

Morphological Analysis of Word Formation Processes: A Case Study of Facebook Users in Nigeria

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

Open Peer Review History:

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: <https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/87619>

Review Article

Received 25 June 2022
Accepted 29 August 2022
Published 10 September 2022

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to unveil the word-formation processes unconsciously applied by the users of Facebook in Nigeria in the creation of new expressions to fit their social communication needs through morphological analysis. The study is an analysis of the language of social media interaction entailing the application of knowledge of familiar word-formation processes in the examination of the means of creating new words by Facebook users in Nigeria. These word-formation processes are not strictly restricted to Facebook users in Nigeria alone. The choice of Facebook in Nigeria is for the limitation of the study in terms of the area to gather data. This project is a simple qualitative study. Data for this study is collated through direct observation of the nature of language used on the Facebook platform. The data collated was analyzed descriptively and major findings were made in the study. A number of word formation processes were observed as used by various Nigerian Facebook users which includes logograms, cases of initializing, cases of omission, clipping and nonstandard spelling.

Keywords: Language; social media; communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Morphology is a term for that branch of linguistics which deals with the internal structure of the words of a language, the rules that govern these internal structures and the relationship among words. Morphology, according to Bauer, 1994; Carstairs-McCarthy, [1] is the study of the internal structure of words and of the rules which form words. Anagbogu et al. [2] define morphology as the study of “the shape of words and the categories realized by them”. One major concern of language morphology is how words which are building blocks of communication, are formed. In every language, words, lexical and grammatical, are formed in various ways, which reflect the grammatical peculiarities in the language. This study aims to show the morphological analysis of word formation processes. The analysis of morphological structures is situated right at the basic level of a language because it reveals deeper insight into how the smallest meaningful parts of a language are organized. Morphological analysis, according to Katamba [3] is usually divided into two broad groups: Inflectional and Derivational. As Nwala [4] puts it, the general target of morphology and morphological analysis is to interrogate the existence of various processes in the formation of new words in a language, and to develop competent theories that could suffice in the account of such processes.

Meanwhile, the question of what is ‘word’ remains at the center of the analysis of word formation processes. Aronoff and Fudeman [5] assert that words may be defined syntactically or phonologically. Syntactically, a word is defined as the smallest unit of syntax, while phonologically it is seen as a sequence of sounds associated with a particular meaning. Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams [6] also note that words in a language are either categorized as grammatical words or lexical words, and there are ways in which words are formed in languages. These are called word-formation processes. In a simple definition, Okafor and Ejiofor [7] defines word formation as an art of creating new lexical and grammatical words or modifying existing ones to derive a particular lexical or grammatical idea. According to Nwala [4], word formation is defined as certain strategies adopted in the formation of words in a language. Words are formed through various processes. Word-formation processes in the English speech is connected with productivity, the linguists Spencer and Zwicky explains

‘morphological productivity’ informally as the extent to which a particular affix is likely to be used in the production of new words in the language. Nwala [4] maintains that word formation processes are those strategies that are adopted in the formation of new words or modification of existing words to express either grammatical or lexical functions.

These processes according to Yule [8] includes acronym, coinage, affixation strategies, clipping, etymology, blending, compounding, back formation, conversion, multiple processes, compounding and reduplication amongst other functional processes across languages. The existence and productive levels of these processes may vary in languages or even dialects of the same language.

Facebook is a social media networking site that allows users to connect with friends, family, co-workers and others, including groups of people who share similar interests. Users can share pictures, videos, articles and opinions with their friends. With Facebook, users can not only post comments and photos, but they can also look through their local news feeds, create live videos, make an event plan, send messages to friends, ask for recommendations, and buy or sell items. Facebook is at the top of the social media game as its platform caters to a wide variety of people, incorporating many different media aspects, from photos to messenger to text [9,10]. It is not as limited as LinkedIn and Twitter, which typically cater to a specific demographic.

