THE ARTISTIC FUNCTION OF THE REAL-TIME LANGUAGE OF THE FACEBOOK REALITY DRAMA

K.I. Ehiemua
Dr. F.O. Ibhawaegbele

ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes a linguistic description of the spontaneous and on demand conversational language of the Facebook internet phenomenon in order to explicate its pedagogical and aesthetic values from the premise that art is both instructive and entertaining. The spontaneous and ‘on-demand’ conversational language of the Facebook is what this paper refers to as ‘real-time’ language. This has become a major part of the inherently essential style of the Facebook and which qualifies it as a narrative similar to reality drama, if not exactly so. This study uses the personal Facebook chats of four Nigerians to affirm that the popularity of the Facebook internet phenomenon in Nigeria is partly, but significantly, due to the artistic function of its conversational language and its dramatic potentials apart from the democratization, portability, accessibility and the interactivity of the new media.

Keywords: Facebook, internet, new media, real-time, conversational language, reality drama

Introduction

The internet was invented in 1969; and it is defined as an “information highway” and “the vast network of telephone and cable lines and satellite systems designed to link and carry computer information worldwide” (Campbell et al 2007:41). The internet is obviously the 20th/21st century new media, which ‘actively’ began with its expansion in the 1990s when its versatility was highlighted with the “development and rapid diffusion of the world wide web (www)” (Campbell et al 2007:41). This brought a new awareness of the versatility and utility of the internet, which was hitherto exploited as a military information technology (Albarran 2002:277). The world of the internet, as the face of the new media, has also since 1990s demonstrated its versatility beyond its use for business practices, advertising, dissemination of
ideas, news broadcast, media streaming, telephony activities and search engine operations to include its use as a platform for social media, which promotes social and human relationships as well as serves as veritable means of instruction, entertainment and relaxation.

Campbell et al (2007) aptly capture the distinctive features of the new media, which is the internet platform, over traditional media such as books, newspapers, radio, television, when they write that:

... the internet had become increasingly interactive by the 1990s, allowing the immediate two-way communication (like telephone) and one-to-many communication (like radio and television) between senders and receivers of messages. (42)

They assert further that:

With its ability to transport both personal conversations and mass communication, the internet has begun to break down conventional distinctions among various media and between private and public modes of communication. (42)

As rightly stressed by Campbell et al in the foregoing, the interactiveness of the new media is of a remarkably eclectic nature, which is evident in its integration of the characteristics present in the traditional media along with its unique features which are absent in the older media. The immediate two-way and one-to-many communication processes between senders and receivers of the internet information/messages enable it to function more effectively as the platform for social media than any of the traditional media. This phenomenon imbues the new media with the dramatic potentials, which manifest in the varying types of social media of the internet, namely Facebook, Twitters, RSS, My Space, Skype, 2go, What’s app, Hi five, Yahoo, etc.

When one notices the dramatic potentials of the new media, then one readily sees the ways its social media promote the facilitation of a different kind of reality drama. Social media therefore have become facilitators of reality drama event in a telegraphic mode bereft of audio visual signals with users (or owners of accounts) and their listed contacts occasionally and conveniently engage in a communicative play activity, which is recreational and entertaining and which promotes social and human relationships. Observably the role of the social media in the
propagation of reality drama is also phenomenal in more ways other than the foregoing. One, users and their contacts/friends in the chosen social medium unconsciously become actors who, sub-consciously, create their own narratives based on real-time experiences. Two, the linguistic freedom and creativity are over-stretched that expressions deviate from linguistic norms; and they foreground the underlying essence and philosophy of reality drama in which the regularity and irregularity of daily life routines become excitingly novel. Three, the democratization, interactiveness, portability, accessibility and convenience of social media through telephone and computer formats further foreground the revolution in media technology and functionality patent in the new media, which reinforces A. N. Shamsi’s (2006) assertion that the “mass media and communication technologies have become integral parts of our life and our society”(333).

This paper however focuses on the artistic function of the language of Facebook chats in Nigeria and how the nature of this linguistic function has aided Facebook medium to creatively function as a platform for a performance art recognizably known as reality drama.

