with all functional varieties of language, the use of one language or of a particular variety in a particular context is detected by the function the language or variety is called upon to perform. But, as much as this argument is valid, there is still some problems with it.

With the rapid development of digital technology and its tributaries, such as the Internet or social media, various publishing or postings on the web or social media do not observe standard rules of syntax, vocabulary, spelling, usage, punctuation and capitalisation in English Language. Specifically, the net or social media is often perceived as a place where everything

goes. As a result, there is an emerging practice of shortening words or using abbreviations together with words or alpha-numeric characters for the purpose of conveying information or message. The practice is well-received by the so-called net generation, and it is often justified on the basis of time factor, inadequate space of some social media platforms, among others.

However, the apparent violation of these norms of English usage has profound effects on the standard of English usage and the quality of publishing within the ecosystem. Within the publishing ecosystem, those who have encountered drafts or published works in netspeak, online or offline, such as editors, reviewers, publishers, students, scholars, researchers and readers, all have their own challenge with a writing system that overtly violates acceptable and conventional practices in all matters of English usage. The manner some Nigerian users of the English Language communicate with one another on the internet or social media nowadays through chatting and texting is gradually finding its way into formal classroom situations. Slang forms have taken over much of social interaction among the youths. Constructions, such as BRB (Be right back), ITK (I too know), LOL (laughing out loud), SMH (shaking my head), among others, are commonly seen in inbox chats, forum contributions, etc. Some students and writers now use them indiscreetly, and some of the netspeak varieties have appeared, not only in wall posts on the social media, but also in more formal writings in blogs, tweets and wall posts intended, not just for consumption for the general reader, but also as materials with scholarly value. Incidentally, the grammar of English is severely influenced by these norms, and it is likely going to affect the quality now and in the future. It is in the light of this that this work examines the negative aspects of changes in the linguistic norms of English in Nigeria which have profound effects on the publishing ecosystem. It also examines how linguistic problems can be remedied.

### **The Concept of Netspeak and Publishing Ecosystem**

The concept of netspeak and publishing ecosystem are relatively new within the academic circles. Much of what is known about netspeak, for instance, is within linguistics or language and communication studies. On the other hand, what is known about the publishing ecosystem is known fairly well within Library and Information Science. But, it is important to note that the knowledge and information sciences appropriate the word 'ecosystem' with slight modification in its meaning from the biological science (Ostroumov, 2002).

Ostroumov (2002) notes that ecosystem, as a word, was coined in 1935, and it represents the complex interconnected living organisms inhabiting a particular area together with their environment and all their interrelationships and relationships with the environment characterised by the description of populations of individual species, interspecies relationships, activity of organisms, physical and chemical characteristics of environment, flows of matter, energy, information and description of changes of these parameters with time. In other words, ecosystem describes the relationship organisms share in their use of the natural environment and the effects such activities have on the environment. Following from the above, different kinds of phenomena operate within their ecosystems. It is possible, therefore, to talk about information ecosystem or the publishing ecosystem—as spheres of activities with norms and practices which demand minimum level of adherence.

In its adoption in the information sciences, ecosystem is used as a metaphor, but, as may be noted, its definition within the biological sciences is not part of the metaphor. According to Norris and Suomela (2017), the 'information ecosystem' is a trending metaphor widely used in the academic libraries and has become nearly ubiquitous when speaking of the information

systems that support scholarly communication and varied forms of data sharing and publication. They observe that the notion of ecosystem has its roots in the definition of library by Ranganathan which views library as an organism, literally alive, encompassing notions of growth, evolution, diversity and some vitality. Within the ecosystem, the interrelationship which holds between authors and editors, teachers, scholars, researchers, book rep, publishers, among others, are part and parcel of the publishing ecosystem requiring the observations of certain conventions and protocols?

Netspeak, as a concept, does not lend itself easily to a single definition. According to Crystal (2004, p.17), netspeak is a more suitable alternative created to replace other relatively known forms of linguistic phenomena, such as 'Netlish', 'Weblish', 'Internet language', 'cyberspeak', 'electronic discourse', 'electronic language', 'interactive written discourse' and 'computer-mediated communication' (CMC). He states that the meaning of netspeak is broader in scope and function than the George Orwell's *Newspeak*, *Oldspeak*, *Doublespeak* and *Seaspeak* or media labels, such as *Royal speak* or *Blair speak*; and such categories as *Webspeak*.