2. METHODOLOGY

This Research work is a simple qualitative study. It is also a simple descriptive and morphological analysis of word-formation processes used by Facebook users in Nigeria. The study focuses on simple textual analysis and information was derived directly from Facebook. The qualitative method is a simple research design in which a researcher focuses on textual rather statistical analysis of data and the simple descriptive method is a popular research design adopted mostly in textual analysis of data. Data for this study is collected through direct observation of the nature of language use on Facebook platform by Nigerian Users. Direct observation is a system in which the researcher gets involved in the collation process through observation of other participants. Data collated will be analyzed descriptively. The descriptive method is a system of analysis in which the researcher submits analysis based on observation.

3. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Word Formation Process Observed

A number of word formation processes were observed as used by various Facebook users in the Nigerian platform. The direction of this section is to present instances of the processes and the words derived.

3.1.1 Logogram

In morphology, logograms are considered signs which represent words or parts of them, in the case of texting these are single letters, numerals, typographic symbols or the combination of the part of the word with a number. This is one of the most frequently used word formation process in various social media platforms. Below are some instances from the collated data:

1. 'are' Abbreviation:

The most frequent abbreviated form is r. The reason for using this type of abbreviation is that the letter r has the same pronunciation as the actual form of the verb BE

2. Meaning: be' Abbreviation:

The letter b used to replace the verb be is an example of a logogram. The shortened form of the verb be is motivated by the pronunciation of the letter b which is the same as the pronunciation of the verb be.

3. 'before' Abbreviation:

The abbreviated form b4 is an example of logogram because it is formed by letter b with connection with the number 4, the pronunciation of both altogether makes the word before.

4. 'the' Abbreviation:

The abbreviation 'd' is based on the pronunciation of 'the', with initial vowel pronunciation.

5. 'No one', Abbreviation:

The abbreviation 'no1' is formed partly by the number, which is pronounced the same way as the part of the original word, which it replaces.

6. 'See you', Abbreviation:

The abbreviation 'cu' is formed by pronunciation of the two parts of the collocation.

7. 'Someone', Abbreviation:

The abbreviation 'sme'1 is formed the same way as the abbreviation for the word no one, the second part is formed by the number based on the same pronunciation.

8. 'To' Abbreviation:

The abbreviation is formed by the number '2', based on the similar pronunciation.

9. 'For' Abbreviation:

The usage of number '4' to express preposition for, is an example of logogram, in which numbers are used to express words.

10. 'you' Abbreviation:

Personal pronoun can be also expressed by different abbreviations. The most frequent is abbreviation 'U', where the pronunciation of this letter and the pronunciation of pronoun you is the same. Other less frequent forms are: Ya, Y.

As can be seen from the instances above, the internet or social media users frequently use the morphological process, logograms, to derive words. These processes can be argued to be cases of neologism as they are new; however, almost all the system of using derivations on social media can be predicated on the perception of neologism. To that extent, it then becomes important to look into the system without focusing mainly on the process alone. This informs the classification of the processes into various types.

3.1.2 Cases of Initializing

This is a process in which social media users derive a word from the initials of a phrase. This is also a popular system of word derivation at various social media platforms. Below are some instances of initializing as a word formation process:

11. 'be right back':

The phrase 'be right back' is usually initialized as 'Brb'. This is formed by initializing part of phrase.

12. 'Best friend/boy friend':

The abbreviation 'bf' is formed from the initial letters of the original word.

13. 'by' the way:

The initialism 'bdw' or 'btw' is used to express the meaning of by the way. It is important to reiterate that 'btw' can also be used to mean 'between'.

14. 'Do not care':

Abbreviated form is created from initial letters 'dnc', therefore, it is also an example of initialism.

15. 'Facebook':

The abbreviation for the social network is 'fb' and it is formed by initializing of the two parts of word that form the word Facebook, meaning face and book, which can exist separately.

16. 'I do not know':

The abbreviated form idk is formed by initial letters, thus it is an initialism. Other occurring form is dunno.

17. 'Just kidding':

The abbreviation 'jk' is formed from initials of original expression just kidding.

18. 'Laughing my ass off':

'Lmao' is abbreviated form formed by initial letters. Therefore, it belongs to the group of initialisms.

19. 'laughing out loud':

The abbreviation for laughing out loud is a typical example of initialised abbreviation, where each part of phrase is represented by its initial letters and creates word LOL. As mentioned above, the abbreviation for laughing out loud is initialism LOL, for the expression of sarcasm the letter z is added at the end, so the final abbreviation is LOLz.

