An Analysis of Chat Abbreviations and Slangs of the Students of the University of Port Harcourt

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Abstract

This paper examines chat abbreviation and slangs of the University of Port Harcourt students. The qualitative research design was used in analyzing the data collected using the descriptive content analysis. The sampling technique adopted in this paper is the purposive sampling technique and source of data for this paper is primarily observations from students of University of Port Harcourt online platforms and social media used by students and interview. The findings of this paper reveal that students of the University of Port Harcourt use single letters, digits and a combination of both to replace words while some of the words are shortened, contracted and clipped. The paper also establishes that the students abbreviate words in order to minimize cost, save time and add style to their writing. The paper further establishes that chat abbreviation and slangs of the University of Port Harcourt students do not follow the rules of grammar of English language since they are composed haphazardly. It was observed that students of University of Port Harcourt do not use their punctuation marks properly in their formal writings. This paper also reveals that chat abbreviations and slangs have affected the proper usage of English language by some of the students of the University of Port Harcourt. This paper recommends that students should become more conscious of the dangers of chat abbreviation in their academics and identify as well as appreciate the appropriate setting in which to use them.

Keywords: abbreviations, slang, chat, clipping, spelling error, grammatical error, punctuation

1. Introduction

Crystal (2008) says text messaging has a huge impact on people's spelling, writing and the manner in which people converse. In recent time, short message service (SMS) and chats are the fastest and most reliable means of communication. They have attained universal acceptance and fascinated billions of subscribers. With the introduction of chat abbreviations, the use of proper grammar in writing by the students has been seriously affected There is so much literature on the phonological and syntactic problems of learners of English in a second language situation, but the emerging trends in slangs and social media system of communication adds new dimensions to these problems. The emerging trends have provoked great interests but not much has been done in exploring the influence of the emerging trend on the structure and general development of the English language among University of Port Harcourt students, and this is what this paper is designed to address. Chat abbreviations and slangs are pervasive among the University of Port Harcourt students. To the best of my knowledge, no research has done on chat abbreviation and slangs of the students of University of Port Harcourt. This paper examines a descriptive analysis of chat abbreviations and slangs of the University of Port Harcourt students. It provides the slangs and abbreviation and the structures of these slangs and abbreviation used by the University of Port Harcourt students and the effect they have on their formal writing.

This paper is organized as follows: section 1 is the introduction while section 2 is the review of literature. In section 3 we discuss the method of data collections. Section 4 discusses the data presentation and analysis while Section 5 is the summary, conclusion and recommendation.

2. Uses and Gratification Theory

This theory was propounded by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch in the year 1974. Uses and gratification theory helps in understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. Its main focus is on what people do with the media. The driving question of uses and gratification theory is why do people use media and what do they use the media for. This theory shows how users deliberately choose media to their own advantage and

how media allows them to enhance their knowledge for relaxation, social interactions, companionship, diversion, etc. Therefore, audience is responsible for choosing media to meet their desires and needs to achieve gratification.

With the invention of the new media and its content, people make use of slangs and chat abbreviations to satisfy their needs and desires. Use of abbreviation and slang has become a common way for people, especially students to communicate and socialize

3. Conceptual Review

Defleur and Dennis (1999:.229), state that technology has always been a metaphor for change. Chat abbreviations are acronyms used to shorten too many words used when chatting or messaging. They are used by people of all ages. Slangs are casual type of language that is trendy and formal. It consists of coined words and phrases which are regarded as informal and are used mostly in speech than in writing.

Micheal (2009), remarks that slangs is a liminal language which its context, interest and motives are often impossible to tell. Example are: *bit the dust, kick the bucket, Hang one's hat, are slangs for death, grass for marijuana.* Slangs originated as a result or desire for members of a particular group or subculture to communicate freely and intelligibly among themselves. According to Michael (2009), there are 5 types of slangs and they include:

1   SMS/chat abbreviation slang: used in chat and social media platforms.

2   Country slang: used by people from the rural part of a country.

3   Urban slang: used by people in the city.

4   Gay slang: used by homosexuals, bisexuals and transsexuals.

5   Common slang: used by almost everyone.

The focus of this research is on sms /chat abbreviation and slangs. Formal English on the other

hand adheres to the rules grammar, structures and technical vocabulary. It is more elaborate because it has a conventionally recognized forms, structure and set of rules. This research is on the students of University of Port Harcourt who use these slangs and chat abbreviations consciously or at times unconsciously. This has impacted on their writing skills, spelling skills and grammar. Therefore, this research would effectively help in identifying the effects of chat abbreviation and slangs among the students of University of Port Harcourt and help in determining the suitable form of writing for an academic environment.