Even though netspeak is preceded by the suffix 'speak', it involves a manner of speaking as well as talking. In fact, Crystal posits that netspeak involves a way of 'listening and reading' (2004, p.17) since it comes with practices which flourish with a particular trend and generation. By way of definition, netspeak is a casual, informal language or shorthand used by internet users for texting, chatting and communicating on the web or social media. It has been defined as the jargon, abbreviations and emoticons typically used by frequent internet and social media users for communicating with one another. As noted by Ito et al. (2008), communicating on social media is now a social norm and an increasingly essential form of media literacy especially among the so-called net generation. In communicating with one another, the net generators build their own lexis, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation and other linguistic practices, which influence language use in one way or the other.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopts the theoretical perspective of corpus linguistic approach. It should be noted, however, corpus linguistics is treated as an approach, method and a theory even though it does not come with its own definable tenets. In any case, a corpus-based linguistics relies on any of the linguistic theory in grammar and syntax for the study of language.

Within the academic circles, there is also no agreement on what constitutes corpus linguistics. The increasing drive for the application of computer devices to the study of language makes Leech (1992, p.106) to take a more positive view when he sees corpus linguistics as a new research paradigm thus:

computer corpus linguistics (CCL) defines not just a newly emerging methodology for studying language, but a new research enterprise, and in fact a new philosophical approach to the subject. The computer, as a uniquely powerful technological tool, has made this new kind of linguistics possible. So technology here (as for centuries in natural science) has taken a more important role than that of supporting and facilitating research: I see it as the essential means to a new kind of knowledge, and as an 'open sesame' to a new way of thinking about language.

Following from this, the basic rules of grammar, word, sentence, punctuation, among others, are examined to find out how they conform to basic English norms for forming well-formed linguistic strings or whether such uses conform to conventional rules of grammar. Analysis of grammatical units follow Halliday's (1992, p.63) exposition thus:

grammar and vocabulary are not two different things; they are the same thing seen by different observers. There is only one phenomenon here, not two. But it is spread along a continuum. At one end are small, closed, often binary systems, of very general application, intersecting with each other but each having, in principle, its own distinct realization.... At the other end are much more specific, loose, more shifting sets of features, realized not discretely but in bundles called 'words', like bench realizing 'for sitting on', 'backless', 'for more than one', 'hard surface'; the system networks formed by these features are local and transitory rather than being global and persistent.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Advances in modern science and technology have enhanced the social interaction and human relationship. In the same way, modern technology has revolutionised social and human communication. As a result of the progress so far achieved, various studies have been carried out to provide insight into the nature of such communication and the role they play in communication. It may not be possible to go into a full account of all the works that have been done in this area.

The use of modern computer devices enabled by internet connectivity makes it necessary for people to access the web and the social media. Indeed, people use the internet and the social media for different reasons. The social media is used for various purposes by different individuals and groups—some for education (Ezeani & Igwesi, 2012); others for commercial and business transactions (LaDuque, 2010); and yet others to access social capital or build social interaction (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011; Steinfield, Ellison, Lampe, & Vitak, 2012).

One of the things people do on the internet or social media is to chat. The importance of using ICT to teach students have been stressed in Kukulska-Hulme, Norris and Donohue (2014). Editing is required to make the draft fit before publishing, more since not everyone is blessed with the skills of writing (Aghadiuno & Oryila, 2017). Again, writing may come naturally to some, but there are many people to whom the art of writing does not come naturally (Oryila, 2015).

Many scholars have also carried corpus-based studies on different fields and subject and their research have provided some insights for this work, namely, Leech, Halliday, among others. Crystal (2014) looks at netspeak general and the feature of the emerging language use on the internet and social media. This study is informed by the fact that the previous studies did not consider the implication of norm generation to the publishing ecosystem in Nigeria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The primary sources of data for this analysis are naturally-occurring written corpus of Nigerian speakers of the English Language in electronic form taken from the domain of the internet or social media. They data was selected at random from the Web and social media from blogs, Facebook walls and twitter handles operated by Nigerian speakers of the English Language who also speak one or more indigenous languages. Equal attention is given to the different data sources because of the similarity in Nigerian English usage which holds across the different internet sources and social media platforms.

In order to analyse the dataset, the paper applies a corpus-based approach which makes it necessary to examine the lexis of Nigerian English netspeak at the broad level. A ‘corpus’ (plural form ‘corpora’) is a collection of naturally occurring texts stored on computer and carefully sampled to represent some variety of the language. In this case, it is Nigerian English netspeak fashionable within the internet or digital space, such the Web and social media. Issues relating to lexis, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, capitalisation and the like are investigated.

The study thus offers a distinctive way to understand the use of language patterns by Nigerian English netspeak users. The analysis provides resources which English language teachers, learners, scholars, researchers, editors, publishers and library practitioners can improve their understanding of the usage and meaning of words and phrases. The data is examined from the linguistics perspective in terms of vocabulary, spelling and syntax. They are also examined from their extra-linguistic, social and global perspective.