The Facebook (Fb) Chat as a Reality Drama

Fb is one of the internet platforms which provide social networking service. The others include Twitter, RSS, MySpace, 2go, Skype, What’s App, Hifive, Bebo, BBM, Dadoo, etc. Fb, launched in February 2004, owned and operated by Facebook Incorporated, is the largest of these social networking websites with over 900 million active users, and more than half of them using Fb on a mobile device (“Facebook”, retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/facebook). Its dominance was rightly noted by Jeff Ginger (2008) in his study, titled “The Missing Box: The Racial Politics Behind The Facebook Interface”, when he affirmed that the “Facebook ... is the world renowned social networking service (SNS)” and that “it is often a daily internet stop” for undergraduates “across the nation and increasingly people of all kinds in the US and worldwide” (retrieved from http://www.thefacebookproject.com/research/jeff/publications/missingbox).

To acquire Fb page, a potential user registers to become an account owner with the Fb website and thereafter begins to use the site. He/she creates a personal profile, adds other users as friends, exchange messages or chat with them anytime. Other users in the owner’s list of friends are notified when the owner of a specific Fb page updates his profile. A user could use the
platform to seek and connect with old friends or acquaintances with whom the user may have
lost contact and who may be on Fb. A user may write a viewpoint on his or her message wall to
which she/he may want friends to comment, or on which the user may want friends in the
contact list to start a discussion. The account owner/user of the Fb page can feature a personal
or/and group photographs and videos to share with friends on the contact list. The current or
breaking news or any piece of information can be passed through this forum as well by the
account owner to friends on the contact list and vice versa.

This paper affirms that this whole gamut of exchanges and social networking occasioned
by Fb communication interface plays out like a reality drama; and the freedom it allows users to
break barriers of linguistic norms does not only reinforce the feeling of an involvement in a
creative performance, it also appeals to an artistic sense that yearns for excitement and fun. This
is why in this paper we refer to the Fb medium, like other social media, on the internet as a
platform for another kind of reality drama.

In this reality drama occasioned by Fb chats, users/account owners unknowingly become
actors in a telegraphic communicative process without speech, mime, stage directions and
animated visuals of participants. While conventional drama basically thrives on human
connectivity, the Fb internet medium "is a veritable playground for connectors"; it is where
“weak ties can flourish” and where “more opportunities through compounded and elaborate
sharing of identities and media can be offered” (Ginger 2007).

Fb chat is a social narrative which further confirms its nature as reality drama with the
account owner and her/his friends on the contact list as enclosed real life actors. The users as
actors interact at their own convenience, exchange or share ideas, information and photographs.
There is often a sustained ‘on-demand’ and spontaneous dialogue between users which can be
eddying, humorous, informative or instructive. Where responses are not given spontaneously on
demand, they are delayed and then given at the convenience of the recipient of the message. The
subject of conversations or messages may be social, domestic or personal, political or economic.
Unlike the role playing of actors in the developed plot structure of conventional drama, the users
as actors play themselves. Their engagement on the Fb page is unplanned, telegraphic and based
on real-time experiences. Users as actors do not portray psychological, social and philosophical
depths as in conventional drama; though these may be inadequately deduced by the users’ profiles that are available on the Fb page.

One of the striking features of the Fb medium, which credits this social networking platform (and perhaps others) with its peculiarities, is the nature of its real-time conversational language. This is an inherently essential style of the Fb worthy of focal attention in this paper as suggested in its main and subsequent titles.

**The Artistic Function of the language of Fb Chats**

The artistic function of language occurs when language use deviates essentially from norms, consciously or sub-consciously, which according to Leech and Short (1981) can manifest in both qualitative and quantitative senses (48). In either of the senses, all or some of the lexical items in the utterance foreground. To foreground means to bring into prominence, to “ Estrange or defamiliarize; that is, by distinguishing the ordinary modes of linguistic discourse ... [and make] strange the world of everyday perception and renews the reader’s lost capacity for freshness” (Abrams, 1981:166). According to Leech and Short (1981), foregrounding is an aesthetic exploitation of language [which] takes the form of surprising a reader into a fresh awareness of, and sensitivity to, the linguistic medium which is normally taken for granted as an automatized background of communication. (28)

Leech and Short (1981) affirm that foregrounding is qualitative when it is a “deviation from the language code itself – a breach of some rule or convention of English”; it is quantitative when it is a “deviance from some expected frequency” (48). In other words, deviation in the qualitative sense is a foregrounded irregularity while deviation which occurs as a result of a frequency of lexical items (a word, phrase, clause or sentence) more than is expected in socially normal English expression, is a foregrounded regularity.

