Orthographic Analysis of Social Media Discourse: The Case of WhatsApp Messages of Undergraduate Students at the National University of Lesotho

Maboleba Kolobe & Beatrice Ekanjume
bekanjume@gmail.com
Faculty of Humanities, National University of Lesotho, LESOTHO

Abstract

This paper examined the orthography of words used by the National University of Lesotho undergraduate students on WhatsApp. Although language is regarded as a coherent and homogeneous system, it can also be studied in its variations across time and space and how it is actually used in social interaction. Youth immersion in the use of social media has successfully made the presence of the digital era to be felt not only in social life but also in communicative competencies. This paper recognised the youth linguistic creativity as a concept that characterised nomenclature of spelling conventions observed on social media. Using voluntary participatory approach, data was collected from undergraduate students majoring in English at the University who volunteered to share their WhatsApp posts for the purpose of this study. Data revealed that youths' social media discourse featured different orthographic representations as a result of accent stylisation, substitution, acronym, hybrid, clipping, coalescence, onomatopoeic spellings and deletions. The paper concluded that youth social media discourse deviates from conventional spellings, and thus serves as a linguistic innovation from the part of the youths. It further concluded that social media discourse is a true reflection of language diversity in this digital era especially with regards to the language of the youth globally.

Introduction

The internet is an electronic medium of communication which emerged into new communication platforms. As technology medium evolves, various labels are used to refer to language used in the medium such as e-discourse, e-sentence, netspeak, netlinguistics, language online, computer-mediated-communication language (Valentini et al., 2016;

Crystal, 2008; Tabe, 2018; Nisa & Subiyanto, 2016; Verheijen, 2016). According to Adesanmi and Ekanjume-Ilongo (2019), the twenty-first century has witnessed social media discourse becoming part and parcel of our daily communication. The authors go on to say that social media can therefore be described as a vibrant linguistic platform where various classes of people converge daily to communicate with one another on all issues bothering themselves personally and the macro societies in which they live. This paper highlights a necessary recognition of social media discourse as true reflection of language diversity in this digital era especially in the context of youths across the globe. This is more so when one looks at the spelling conventions that come with this kind of discourse. However, Stevenson et al. (2009) observe that language change especially vocabulary change is considered socially disadvantageous due to the fact that some people react negatively towards words that are unfamiliar to them and/or words that show unconventional spellings. This makes them think the language is deteriorating and becoming functionally disadvantageous because it may result in an ineffective communication. On the other side of the coin, for some people, social media platforms have reflected creativity in the language of the internet and this is the stance taken by this study. Seemingly, Plag (2018) supports evolving of vocabulary on any platform by saying that it is necessary for a language to develop so as to fulfil purposes of labelling things, expressing attitudes and re-categorising syntactic operations.

This paper examined different word spellings which feature in social media platforms used by the youths in Lesotho. Its main focus was to identify various spellings that characterise the language of the internet used by the Basotho youths who are studying at undergraduate level. Social media is defined by KhosraviNik (2017) as spaces that are digitally made easy, while Barton and Lee (2013, p. 3) employ the phrase "textually mediated online spaces" to define the concept. In the same light, these authors purport that social media is used to connect the younger generation with one another, based on common interests, goals and even values. Based on this description, the researchers believe that the representation of

language by this particular group of people is unique to them and intended to connect them as they belong to the same generation and have same interests.

Furthermore, the paper aligned with Dahlgren's (2005) statement that social media interactions are conversational; therefore, its users may identify with one another easily on daily basis if they share similar views. This was found to be the case with participants in this study. WhatsApp has become an easily accessible social media tool used by tertiary students to communicate on daily basis. However, Stæhr (2014) argues that language on social media is often an unexplored regular part of people's everyday encounters even though there is a lot of rich data that can be used to understand the world and its people better. Based on this, the aim of this paper was to tap on this less explored area of language by examining the various spelling representations of words used by Basotho undergraduate students on social media, particularly on WhatsApp, at the National University of Lesotho (NUL). The study hypothesised that the increase in the number of people using the social media has been influential on the language used by the youths hence they strive to adjust their language and its orthography to suit the innovative media. In order to identify the different orthographic processes used by these Basotho youths when interacting in written form on social media, the paper was guided primarily by Crystal's stylistic feature of written language (Crystal, 2001) and other previous writings on similar concepts as cited inside this study. This was also necessitated by an observation made by Crowley and Heyer (2016) that social media changes the approach of communication skills, especially writing skill, as it challenges spelling conventions of a language.

Since communication marks existence of human kind, it is imperative to study it in its different dimensions as an attempt to create a wholesome comprehension of human interactions. This paper, in particular, attempted to contribute towards this educative growth of language by bringing forth a realisation of orthographic features employed by Basotho youths at tertiary in their daily interactions on social media. The questions in

mind are whether words used by Basotho youths differ in spelling from Standard English spellings and can this creativity be embraced as language growth. It may further be rhetorically asked whether these unconventional spellings can distort the intended meanings of such words. Crowley and Heyer (2016) declare that of the four skills of language, writing transforms what could have been heard as spoken language to what can be seen and/or read; as a result, a system that represents spoken language in a written form must be designed particularly for that purpose. As intended by this paper, indeed, there is a need to identify and establish all intricacies of written language in its various forms and contexts inclusive of social media.