### **Features of Netspeak in Nigerian English Usage**

There is a basic assumption that netspeak exists. In other words, some scholars agree that the language use on the Internet possesses marked features which make it necessary to talk about netspeak as form of language used on the Internet. These features belong exclusively to the language use on the Internet. However, the features have nothing do with the lexicon or jargon of computer science, programming, technological devices, among others. The lexicon is a product of linguistic creativity, words and phrases which have been developed by individual or groups on the internet to talk about particular situations.

## **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

This sections discusses the corpus on Nigerian English netspeak. They are discussed as follow:

### **Linguistic Aspects of Nigerian English Netspeak**

Nigerian English netspeak is noted in its linguistic, extra-linguistic and socio-cultural features.

#### **Lexis and Vocabulary**

As seen from a sample of the internet and social media postings, many lexical items are a product of Nigerian English netspeak. Nigerian English netspeakers keep inventing new words to express themselves. Take, for instance, the following words:

<b>S/No</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
1.	Bae	Girlfriend
2.	Boom	Buttocks
3.	Doe, dope	Fine, awesome
4.	Flop, flopper	Spoiler

Lexical items may be either part of code switched sequences or they may be appropriated morphologically to Nigeria English context.

<b>S/No</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
1.	Run upanda	Run up and down in anxiety
2.	Stop confusing the thunder	Used to say someone should take a definite side so that the writer's thunder (destructive wish) will not hit the wrong target
3.	Gbam	Used to show a matter

Nigerian loan words from other linguistic groups into English, and some of those words have become popular. The words usually undergo a process of transformation. A closer examination, however, reveals that in their borrowing of English words, Nigerian English netspeakers resort to borrowing from the local groups as a matter of necessity to fill lexical gaps. There is a parallel between their register and slang, which is also heavily influenced by (American) English. In fact, blogs are full of slangy terms, much more so than other text types. The words are often creative, playful, witty, sometimes also very unstable, even nonce words, made up by an individual internet and social media users. Sometimes they imitate the spoken language or regional varieties.

### **Abbreviations and Spellings**

The most common linguistic feature of the netspeak is the use of unconventional spelling system and punctuation markings. Netspeak deviates from the norms of spelling in English. Sometimes spellings are used at random. Capitalisation and punctuation marks do not follow well known forms. This more or less shows that everything goes on the internet and the social media. In addition to the use of unconventional spelling, netspeak makes use of abbreviations for the purpose of making meaning. This practice makes some of the messages appear untidy, disorderly and unserious. The utility of having an ordered communication is sacrificed on the need to utilise small space. Take a look, for instance, at the following examples:

1. LWKM – Laugh wan kill me
2. LWKMD – Laugh wan kill me die
3. MIDG – make i dey go
4. WGYL – we go yarn later
5. IGA – I gbadun am
6. ICS – I can't shout

7. DJM – Don't jealous me
8. WBDM – Who born d maga
9. UDC – U de craze
10. NUS – Na u sabi
11. WSU – who send u
12. OSABZ – over sabi
13. ITK – I too know
14. WDH – wetin dey happen
15. NDH – notin dey happen
16. FMJ – free me jo
17. BBP – bad bele people
18. HUD – how u dey
19. WKP – waka pa\$\$
20. BBG – baby girl
21. KKL – Kokolette
22. MML – mamalette
23. GFF- Gbono fe le fe le (e.g., she GFF)
24. NTT – Na true talk
25. IKU – It koncain u?
26. NDM – no dull me
27. LGT – let's goo there
28. IFSA – I for slap am
29. IGDO – I go die o
30. YB – Yess boss
31. NLT – No long thing
32. 2GB – 2 gbaski (e.g., the song 2GB!)
33. CWJ – carry waka jorh
34. WBYO – wetin be your own
35. U2D – U 2 do
36. U2DV – U 2 dey vex
37. MKG – maka gini?
38. WSDP – who send dem papa
39. INS – i no send
40. INFS – i no fit shout
41. WWY – who wan yarn
42. NBST – no be small thing
43. NWO – na wah oooooo
44. NMA – no mind am
45. MIHW – make i hear word
46. NBL – no be lie
47. NB? – na beans?
48. wd – wetin dey
49. UNGKM – u no go kill me
50. o2s – omo 2 \$exy
51. LMAO- Laugh my a\$\$ off
52. BRB- Be right back

### **Emoticons, Emoji and Kaoji in Netspeak**

Nigerian English netspeakers use emoticons, emoji and kaoji in their online communication.