The conversational language of Fb users in Nigeria is largely deviational; hence, in this sense, it is artistic. It is a phenomenon in which both language and medium (the Fb social network) are foregrounded. The excitement and freedom it allows in the abuse or dislocation of linguistic norms flow from the users artistic impulse. We believe this is partly responsible for the popularity of the Fb among youths and middle age men in Nigeria considering mankind’s well
known instinct for recreation and entertainment.

As Crystal and Davy (1989) have rightly affirmed, conversational English has no situational specificity and that “it is, situationally speaking, the most neutral kind of English one can find” (95). Perhaps this is why it allows for all kinds of experiments between Fb users making them to consciously and subconsciously define/create codes and significations only they (the users) may be able to understand within the conversational linguistic situation. According to Buttler (1985), in his *Systemic Linguistics Theory Applications*, “codes are not themselves varieties of language; rather they are said to act as filters regulating access to particular classes of variety (67). This appears to be corroborated by Lisa Whittaker, a postgraduate student at the University of Stirling, researching into how teenagers create secret online language on social networking sites like Fb and Bebo, who observed that:

The creation and use of their [the teenagers’] own social language may be a deliberate attempt to keep adults from understanding what is written on the page. By doing this they are able to communicate with their in group and conceal the content from the out group. This further adds to their online identity. (Retrieved from “Facebook speak: Teenagers create secret online language”, www.telegraph.co.uk)

The conversational language of the Fb in Nigeria has become codes-based as well in its deviations; and its signification is only understood by the users who share the same linguistic culture. It is also a neutral kind of English in the sense that it does not have any situational specificity. This reinforces the reality and the dramatic nature of its function.

The deviational patterns, which commonly manifest qualitatively and quantitatively in the conversational language of the Fb users in Nigeria, occur at syntactic and graphological levels. The semantic quality of the conversational language of Fb users in Nigeria resides more in the comprehension or deciphering of these syntactic and graphological deviational patterns

**A. Syntactic Deviation (Sd)**

Leech and Short concisely define syntax as “the abstract grammatical and lexical form[s] of language” (120). Syntactic deviation (Sd) therefore means a deliberate or sub-conscious or
careless breach of grammatical and lexical rules of language. This is a dominant style in the chats/conversations of Fb users in Nigeria. It manifests in three different forms as stated in the table below.

| i. Abnormal abbreviation or shortening of words, phrases and clauses (Sd₁) |
| ii. Pidginisation of Standard English or mixture of both Pidgin and Standard English in an utterance (Sd₂) |
| iii. The regularity of short sentences, phrases and clauses (Sd₃) |

**B. Graphological Deviation (Gd)**

Again, Leech and Short's definition of graphology is notable. They define it as "the writing system" which 'is an alternative system of realization of phonology", and which “concerns such matters as spelling, capitalization, hyphenation, italicization, paragraphing” and punctuations (120 and 131). A deliberate or sub-conscious violation or breach of the rules of any of these aspects of the writing system of language is what is referred to here as graphological deviation (Gd). This also occurs in four obvious forms in Fb users’ chats in Nigeria as tabulated in the following:

| i. a sub-conscious, deliberate or careless misspellings (Gd₁) |
| ii. a sub-conscious, deliberate or careless violation of initial capitalization of sentences, proper nouns and pronouns like ‘I’ (Gd₂) |
| iii. a disregard of appropriate punctuation marks (Gd₃) |
| iv. the substitution of some prepositions or initial letters of words with some numerals (Gd₄) |

The following are extracts of the chats of four Fb users in Nigeria. Many of the sentences are labeled to indicate the presence of the observed linguistic forms highlighted in the foregoing and for clarity. The owners of the Fb accounts from which the chats are extracted are undergraduates whose ages fall between 19 and 25. Since it will be unwieldy to present more than these four extracts of Fb chats of several account owners, a glossary of some commonly used deviant expressions and their meanings in the Fb chats of some Nigerian users, shall also be
tabulated.