4. Empirical Review

There are thousands of abbreviations, pictograms and emoticons used in chatting. The problem is that individuals create their own shortcuts different from what is on print thereby causing more confusion which has a negative effect. The use of context helps when interpreting chat language. The objective of chat language is to use the least number of characters needed to convey an intelligible message which in turn is understood by the receiver. Baskerville (1992), remarks that the system of chat and slangs language already has a life force of its own and to a large extent is out of our control. This is true because people who receive these messages from their phones which are abbreviated do not neglect them rather they themselves reply such letters with encoded messages. According to Nwodo, technology through the help of SMS and slangs have found their ways into every corner of the world and caused a division between the rich and the poor and has become a part of life for many. They stated that caution should be taken because this has negatively and seriously affected the academic performance of the students and care should be taken by the users.

Watching the other vices of addiction, distraction and interruption brought about by the new technology, one has to be careful that it becomes a blessing not a curse. Consequently, proper examination must be done because it compounds the problem Nigerians have in the learning of English as a second language. Politics, trade, science and technology have established English as a world language. Nigeria like many other nations of the world is part of the global network of information and technology (Onuigbo and Eyisi, 2008:61).

Although chat abbreviations and slangs as coded language may be seen as one of those changes that occur in languages, caution should be taken so that it does not eventually replace or corrupt what is known as Standard English Language. A global language like English should be protected from diffusing into innumerable versions that could reduce its international intelligibility and so there is need to trace the influence of such changes like chat encoded language on the writing performance of its users. Hence, this work aims at identifying chat abbreviations and slangs and their influence on the formal writing of the University of Port Harcourt students.

5. Methodology

This work is basically a descriptive survey. This paper describes the structures and patterns of chat abbreviation and slangs of University of Port Harcourt students.

This approach helped us to collect data and describe in a systematic manner, the characteristic features about the chat abbreviation and slangs of University of Port Harcourt students. Besides, the descriptive survey, research design made it possible for us to study the chat abbreviation and slangs of University of Port Harcourt students by collecting data from only few samples considered to be representative of the entire group (Nworgu 1991, Osuala 2007). This study collected samples of the chat abbreviation and slangs of University of Port Harcourt students and described and compared their features to determine their similarities and differences.

The population of this study was drawn from the University of Port Harcourt website and comprises male and female undergraduate population of 44,500 which forms the main population of paper. The University of Port Harcourt is made up of 12 faculties.

The non-probabilistic sampling method, specifically, the purposive sampling technique was adopted. This afforded us the convenience of selecting our informants based on our judgment that they will be able to provide us the required information needed for the study. 120 students, 10 from each of the faculties were used (interviewed as the representative population).

The source of data for this study is primarily the observations from students of University of Port Harcourt using various online platforms and social media used by students and interview. The online platforms include: Uniport students forum on facebook and Uniport open market on whatsapp. Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest. Data were collected from the researcher's personal observations from the following social media sites used by University of Port Harcourt students (Uniport students' forum and Uniport open. The research instrument employed included written interview and observation. In +the written interview, essays were given to the respondents. These were collated accordingly. Participant observation was adopted. Using the instrument of participant observation, the respondents were prompted into conversations, which were discreetly guided and, as much as possible, directed towards the needed utterance type.

6. Data Presentation and Analysis

Based on the researcher's observations from the following online platforms (Uniport students' forum and Uniport open market) that is from facebook and whatsapp social media, some unusual abbreviations, grammatical errors, spellings errors are used by most students of University of Port Harcourt. The following examples on the table are some of the abbreviations and their meaning.

Table 1. Chat abbreviation and slangs used by University of Port Harcourt Students

Abbreviation	Meaning
Ur	Your
Ok	Okay
Dis	This
2	To
D	the
U	you
C	see
Dat	That
Bcos	Because
Congratul8	Congratulate
b/w+	between
Y	Why
Yr	Year
4rm	from
2ndly	secondly
3rdly	thirdly
4goten	forgotten
Sml	Someone
2mow	Tomorrow

Tk	Take
Abt	About
Stpt	Stopped
Mnth	month
Pls	Please
Govt	Government
Lab	Laboratory
Mch	much
2c	to see
Lol	laugh out loud
Yolo	you only live once
Brb	be right back
Cwot	complete waste of time
Anoda	another
Lmk	let me know
Nvm	never mind
F2f	face to face
Ily	I love you
Fyi	For your information
B4n	bye for now
Btw	by the way
2day	Today
B4	Before
4	For
Fomo	Fear of missing out
Atm	at the moment
OmG	Oh my God
Bbl	be back later
Gf	girl friend
Bf	boy friend
Asap	as soon as possible
Idk	I don't know.
Wunt	won't
IJN	In Jesus name
Tnx	Thanks
Uniport -	University of Port Harcourt
Uwc	you are welcome