Emoticons, according to Azuma and Ebner (2008), enhance communication in the cyberspace by making communicators to easily understand each other because they serve to bring out communicators' emotional states. An exploration of the graphic, text-or-character-based emoticons by the Nigerian English Netspeakers help to convey emotional meaning. For instance, compare and contrast these emoticons:



These emoticons, emoji and kaoji have various meanings in their socio-cultural contexts.

### **Humour, Irony and Satire**

Nigerian English netspeakers use humour, irony and satire in their internet and social media chats and posts. See, for instance, the following text admonishing someone to choose where he friendship stands before any unpleasant consequence:

If you want to be my friend, be my friend.  
If you want to be my enemy, be my enemy.  
Stop being frenemy.

Similarly, here is another one:

If you want to be my friend, be my friend.  
If you want to be my enemy, be my enemy.  
Stop confusing the thunder!

### **Challenges of Nigerian English Netspeak in the Publishing Ecosystem**

The linguistic phenomenon of netspeak causes challenges within the publishing ecosystem. The challenges of netspeak in the publishing ecosystem is multifaceted. Within the publishing ecosystem, netspeak affects authors, editors, readers, learners and traffic or patronage or potential publishing fitness of a draft.

### **Challenges of Netspeak for Authors within the Publishing Ecosystem**

Although, authors of works on the internet and social media are the producers of those texts, the apparent use of netspeak often portray them in bad light as untidy and unserious. This is so because many features of netspeak are turn off to many online characters. When a celebrity author decides to write consistently on his wall in Nigeria English, after a long period of time, many of his followers may lose interest in what he or she writes on his wall or blog.



### **Challenges of Netspeak for Editors within the Publishing Ecosystem**

One of the major challenges of netspeak is that works written purely in it give the editors too much job to handle. For instance, the editors need to contend with all aspects of grammar and language use. But, the unconventional practice places a heavy burden on the editor to ensure that the draft is publishable and it meets minimum acceptable publishing requirement.

### **Challenges of Netspeak for Language Learners within the Publishing Ecosystem**

The use of unconventional writing system or idiosyncratic methods affect intelligibility. It should be noted that not all learners understand netspeak. Only a small number who are exposed to Information and Communication Technology do and can conveniently understand the syntax and grammar of text messages. For a matter to be transmitted to the learner, it must be in an acceptable language. Language learners may face additional challenges using some of the netspeak on the social media (Dou,2011).

### **Challenges of Netspeak for Scholars within the Publishing Ecosystem**

Scholars or academics are serious-minded people. Netspeak seldom qualifies as a language which scholars can adopt to communicate with their audiences or readers. A scholarly language has to be objective, scientific and verifiable. Academic writing does not condone sloppy writing style. In writing on the internet or social media, scholars must ensure that their works confirm to acceptable linguistic norms.

### **Challenges of Netspeak for Publishers within the Publishing Ecosystem**

Publishers who give their platform for the publication of books in netspeak may lose money on their investment. This is because, apart from the need to disseminate knowledge, at the moment, the condition does not favour the publication of books or materials which tend to violate the norms of English usage and grammar.

### **The Future of Nigerian English Netspeak**

For now, the future of netspeak is not certain. It is not clear whether it will be given additional function within the Nigerian linguistic space. It is not clear whether it will be forced to fall into disuse. Besides, the rapid technological development makes it difficult to predict with accurate precision what may become of netspeak. If the role of netspeak increases, it will no doubt affect the publishing ecosystem as argued in this paper.

### **Suggestions**

With the increasing use of netspeak on the internet and social media, it is important to make the following suggestions:

1. Learners must be guided to observe standard forms of English usage.
2. The publishing ecosystem must be protected so that it will not suffer patronage because of the blatant violations of the norms of appropriate English usage.
3. For the purpose of publishing quality works, the language used in the book must be appropriate.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, it is shown that developments in Information and Communication Technology has greatly impacted on human communication, leading to the emergence of the so-called net generation. This net generation are active users on the Internet and social media. In the use of the social media, the net generation create their own linguistic norms, known as the netspeak, with elaborate changes in lexis, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation markings, capitalisation and style in partial or complete violation of the norms of English usage. Netspeak are used in inbox chatting and in postings on walls and blogs. They are used because of the need for fast and effective communication. However, netspeak, if not properly handled, may grow and even be accepted in formal situations, such as conventional publishing. In fact, its use on the internet and social media needs to be minimised, more since there is the need to ensure a balance and harmony in the use of acceptable English Language within the publishing ecosystem.

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