FB.EXT. A

Stephen Onaivi Innocent

sup dearie? (1) \( (S_d_1, S_d_3, G_d_2) \) June 7

Deby Fakunle

I'm great (2) \( (S_d_3, G_d_3) \) June 7

Stephen Onaivi Innocent

Hey (3) \( (G_d_3) \) June 13

Stephen Onaivi Innocent

Hey (4) \( (G_d_2, G_d_3) \) June 13

Deby Fakunle

Hey (5) \( (G_d_3) \) June 13

Stephen Onaivi Innocent

sup wth u dearie (6) \( (S_d_1, S_d_3, G_d_2) \) not aslip yet? (7) \( (S_d_1, S_d_3, G_d_2) \) June 13

Deby Fakunle

Naaaaaaa (8) \( (G_d_1) \) I'm here (9) \( (S_d_1, S_d_3, G_d_3) \) June 13
Stephen Onaivi Innocent

so wat re u doin? (10) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃)
jacking? (11) (Sd₂, Sd₃, Gd₂) June 13

Deby Fakunle

Trying too (12) (Sd₃, Gd₁, Gd₃)
U knw na (13) (Sd₂, Sd₃, Gd₃) June 13

Stephen Onaivi Innocent

i blv (14) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₃)
but pls izi (15) (Sd₄, Sd₅, Gd₂, Gd₃) June 13

Deby Fakunle

Na jxt scale tru ooooo (16) (Sd₂, Sd₃, Gd₃)
I dnt read at nyt (17) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₃) June 13

Stephen Onaivi Innocent

ok (18) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃)
so wat’s up tmoro (19) (Sd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃) June 13

Deby Fakunle

Yep (20) (Sd₂, Gd₃)
Reharsals (21) (Sd₃, Gd₃) June 13

Stephen Onaivi Innocent

abt d convocatn (22) (Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃) June 13
Deby Fakunle

Exam strts next week (23) (Sd3, Gd3)  
Dunno abt d convocation buh I knw dey strtd 2day (24) (Sd3*, Gd1, Gd3, Gd4) June 13

Stephen Onaivi Innocent

sure i kw (25) (Sd1, Sd3, Gd2, Gd3) June 13

Deby Fakunle

K (26) (Sd1, Sd3, Gd3) June 13

FB.EXT.B

Samson S Ilekhomon

Wats nt true (1) (Sd1, Sd3, Gd3) July 24

Deby Fakunle

I b њ love na (2) (Sd1, Sd2, Gd3) July 24

Samson S Ilekhomon

Lol (3) (Sd1, Sd3, Gd3) July 24

Deby Fakunle

⌣̶̲̥̅̊ ̶̲̥̅̊ - ✽ (y)yea ̶̲̥̅̊ ̶̲̥̅̊ - ⌣ na (4)(Sd2, Sd3, Gd3) July 24
Samson S Ilekhomon

I miss yall too  (5)  (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₃)  July 24

Deby Fakunle

How far na  (6)  (Sd₂, Sd₃, Gd₃)  July 24

Samson S Ilekhomon

I just dey oo  (7)  (Sd₂, Sd₃, Gd₃)
Just tryin 2 survive  (8)  (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₃, Gd₄)  July 24

Deby Fakunle

Yeah  (9)  (Sd₃, Gd₃)  July 24

Samson S Ilekhomon

Nd u  (10)  (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₃)  July 24

Deby Fakunle

Lol  (11)  (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₃)
Ö must to survive oooo  (12)  (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₃)
I’m here trying to write my project  (13)  (Sd₃, Gd₃)  July 24

Samson S Ilekhomon

Kk, so hw far hv u gone wit it?  (14)  (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₁)
U r in wat chaptre nw?  (15)  (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₁)  July 24