From the data presented above, we note that the students of the University of Port Harcourt can use single letters, digits and combination of both to replace words as exemplified in the following table

Table 2. Words Replaced by Single Letters

Words	Letter
Be	B
See	C
The	D
Why	Y

Table 3. Words replaced by single digits

Word	Digit
Ate	8
For	4
To or too	2
Won	1

Table 4. Words replaced by combination of letters and digits

Word	Combination of Letter and Digit
Great	gr8
Mate	m8
Later	l8r
Skirt	sk8
Tomorrow	2moro
Today	2day
Before	b4
Bye for now	b4n
Face to face	f2f
To see	2c

We also observe from the data that most words used by these students were shortened, contracted and clipped.

7. Contraction

Contraction is the shortened form of a word or group of words with the omitted letters often replaced in written English using apostrophe. Contracted words consist of words with omitted letters, usually vowels. From our data, the examples found are:

Is not	isn't
Department	dep't
do not	don't
Madam	ma'am

We observe that the University of Port Harcourt students prefer the contracted form of these words.

Clipping

Clipping is the formation process which involves the reduction of a word to one of its parts (Marchand 1969). Clipping is also known as "Truncation or shortening". They do not belong to the standard vocabulary of language. Clipping creates shortened words but does not change the meaning of the word. Example of clipped words used by the University of Port Harcourt students are: Initial clipping, Final clipping, Medial clipping and Complex clipping**.**

Initial clipping: This process retains the final part of the prototype. Example:

Telephone phone

Final clipping: This is also known as back clipping. This is a situation where the final parts of the words are deleted. Examples noted from the University of Port Harcourt students are:

Examination *exam,* February *feb*,

Sunday *Sun*

Laboratory *Lab*

Lagos *Lag*

From the examples of the final clipping, we observe that the first syllables of the words are maintained while the rest parts are omitted in the clipped words.

Medial clipping: The middle part of a word is deleted. This process is very rare as used by the University of Port Harcourt students Example:

Madam maam.

The above example shows that the letter ***d*** in the word 'madam' is clipped.

Complex clipping: This type of clipping is shown in the following words. Examples found in the chat of the University of Port Harcourt students are:

Table 5. Complex Clipping

Original form	Complex clipping
University of Port Harcourt	uniport
University of Calabar	Unical
Mathematics	Maths
Economics	Econs

The examples in complex clipping show that there are combinations of the first and second parts of the words.

From the formal writing of some selected students of the University of Port Harcourt, we observed that some of the errors found in their chats were also found in their formal writing. Errors such as grammatical error, punctuation error, and spelling error are identified. These errors are exemplified in the following tables

Table 6. Some Grammatical Errors Observed in the Chat Forum and Formal Writing of University of Port Harcourt Students

Grammatical errors (simple past)	Correct form (simple past)
This decision is not ok by me………….	This decision was not all right………….
Before this actions were…………………	Before these actions were……………..
I am also happy b/c it stop……………	I was also happy because it stopped………..
No more concentrate………………..	No longer concentrate………………
I majorly agree with you	I sincerely agreed with you
I side you	I agreed with what you said
I suppose ………….	I'm supposed to ………….
Its majorly seen…………	It's mainly seen……….

Grammar is the set of structural rules governing the composition of clauses, phrases and words in any given language. English language follows rules that guide its formation. We observed from the data that chat abbreviation and slangs used by the University of Port Harcourt students do not follow the rules of grammar of English language. Chat abbreviation and slangs used on these online platforms do not observe the tense with reference to the moment of speaking. This means that some of the students do not use their tenses properly both in chat and in formal writing.

Table 7. Punctuation Errors Observed in Students Formal Writing and Chatting

Punctuation errors	Correct form
Also this has effect…………	Also, this has effects………..
For example she sang…………..	For example, she sang………..
Secondly the junior students………..	Secondly, the junior students………
I m very happy……….	I'm very happy……..
In the 1st place I want to…………….	In the first place, I want to…………….
The school canot……………	The school cannot………….
First I thank …………….	Firstly, I thank……………….
However the frequent…………….	However, the frequent…………
I ve nt seen him	I haven't seen him.
congratulations.	Congratulations!
Y didnt you come to school	Why didn't you come to school?
The students does not………	The students do not ………