20. 'Oh my God':

The abbreviation for expression Oh, my God is another example of initialism, because it is formed from initial letters, 'omg'.

3.1.3 Cases of Omissions

21. 'about':

The abbreviation for about is abt, which is formed by omitting of letters o and u.

22. 'and':

The abbreviated form for conjunction and is a single letter N. It is an example of logogram. The other occurring abbreviation is nd.

23. 'back':

The abbreviation bck is formed by omitting the vowel.

24. 'because':

The most used abbreviated form for a word because is just becuz, where the second syllable of the word is written cuz instead of cause. The other possible abbreviation used during internet discussions are: coz, bcz, cuz, becaz, cos,

25. 'better': The abbreviation btter is formed by omitting the letter e.

26. 'don't': The abbreviated form dnt used for a word don't is an omitted expression, where the vowel o is omitted.

27. 'friends': The abbreviated form frnds is formed by omitting of letters i and e.

28. 'from': The abbreviated form used in discussions for a word from is frm. It is formed by omitting of vowel o.

29. 'good': The abbreviation gd is formed by omitting of vowels. The other occurring form is gud.

30. 'have': The abbreviation hav is formed by omitting of final vowel e. Meaning:

3.1.4 Clippings

31. 'Birthday': The abbreviation bday is formed by final clipping of the first part of word that can exist separately.

32. 'brother': The abbreviation bro is a typical example of shortening, where the end of the word is omitted.

33. 'especially': The abbreviation esp is formed by final clipping.
34. 'picture': The abbreviation pic is created by final clipping.
35. 'problem' : The abbreviated form prob for a word problem is formed by final clipping.
36. 'sister': The abbreviation sis is formed by final clipping of the original word.
37. 'English': The abbreviation eng is formed by final clipping.
38. 'tablet': The abbreviation tab is formed by final clipping. Meaning: tomorrow
Abbreviation: The abbreviated form for tomorrow is omission tomo, formed by final clipping.

3.1.5 Nonstandard spelling

39. 'come on;': The abbreviated form c'mon is the example of nonstandard spelling.
40. 'does': The abbreviation daz is formed by nonstandard spelling based on pronunciation.
41. 'going to': The abbreviation gonna is the example of non standard spelling, with the origin in informal US English. The other occurring form is gotta.
42. 'kind of': The abbreviation kinda is the example of nonstandard spelling with its origin in informal US English.
43. 'that': The abbreviation dat is formed by nonstandard spelling, based on the pronunciation of the original word.
44. 'want to': The abbreviation wanna is example of nonstandard spelling, which usually includes informal US English speech.
45. 'what's up': The abbreviated form occurring in chat room discussions is wassup. It is example of informal US English speech and therefore it belongs to non standard spelling expressions.

The presentation of forty five (45) words used mainly in various social media interactions is basic in this study. The analysis unveiled various

systems of forming new words from existing ones by Facebook users in Nigeria. The implication of the analysis is that there are unique systems of word formation on Facebook in the Nigerian platform. Nigerian Facebook users unconventionally device a means of communication, which are in most cases abbreviating the intended expressions. The above data presented has the indication that Nigerian users on Facebook find it easy to abbreviate most of the expressions. Through this system, new words are created and abbreviations are derived in order to communicate. Beyond that, there is also the need to understand the manner in which the abbreviations are derived. That is why they are analyzed under various formation processes as they are peculiarities. Another important narrative from the analysis is the fact that in all the examined instances, there are no cases of morphological inflection in the formation of words. All the processes can be adjudged to be morphologically derived.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study has pursued to analyze how users of Facebook in Nigeria create or form new words. The concern in the study was to unveil the morphological processes the users of Facebook apply unconsciously in the creation of new expressions to fit their social communication needs. So, partly the study was an analysis of language of social media interaction. In other words, it entails the application of knowledge of familiar word formation processes in the examination of the means of creating new words by Facebook users. A number of interactions were recorded. Over 50 new words were collated and 45 were presented and analyzed in the study.

Major findings made through this research which includes that social media users have unique means of forming words and these words are mainly formed by abbreviating the main expressions and the abbreviations follow various patterns.

The users are also familiar with the words, yet most of them are novel.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
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