Deby Fakunle

For now I’ve written my chapter 3  (16)  (Sd₃, Gd₃)
she neva rilly sitdown look all of em  (17)  (Sd₁, Sd₂, Sd₃, Gd₁, Gd₂ Gd₃)
But I knw say 1to3 don ready. I'll just wait for her to do wat she has to do (18) (Sd₂, Sd₃, Sd₅) July 24

FB.EXT.C

**Blessing Akpojotor**

👍 i will call u 2mor (1) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₃, Gd₄) August 4, 2011

**Florence Ekata**

👍 dis time. (2) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₃) August 4, 2011

**Blessing Akpojotor**

👍 yes (3) (Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃) ese wants to make my hair for me (4) (Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃) August 4, 2011

**Florence Ekata**

👍 no prob,tanx 4 d talk (5) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃, Gd₄) August 4, 2011

**Blessing Akpojotor**

👍 alright dear (6) (Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃) talk 2 u sn (7) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃, Gd₄) bye (8) (Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃) August 4, 2011

**Florence Ekata**

👍 ok,i can see u gals ar nw champion in al areas concernin hair. (9) (Sd₁, Gd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃, Gd₄) August 4, 2011

**Blessing Akpojotor**

👍 yes oo (10) (Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃) August 4, 2011
Florence Ekata

babe (11) (Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃) September 4, 2011

Blessing Akpojotor

hey gal (12) (Sd₃, Gd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃)
hw re u (13) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃)
Longtime (14) (Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃) September 4, 2011

Florence Ekata

grtns ad u gul (15) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃) September 4, 2011

Blessing Akpojotor

gud (16) (Sd₃, Gd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃) September 4, 2011

Florence Ekata

no talk 4rm u since dear. hw is lyf (17) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃, Gd₄) September 4, 2011

Blessing Akpojotor

lyf is gud (18) (Sd₃, Gd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃)
Hw're ur mum and dad (19) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃) September 4, 2011

Florence Ekata

dey're gud. ad ur siblings (20) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃) September 4, 2011

Blessing Akpojotor

dey re fine (21) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃)
my mum is here with us (22) (Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃) September 4, 2011

Florence Ekata

am so happi Glory b 2 God (23) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃, Gd₄)
grt her 4 me o. (24) (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃, Gd₄) September 4, 2011
FB.EXT.D

**Nosa Palash**

![image]

how was ur nyt

July 25

**Mercy Aiyelade**

![image]

I Grt

July 25

**Nosa Palash**

![image]

u @ work already?

July 25

**Mercy Aiyelade**

![image]

No, A䀀 home

July 25

**Nosa Palash**

![image]

no work 2day?

July 25

**Mercy Aiyelade**

![image]

Off day

July 25

**Nosa Palash**

![image]

Kk

how's every1 @ home

July 25

**Mercy Aiyelade**

![image]

D ̶̲̥̅̊ εγ r fyn

July 25
Nosa Palash

i couldn’t sleep last nyt u were all i could think of  (10)  (Sd₁, Gd₁, Gd₃)  (11)  (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃)  July 25

Mercy Aivelade

Really  (12)  (Sd₃, Gd₃)  July 25

Nosa Palash

i miss u so much i don’t knw y i love u dis much  (13)  (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃)  (14)  (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₁, Gd₃)  July 25

Mercy Aivelade

*smile*  (15)  (Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃)  July 25

Nosa Palash

what do i do 2 get u back 2 ur old self do u still remember when we just started dating every1 adored u  (16)  (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃, Gd₄)  (17)  (Sd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃)  (18)  (Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₂, Gd₃, Gd₄)  July 25

Mercy Aivelade

Yēs i do  (19)  (Sd₃, Gd₃)  July 25

C. Description of the Foregrounding Linguistic Forms (FLFs)

Foregrounding linguistic forms (FLFs) here refer to all the observed forms of syntactic and graphological deviations in the Fb chats under study. In all the Fb extracts, there are recurring foregrounding linguistic forms (FLFs) in the chats/conversations between users and their contacts. The FLFs are common in many Fb chats in Nigeria even at a cursory glance. For the purpose of easy identification, comprehension and convenience, the four Fb extracts are
labeled; each utterance is numbered as a sentence and superficially notated as evidencing the presence of FLFs.

