The Stakes of the Irruption of SMS in the Daily Scriptural Practices of African Young French-Speaking: The Case Study of Young Ivorians

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Abstract: *The integration of technology into our newly emerging African societies remains controversial. It has encouraged the emergence of SMS in the daily scriptural practices of the younger generation, thus opening a boulevard to different social fields of communication and making it difficult to democratize technology in this continent. This raises a series of questions and reflections on the quality of written production of future generations, since linguistic and typographical norms in interactions are already marked by transgressions, creating more gaps between the acquisition of good spelling practices that are already poorly assimilated and compliance with the norm. Consequently, these technological tools (mobile phones, computers,...), which offer quite original and attractive advantages for young French-speaking Africans, are proving to be a major obstacle to the acquisition of language skills and language development. This article is a contribution to the description of the main consequences of the spontaneous entry of SMS into the daily scriptural practices of young French-speaking Africans in general and particularly young Ivorians, in the face of technological development and proposes a theoretical framework for moderate use.*

Keywords: Digital obsession, scriptural practices, Electronic communication, language development, SMS language

1. Introduction

Young people communicate more than anyone else. The reason is that their field of interaction is very broad and diversified. They communicate regularly with friends, parents, teachers, in short, with a plurality of people they meet very frequently. As such, they represent the most vulnerable gateway to new mobile communication tools.

But of course, even a good thing can be harmful if the use of it does not exactly meet expectations. Thus, whether we use technology to develop language or to improve our social life, today in general, mobile tools fix certain lines of interaction that ignore the rules of written communication. Mistakes in grammar, spelling, vocabulary, morpho-lexical mistakes, neography etc..., these are the exercises most young Africans, Ivorians, fervent communicators via SMS engage in. It seems that the language police, i.e. the language rules, are out of order. Many argue that in the age of technology, we must move faster, not worry about the rules, because they delay. Moreover, the co-texter who receives an SMS from a texter through a digital device knows what his correspondent is talking about. This coded mode of communication, which poses the difficult equation of the relationship between written and spoken language, does not contribute much to language development. Rather, it paves the way for a form of transgression of linguistic and typographical norms. To make matters worse, the profusion of the latest generation digital devices (Smartphones, Ipads, Iphones, etc.) favours a variety of communication methods known by several terms: E-mails, mailing lists, discussion forums, Usenet, Instant messaging, Chats, SMS (text messages), etc. But above all, the latter (SMS) are more talked about, because of their impact on the socio-educational sphere of young Ivorians. In any case, all these modes of communication mentioned above do not allow linguistic interaction and come to cast aspersions on linguistic rules even if they also make it possible to overcome, rightly or wrongly, certain time constraints resulting from the requirement of productivity. Let's just say that insider users communicate in other languages, different from those of their (national) mother tongues. Moreover, most of these insiders are young people[9-25 years old] who do not have a good command of the linguistic rules. So, our determination to seek the influences of electronic communication on young Ivorians leads us to ask ourselves questions that do not concern all the modes of communication mentioned above, but rather to understand what motivates young Ivorians in particular, the use of SMS in their scriptural practices to the detriment of standard and standardized written communication.

How can electronic communication by SMS cause socio-educational upheavals in Côte d'Ivoire? Of course, the answer to these questions cannot be definitive. However, we note necessarily relentless clues and evidence of the importance of the emergence of SMS in the scriptural practices of young Ivorians. We believe that, apart from raising awareness and raising real awareness among these young people about the rush to this other writing, which is probably not a lasting legacy for future generations, this notion remains the only privileged framework that invites us to question the role that electronic communication can play in the daily scriptural practices of young Ivorians and to propose a more "moderate" use of digital technology.

2. What Reception of SMS in the Scriptural Practices of Young Ivorians?

We can speak of a technological revolution in Côte d'Ivoire based on the spontaneous entry of SMS communication into the scriptural and social habits of young Ivorians. We believe that this phenomenon, which has contributed to the creation of a new and atypical language community everywhere else in the world, is particularly widespread in Côte d'Ivoire, thanks to the telecommunications agency

Moov-Côte d'Ivoire[1], a subsidiary of the Etisalate group, which has made SMS communication the best service in its activities since its establishment. Far from us, to insinuate that this company has been the open door to this phenomenon, in the simple sense that SMS support remains the electronic way that only telecommunication companies like Moov-CI hold the secret. We simply say that SMS messages are a delirious success with Ivorian youth with Moov-CI who offered five hundred (500) SMS messages for a subscription of 100 CFAF, for a duration of 24 hours /24, according to its slogan "no limit".