Punctuations are a set of symbols and marks which are used to clarify meaning in text by separating strings of words into clauses, phrases and sentences (Ndimele 1996). The data show that majority of the University of Port Harcourt students do not observe punctuation marks when chatting and in formal writing while some do not use their punctuations properly. The University of Port Harcourt students note that the use of chat abbreviation and slangs do not give them room for punctuations when chatting. For this reason, students become unconscious of the difference between chat and formal writing and omit these punctuations in formal writing. Common punctuation marks which the students of the University of Port Harcourt omit are: full stop, comma, question mark, apostrophe, exclamation marks

Table 8. Spelling errors observed in the chat forum of University of Port Harcourt students

Spelling errors	Correct form
Izi	Easy
Pupos	purpose
Knw	Know
Luk	Look
Neva	Never
Befor	Before
Rum	Room
Unifom	uniform
Sista	Sister
Hat	heart
Beta	Better
Tomow	tomorrow
Weda	whether
Wkend	weekend
Den	'then'
Eqiptment	'equipment'
Tmoro	'tomorrow'

From the above examples, we observe that students of the University of Port Harcourt misspell word when chatting. The use of chat abbreviations and slangs have been unconsciously used by students in formal writing, as a result of overexposure to media content which has affected the proper way of spelling words. Therefore, from the

observations made, chat abbreviations and slangs have affected the spelling and writing skills of University of Port Harcourt students on their various online forums.

The data from examples 4 indicate that chat abbreviations and slangs during chatting do not follow the rules and pattern in spelling words, rather most words are consciously misspelt by students using the various social media platforms.

Table 9. Words Spelt Using Pronunciations (based on the way they perceived the sounds) in the Chat of the University of Port Harcourt Students

Izi	Easy
Beta	Better
Weda	whether or weather
Luk	Look
Kuk	Cook
Buk	Book
Gud	Good
Hat	Heart
Sista	Sister
2moro	Tomorrow
Dem	Them
Den	Den
Neva	Never

We observe from the data that the University of Port Harcourt Students spell some of the words during chats based on the way the words sound. This means that they spell the words on the bases of their pronunciation.

Table 10. Spelling errors and abbreviations observed in the chat and formal writing of University of Port Harcourt students

Misspelt words	**Correct form**
b/w	Between
&	And
Ur	Your
D	The
Econs	Economics
Accts	Accounts
d4	Therefore
Calld	Called

It was observed from the formal writing of the students, that chat abbreviations and slangs have negative impact on the writing and spelling skills of some students of the University of Port. Some of the students may not be conscious of the fact that they were not supposed to use symbols and non-standard abbreviations in formal writing.

This a sample of chat conversation between two University of Port Harcourt students.

Sample Chat Conversation

(1) My holz wz cwot

(2) B4 we usd 2 go to LAG 2c my bro, his wife and 3 kids f2f,

(3) 2day I cam bk 2 skul.

Translation

(1)   My holiday was a complete waste of time.

(2)   Before, we used to go to Lagos to see my brother, his wife and their three kids face to face.

(3)   Today I came back to school.

The above data show a conversation between two friends on University of Port Harcourt students' forum. The spellings, punctuations error, grammar and non-standard abbreviations used by the students in the various social media platforms used for this study do not follow the rules of formal English language. Although these abbreviations are expected to be used only in informal writing which can easily be comprehended by the group members involved in the conversation, but it was observed that some of them used the abbreviations in formal writing. From the data obtained from the chat forum of University of Port Harcourt students, it is obvious that students abbreviate their words to save time and to add style in the way they write.

8. Conclusion

This paper has examined an analysis of chat abbreviations and slangs of the students of the University of Port Harcourt. The data were gathered from an online chat platform used by University of Port Harcourt students and interviews. The study was hinged within the use and gratification theory". The use and gratification theory supports the fact that the students of University of Port Harcourt abbreviate and use slangs because there are certain motives which compels them to do so and in addition to satisfy their need at that moment.

We noted that the students of the University of Port Harcourt used single letters, digits and combination of both to replace words and that some of the words were shortened, contracted and clipped.

It was also noted that students abbreviate in order to minimize cost, save time while chatting, add style to their writing and most times for the fun of it.

Furthermore, when using chat abbreviation and slangs, the University of Port Harcourt students do not follow the rules of grammar of English language since it is composed haphazardly. It was observed that students of University of Port Harcourt do not properly use their punctuation marks in formal writings.

Finally, this paper has established that chat abbreviations and slangs have negatively affected the proper English language used by some of the students of the University of Port Harcourt students

9. Recommendation

Students should become more conscious of the dangers of chat abbreviation in their academics and identify the appropriate setting in which to use it.

Seminars should be held in higher institutions across the country on the influence of Information and Technology Communication (ICT) and chat abbreviations on the writing habits of students.

Chat abbreviations and slangs are clichés and informal. They are not considered standard English, and they should not be used in academic or professional institutions and for official communication.

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