In Fb chats in Nigeria as exemplified in the extracts under study, FLFs occur mainly as syntactic (Sd) and graphological (Gd) deviations. For example, in the Fb chat extract A (Fb.Ext.A), sentence no 1: ‘sup dearie’, the FLFs occur as Sd₁, Sd₃, and Gd₂. In the word ‘sup’, there is a case of abnormal shortening of words, which is the first form of syntactic deviation listed earlier. In this case, it is an abnormal shortening of the clause, ‘what is up?’ - a slang or an informal expression which means: ‘hello’, ‘what are you doing?’ or ‘what is going on with you’. The sentence ‘sup dearie?’ has Sd₃ because it is a short sentence and the type is interrogative. Short sentence types (declarative, exclamatory or interrogative) are very prominent in Fb chats in Nigeria including the ones selected for this study. The short sentence, phrasal and clausal responses in Fb chats in Nigeria are very regular. It is considered in this study to be a deviance which is quantitative. According to Leech and Short, a ‘quantitative deviance’ occurs not as a breach of linguistic rules but as “some expected frequency” (48). The sentence has Gd₂ occurring in the first letter of the word, ‘sup’, which begins the sentence. Gd₂ is a graphological deviation which manifests as a deliberate or sub-conscious or careless violation of initial capitalization of sentences or proper nouns. In this case, there is a deliberate, sub-conscious or capricious violation of initial capital letter of the sentence. That is, there is a breach of the graphological rule of writing in English grammar, which commands that every sentence should begin with a capital letter.

In the Fb. Ext. A., sentence 2: ‘1’m great’, FLFs occur as Sd₃ and Gd₃. The Sd₃ is a repetition of the short sentence form, but in this case it is declarative. Gd₃ is the presence of a graphological deviation which is the disregard of appropriate or necessary punctuation mark. In the sentence, ‘1’m great’, there is a deliberate or careless disregard of the necessary full-stop (.) or exclamation mark (!). In the one word utterance numbered sentence 3, ‘Hey’, there is a case of Gd₃; while in 4, it is both Gd₂ and Gd₃, In no 5. Gd₃, manifests. Both responses in nos 4 and 5 have similar grammatical structure as 3.

In sentence 6, ‘sup with u dearie’, there is the presence of Sd₁, Sd₃ and Gd₂. Sd₁ implies an abnormal abbreviation or shortening of words, phrases and clauses. It should be noted that abnormal abbreviations in Fb chats in Nigeria appear differently. One instance is: letter(s) is/are
taken from a word to suggest or indicate it, like ‘u’ for ‘you’, ‘cos’ for ‘because’, ‘ur’ for ‘your’, ‘k’ or ‘kk’ for ‘okay’, ‘y’ ‘for why’, blv’ for ‘believe’, ‘kwn’ or ‘kn’ for ‘know’, ‘aslip’ for ‘sleep’, ‘abt’ for ‘about’, izi’ for ‘easy’; or a replacement of consonant letters with a contrastive consonant sounds like ‘d(ð)/ere’ for th(ð)/ere’, ‘t(ð)/in’ for th(ð)/in, ‘tanx’ for ‘thanks’; or the initial letters of the constituent words of the phrase, clause or sentence are joined together like ‘lol’ for ‘laugh out loud’; ‘ywc’ for ‘you are welcome’, ‘omg’ for ‘Oh my gosh’ or ‘Oh my God’, ‘lmao’ for ‘laughing my ass out’, ‘dunno’ for ‘I don’t know’, ‘yall’ for ‘you all’.

In Fb. E. C, sentence 1: ‘cos I want 2 make my hair’, FLFs occur as Sd₁, Gd₂, Gd₃, Gd₄ and Gd₄. The new feature here is Gd₄. This is the substitution of prepositions or initial letters of some words with numerals, for example, ‘2’ for ‘to’, 4 for ‘four’ or ‘for’, ‘2day’ for ‘to day’, ‘9ite’ for ‘night’, ‘8’ for ‘ate’.