Thus, young people indulge to their hearts' content, depriving themselves of sleep and study, seeking to exhaust the 500 SMS messages during the day. While other mobile telephone structures in Côte d'Ivoire (Orange and MNT) were more likely to make voice calls, the rush to Moov-CI's"Epic Nation"[2] profile brought young Ivorians closer together, thus broadening this community of "talking SMS". It should be noted that Moov-CI is today, the mobile network of young Ivorians, because almost all of them are subscribers and interact through it. But if the SMS communication mode has integrated the habits of these young people, it is undeniable that it has brought about many changes.

We are thinking exactly of this reciprocal entanglement, which is already observable at the cultural, linguistic, social and even educational policy level. A whole change that will obviously not spare future generations.

3. The Cultural and Linguistic Challenges of SMS Technology in Côte D'ivoire

The behaviours and attitudes inspired by the SMS technological approach call into question all the linguistic certainties gradually developed to face communication challenges. The culture and rationality from which these new trends originate are spreading according to processes that could be described on an inappropriate linguistic scale, at the same time as their consequences on scientific development are being realized. The spontaneous emergence of SMS technology in the daily linguistic practices of young Ivorians is causing major cultural upheavals. All the traditional achievements, these codes of conduct to be observed, which are suddenly swept away, in favour of pseudo-graphics, which are unconventional. Yet, development and progress, which are becoming the top priority for many African countries, require us to compete with traditional language skills that are highly competitive with SMS electronic writing.

It goes without saying, therefore, and in view of the objectives pursued, and the proportion, that anything that hinders compliance with language standards must be combated in order to restore linguistic equity.

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[1]One of the three mobile telephone operators in Côte d'Ivoire, a subsidiary of Maroc Telecom's international network, which operates in several West African countries
[2]One of the best moov-ci products that propels the use of SMS in Côte d'Ivoire

Thus, the practices that result from SMS technology, if recognized as such, should not even be used in a communication scheme because they are foreign to our culture, they inevitably create lexico-syntactic dysfunctions, and the incompatible language forms to which young Ivorians have absolutely converted, become an obstacle to the long process of acquiring good linguistic practices, and act at the level of cognitive psychology, as analyzed (Hayes, 2012a), and (Kellogg, 1996) with regard to the task of written production.

Moreover, the cultural impact inspired by the general characteristics of SMS communication easily instils a new scientific spirit in Ivorian youth.

4. The Cultural Impact of SMS on Young Ivorians

The cultural identity of young Ivorians is defined by their remarkable sociability. But they are good at absorbing new elements and even making them their own.

In the context of electronic communication, every young Ivorian has at least two (2) mobile phones. They communicate in SMS language in an interrupted way, which means that they only leave the screen of their mobile phone when they are asleep. We have therefore described this attitude as an obsession with digital technology.

Cultural values that require moderate use of the "new" are no longer considered. In short, this set of beliefs shared by young Ivorians, which imply social cohesion, is now only available in digital SMS format.

Therefore, this exclusive attachment to the traditional cultural values of sociability, which are in particular face-to-face conversation, whose advantage includes all the nuances of facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures, although it requires the availability at the same time of both parties in conversation; the letter or postcard which, by writing or reading, makes it possible to express and feel warmly and personally the strong emotions, even if its writing takes time and its recipient only receives several days later, all these values have turned into digital or virtual interaction. It is obvious that the SMS have built another type of relationship between the young Ivorians, giving them a new writing orientation that they cannot get rid of.

This extremely relevant perspective, subordinated to the relationships between individuals and social groups, induces social and cultural transformations produced by SMS writing. In ''*Pouvoirs et savoirs de l'écrit'*Jack Goody*(2007)*, through his concept of "literacy", succeeded in creating a fundamental theoretical framework for studying writing and the world of the written word, the means of communication and the sum of texts. Obviously, in the Ivorian socio-cultural context in particular, we see an internal layout of a society that has incorporated writing as a technique. Consequently, the balance of Ivorian society requires a specific configuration to respond to a qualitatively conventional linguistic environment.