In Fb. Ext. B., the following sentences have the following FLFs:

Sentence 2:
‘I b ur love jor’ (Meaning: I remain / am your loved one) - Sd₁, Sd₃, Gd₃, Gd₄

Sentence 6:
‘how far na’(Meaning: how are you?) – Sd₃, Gd₃, Gd₄

Sentence 7:
‘I just dey ooo’ (Meaning: I am fine / okay) – Sd₃, Gd₃, Gd₄

The expressions in brackets are the Standard English translations of the cited sentences in Pidgin English from the Fb chat extract numbered B. Nordquist (2012) in his online page on grammar, About.com, defines a pidgin language as “[a] simplified form of speech formed out of one or more existing languages and used by people who have no other language in common”.

Nigerian Pidgin English is a bastardized informal derivative of Standard English, whose simplicity is gauged by its flexibility in admitting any local vernacular language or any other parlance at the users’ whims in an utterance. It is also accessible to both the educated and uneducated members of the highly multilingual Nigerian community. The new symbol in the three sentences is the Sd₃. This is explained earlier as the pidginisation of Standard English or mixture of both varieties. The use of Pidgin or mixture of both this variety and Standard English is a regular linguistic feature in Fb chats in Nigeria.
Abnormal abbreviations by way of deliberate or sub-conscious elisions, contractions or compressions have become regular FLFs in Nigerian Fb chats. They are abnormal because their compositions do not comply with the Standard English method of abbreviations or contractions in which initial letters represent the words; and in an expression, the representative letters are separated by full-stops/periods (.). Their abnormality is further underscored by the seeming deliberate, sub-conscious or capricious tendencies behind the compositions. The meanings of these abbreviations are inferred from the context of usage while some are suggested from the representative letters. However, habitual stylistic set of familiar abbreviations has emerged from this deliberate or capricious linguistic culture of the social media chats, which is evident in Fbs in Nigeria. This set of abbreviations has evolved into an unwritten social media chat dictionary with Fb taking the lead. Some of these familiar abbreviations and their meanings are provided in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviations</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOL</td>
<td>Laugh out loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imao</td>
<td>Laugh my ass out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotfl</td>
<td>Rolling on the floor laughing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llnp</td>
<td>Long life and prosperity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wullnp</td>
<td>Wishing you long life and prosperity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omg</td>
<td>Oh my God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lwkmd (Pidgin English)</td>
<td>Laugh wan kill me die (near standard English translation- i`am almost dead with laughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ywc</td>
<td>You are welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peeps/pple</td>
<td>People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k/kk</td>
<td>Okay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pls/plz</td>
<td>Please</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wat</td>
<td>What</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dat</td>
<td>That</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dey</td>
<td>They</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ggyumb (Pidgin English)</td>
<td>God go make you bigger (Near standard English translation-God will prosper you more abundantly).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hbd</td>
<td>Happy birthday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tables, numbering, labels or coinages like FLFs, Sd_{1,2,3} and Gd_{1,2,3,4} are devices of this study to aid the description of the phenomenon of language use in the Nigerian Fb chats and to facilitate the convenience of descriptive analysis embarked upon in this paper.
D. The Pedagogical and Artistic Values of FLFs in Nigerian Fb Chats

The foregrounding linguistic forms (FLFs) revealed in this paper underscore the artistic significance of the conversational Language of the Fb medium in Nigeria, and thus observably account partly for its popularity among youths who school or work. They enhance the underlying fun and excitements in Fb chats as users share ideas, confide, socialize, associate, humour, be amused, express expletives, banter, and generally feel a sense of engagement and interaction with little or no linguistic restrictions. The activity, like in other social platforms of the new media, has thus become a narrative which reinforces the very value and essence of communication and drama.

If one is reminded by its inherent nature that Fb chat is another drama, then it is a reality kind of drama distinguished not only by the social interaction of real life human participants in the medium, but also by the spontaneous and on-demand nature of its conversational language. The language is real-time; its spontaneity and on-demand appeal accounts for a large degree of informality and linguistic freedom. This in turn creates a feeling of urgency necessitating sub-conscious or capricious violations and subsequent lively foregrounding linguistic forms.

Users on Fb chats, like in the other social media, are controlled by a sense of urgency. As a result, they care less, consciously or subconsciously, of many linguistic norms in order to keep pace with the excitement and appeal the activity generates. They fail to observe many graphological and syntactic rules of Standard English and cause a lot of deviations which foreground the significance of the message, language and medium. The abnormal abbreviations impress more as the product of human resourcefulness than as lack of linguistic proficiency; it becomes a creative misspelling which enhances the appeal of the engaging drama in which users (consciously, unconsciously or sub-consciously) find themselves.

The part played in all this by the level of academic attainment, literacy issues, deficiency in Standard English language acquisition of users, which may have also contributed to such violation of English grammar rules, cannot be ascertained in this paper because that is not within the scope of this paper. The main thrust of this paper is to describe how Fb fulfills the requirements of art through the peculiarity of language and medium.
The observations of this study contrast interestingly from those of Lisa Whittaker (2010), a postgraduate student at the University of Stirling, Scotland, United Kingdom, studying how teenagers create their secret language on social networking sites like Facebook and Bebo. She affirmed that:

The creation and use of their [the teens’] language may be a deliberate attempt to keep adults from understanding what is written in the page. By doing this they are able to communicate with their in-group and conceal, the content from the outgoing group. This further adds to their online identity. (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook (accessed 20th May, 2012)

The findings of Whitaker about the use and language of Fb and Bebo by a social group is very significant. It reveals how age, strata, social and cultural orientation condition the artistic impulses and compelling desire behind social media use. The common denominator, however, in the use of social networking platform, like the Fb, across continents and cultures, is that it has become another medium for dramatic realization of real-time experiential narrative at both personal and collective levels with little or no inhibitions of linguistic norms.

Conclusion

The Fb chat in Nigeria has become a performance art by virtue of its conversational language, peculiarities of the language and the realization of the medium as an engagement between two or more people. These inherent qualities constitute a dramatic experience whose value can be summed up in Miller’s words:

We can be excited, mystified, intrigued, challenged, frightened or horrified, and we can be driven to tears or laughter, concurrently, consecutively, or entirely independently, but one thing is sure: we will have enjoyed the experience that has been offered to us, for we have, in short been entertained. (1992:3)

By its nature, the Fb experience in Nigeria is entertaining, informative, instructive and therapeutic. The popularity of the social platform owes significantly to these artistic and pedagogical values, which establish it as an interface of both art and technology. There is no doubt that other factors are also responsible for its popularity like the accessibility and
portability of the computer and telephony devices through which the Fb medium can be assessed, and the democratization and interactiveness of the new media. These factors however reinforce the dramatic engagement enhanced by the medium’s inherent artistic possibilities.

REFERENCES


Facebook speak: Teenagers create secret online language. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/7632133/facebookspeak-Teenagers


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kingsley Iyayi Ehiemua holds a BA in Theatre and Media Arts, MA English and a Post graduate Diploma in Education. Kingsley is a pioneer lecturer of the Department of Theatre and Media Arts in the Faculty of Arts, of the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria. He teaches Modern African and European Drama, Drama of Blacks in Diaspora, Literary Theories, Art and Media Criticism. He is a thorobred art and media critic and scholar who has written quite a number of analytical papers on drama and film with keen interest in semiotics and post modern theories. He is known by his colleagues and people of common interests as a literary technician.

Dr. (Mrs) Faith Obyagelli Ibhawaegbele, of blessed memory, passed on in October, 2012. It was immediately after she finished co-authoring the paper on the artistic function of the language of the facebook with Kingsley that she took ill, which eventually claimed her life. She meant to present the paper in the 2012 Poetics and Linguistics Association (PALA) conference (July 16-18) in Malta, but couldn’t attend the conference due to the emerging symptoms of her failing health. She had a Ph.D in English Language majoring in Stylistics. She was a lecturer in the Department of English and Literary Studies in the Faculty of Arts of the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria. She taught Stylistics, English as a second language, Psycholinguistics and Syntax. She was a versatile scholar who authored many scholarly papers in both linguistics and the use of English in African Literature.