5. The Sociolinguistic Impact: The Potential for Linguistic Change among Young Ivorians Presented in SMS Writing

Writing in general confirms the practical assimilation of oral learning. However, the process of integrating SMS writing into an Ivorian society whose standard writing rules are not yet well established, reverses this thesis. The SMS interaction situation thus leaves more room for imagination and personal creativity. We can notice in the conversational example below, this fertility of language creation:
-Subject A:(38 characters)
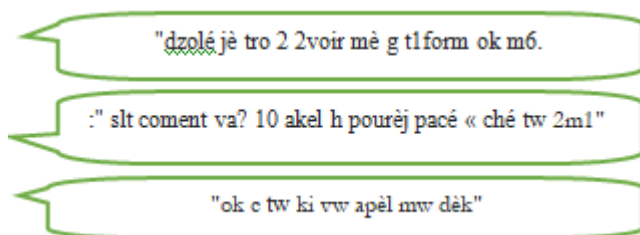Hi, tell me what time I could come by your place tomorrow?
-Subject B: (29 characters)
Sorry, I have too much homework but I'll let you know. Okay, thanks.
-Subject A: (18 characters)
Okay, it's up to you, call me as soon as you can.

"dzolé jè tro 2 2voir mè g t1form ok m6.

:" slt coment va? 10 akel h pourèj pacé « ché tw 2m1"

"ok c tw ki vw apèl mw dèk"

It is clear that for an Ivorian youth who is fully involved in SMS practices, the potential for linguistic change is merely a formality of passing from the "non-assimilation" of strict linguistic rules to the appropriation of unconventional writing that restricts them within a graphic interval of 160 characters, including spaces.

This creates a new linguistic community or social group that is out of step with good practices. However, it should be noted that SMS insiders do not always understand each other. Also, the playful nature of the SMS messages supports the enthusiasm of young Ivorians for this writing. From a technical point of view, these linguistic changes are not acquired; because the acquisition of digital skills (e-skills, e-skills) in itself, compared to the idea we have of the way technological tools exist, however, remain rather complex. It must necessarily take into account variables such as social class, level of education and culture.

We believe that what is happening with SMS communication for young Ivorians is far from a stylistic curiosity; rather, we are witnessing the disappearance of traditional linguistic practices and the phagocytosis of standard spelling. In reality, digital tools are also at the root of this linguistic mutation, which causes many prejudices to young Ivorians in their scriptural practice. Their contribution to linguistic development seems less reassuring and controversial for the latter.

But, as necessary as it will be for the Ivorian education system, in its educational policy to equip itself pedagogically to integrate technology, the practical mobilization for e-education remains an innovative project to face the absorption of digital technology. But it must also win our schools as quickly as possible by involving all the actors in this system.

We hypothesize that the context of language production can affect the nature of the link between the use of digital SMS writing and the quality of spelling production.

6. Social Interaction in Digital Mode

Communication by SMS is based on a virtual conversational style that requires the existence of digital technology. It is an exchange through scriptural and virtual means that nevertheless keeps the oral features. It requires the use of small alphanumeric keyboards on mobile phones, which are now tactile with smartphones. This induces absolutely a double difficulty: a technical writing difficulty that implies the restriction of the margin of character required for SMS (160) and a difficulty of interaction that requires a speed of exchange between the enunciator (sender) and the Co-enunciator (receiver). This is a break with standard interaction practices.

With the evolution of telephone packages (unlimited SMS in particular), SMS interactions attract more young people. This further justifies the reduction of the telephone call bill. But we will not relieve ourselves enough with all these so-called technological achievements in language practices, because the stakes are high and the language practices are becoming more and more abnormal.

It should be noted that Ivorian youth are professionally very active. Thus, SMS language has spread to other social environments, including the professional sphere through professional emails. Note, for example, the frequent use of "S1crmt *(Sincèrement)*", "Amclt *(Amicalement)*", "fdlt *(fidèlement)*", referring to the following polite phrases: "Sincerely", "Friendly", and "Faithfully". This use reveals how SMS writing has once again affected the social system. While they are more common in students' copies, the impact on the administrative system is imminent alert to the lexico-syntactic functioning of SMS language forms. So what linguistic heritage will we leave to future generations?

7. The Functioning of Lexico-Syntactic Encodings of SMS Language Forms

To study the lexico-syntactic functioning of SMS is to try to describe the characteristics of the resulting codes and language forms, based on linguistic deviations, social differentiation between SMS users and those who respect the standard. But by still trying to understand the possible meanings of these scriptural practices likely to create a new lexicon, reflecting a morphosyntactic ambiguity.

However, it is not surprising to find SMS exchanges like the ones below:

« Jst savwr cmt tu vas é oci te 10r merc6 bcp pr le fè ke tuè pens @ mw. P8ske G v1 2m1 voir la fami g tapeleré. Bne jrné é on se vera 12c4» (100 characters)

(A student in Master 1, Lettres Modernes, from Felix Houphouet-Boigny University)

« *Juste savoir comment tu vas, et aussi te dire merci beaucoup pour le fait que tu aies pensé à moi. Puisque je viens demain voir la famille, je t'appellerai. Bonne journée et on se verra un de ces quatre»*.

"Just to know how you are, and also to say thank you very much for the fact that you thought of me. Since I'm coming to see the family tomorrow, I'll call you. Have a good day and I'll see you around".

A very particular graphic style whose construction deviates from all spelling and linguistic norms:
1) SMS : 10 mw kan cpte-tu toqp du bb ? On 10rè ke xa t1teres pas G ne vè pas en resté là, cè oci ton pbl, dc J tapel 2m1 pour ke tu me diz ceke tu en pens. A+

2) SMS : 7ané jè tro 2souci jpe pa mamuzé avc mè étud fo Kjail en cour jte fè sign ok bizooox jpens atw
1. « *Dis-moi quand comptes-tu t'occuper du bébé ? On dirait que ça ne t'intéresse pas. Je ne vais pas en rester là, c'est aussi ton problème, donc je t'appelle demain pour que tu me dises ce que tu en penses. A plus.* »
2. « *Cette année j'ai trop de soucis je ne peux pas m'amuser avec mes études, il faut que j'aille en cours je te fais signe ok ? Bisou je pense à toi.* »

1) "Tell me when you plan to take care of the baby? You don't seem to be interested. I'm not going to stop there, it's also your problem, so I'll call you tomorrow to let you tell me what you think. See you later. »
2) "This year I have too many worries I can't have fun with my studies, I have to go to class I'll let you know, okay? Kiss, I think of you".

We prefer to keep silent about the origin of these two SMS messages.

This graphic style, "scrapped" as Rémi Bové (2005) calls it with a combination of letters, numbers and other graphic signs, is none other than the phonetization of the standard spelling of the language. And it is this incongruous writing, which has no linguistic characteristics that young Ivorians are fond of. It influences the form and/or meaning of enunciative speech, making it difficult to distinguish linguistic elements. This scriptural atypism raises a real sociolinguistic problem whose magnitude of impact calls for all linguistic consciences. Because it creates instability in the communication process. We say that such a situation is even less of a threat to present generations than to future generations, to the acquisition of standard spelling.

8. Conclusion

In the modern and problematic written communication relationship of the scriptural norm in a French-speaking Africa at the technological juncture, the question of SMS is both a relevant research subject in the rehabilitation of the principle of generational transfer and an instrument for measuring the evolution of writing. As a research subject, electronic communication by SMS makes it possible to understand the ideological motivations of Ivorian youth who seem to have an "addictive" attitude towards SMS. By hiding behind this very different emerging graphy, they mask their dysorthographia, which inevitably leads, if nothing is done, to the production of a future "hyper-social" generation, but linguistically at a discount. As a measuring instrument, SMS writing seems to be the new record for written form that language has never been able to represent graphically per second, thus imposing new morphosyntactic postures that deviate from all linguistic norms.Our key implication for an inclusive approach, a common vision of SMS and writing is that users do not lose their human and linguistic identity in the face of the telephone machine.

There is certainly one thing: SMS will not disappear. We must therefore explore opportunities for mobile-phone assisted literacy and redirect risks and consequences to make good use of them.

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