Though research on the language used on social media is not extensive in the Basotho literature, there is a growing interest towards relationships between social media and human interaction and the impact of the language that they use. This observation is corroborated by Roelofse (2013) that introduction of new literacies found in new computer-mediated communication influences the way in which second language speakers perceive the world. He adds that the frequency that these speakers have with these social media practicalities also impacts literary practices and the way they think more so because social media is regarded as a dialogue and a manner in which people engage with one another. Similarly, Adesanmi and Ekanjume-Ilongo (2019) purport that through the expansion of technology and digital media, the boundaries between online and offline discourses are becoming increasingly blurred and smooth, thereby aiding in the transfer of information. The authors argue that this situation has allowed new forms and uses of language to emerge for successful message delivery to all groups of people. Drawing from the sentiments of the above authors, the present study highlights alterations or dynamics in written communication brought about by transformations in electronic media communication like WhatsApp, which according to Adesanmi and Ekanjume-Ilongo (2019, p. 40), is described as a messenger application intended for smartphones. The authors explain that WhatsApp uses the Internet to send text messages, images, audio or video, thus fulfilling the social aspects of exchanging information and ideas, and thereby

operating as one of many text messaging services available. They add that as a messaging platform, WhatsApp is very popular with teenagers and youths, generally because of features like group chatting, voice messages, audio and video calling and location sharing.

However, this paper cannot ignore the counter argument on the social media language. Seemingly, prescriptive language users think that social media is 'spoiling the language of the youth' as it does not help them to write words correctly or interact in grammatically correct English. This is because social media discourse is noted to have more structural reductions, non-standard orthography, and instances of linguistic innovation. Some critics of social media style think that the language use in these platforms contain a lot of spelling and grammatical errors, as well as colloquial expressions. For instance, Verheijen (2016, p. 76) states that communication that youth use via new media or social media often diverges from the 'official' spelling and grammar rules of the standard language. He states that youth tend to use language anyhow since according to them computer-mediated communication is 'playful, informal and cool.' He goes further to characterise communication via social media as deviating from the standard language in that it highly regards effectiveness and speed as more important than correctness. This is so because it has limited space for messages hence correctness is not a significant issue. It is also notable that it features words that are typed as pronounced. People have developed a new structure of texting while connecting in social networks globally. They may use informal and less correct language, more of a dialect, acronyms, spelling mistakes and also emoticons in their daily interaction. Nonetheless, the primary focus of this study centred around language creativity reflected on the WhatsApp posts written by undergraduate students at the National University of Lesotho.

This paper has reviewed few studies which form a base for the subject under study. There has been a clear indication of interest by researchers from elsewhere on the language of the internet in other places beyond Lesotho. For example, Yuan (2018) explored how social network site used to share, disseminate or pick up information in China construct identity.

Yuan interviewed ten undergraduate students who agreed to volunteer their social media posts as his research subjects. His study focused on language use in the status updates and personal profiles of the ten respondents. The findings of Yuan's study show a variety of strategies that students use to construct online identities such as visual, enumerative, narrative and self-labelling practices and different forms of internet language. One other interesting discovery Yuan made was that internet users tend to use more implicit identity claims. They strategically use language to build situation-appropriate multiple identities.

Another related study was carried out by Lyddy et al. (2014). In their study of students' text messages, these researchers analytically studied textual characteristics of 139 Irish undergraduate students' text messages. Carrington (2004) refers to text language as squeeze-text since words may be contracted to the minimum syllable length by often removing part or parts. In support of Carrington's statement, Crystal (2008) in Farina and Lyddy (2011) notes that the most striking feature of text messaging is the combination of standard and non-standard forms of language. Similarly, Lyddy et al.'s (2014) study revealed that students' text messages feature characteristics such as abbreviations, letter and number homophones, contractions and non-conventional spellings.

In addition, Sboev (2016) studied principal sources of new words and expressions in the Chinese internet language. His study revealed that Chinese internet language is derived from different dialect groups. Web-users manipulate these dialect-originated words into their everyday use of language as it is also hypothesised by the present study. According to Sboev (2016), new words and expressions in Chinese internet language equally come from archaic characters which would be reemployed in the language with new meanings. In addition, Sboev (ibid) states that semantic transfer was also found to be one other attributive source of new words in Chinese internet language. It would be interesting to know what characterises social media discourse among the Basotho youth.

Ratih and Gusdian (2018) also investigated processes of word-formation on

Oxford English Dictionary (OED) online with a particular interest on identifying the most productive processes. Their search demonstrated conventional processes such as affixation, folk etymology, compounding, abbreviation, acronyms, borrowing, blending, clipping and back formation. Besides these, they also identified combination of word-formation processes such as compounding + affixation, blending + clipping, just to mention a few.

In the same light, Kilyeni (2014) explored social media terminology in English. Her study centred on the status of terms which have migrated into general language and are used in everyday communication which she referred to as buzzwords. She further discussed word-formation patterns relating to buzzword. Kilyeni (ibid) highlighted that terminology is crucial whenever and wherever domain specific information and knowledge is generated and passed on to carry out a specific purpose. She found out that many social media terms in English are formed through terminologisation which is a process by which a general word is given a specific meaning depending on the specialised field it is used in (Kilyeni, 2014, p. 434). The author explained that in terminologisation, the word acquires the status and the characteristics of that term used in a specialised field. Another word-formation pattern identified by the author is conversion. This is where there is a functional shift of a word from one lexical category to another without any transformation in the existing term; hence, another term for conversion is zero derivation. The results revealed that social media terms are also a result of this process. The last word-formation process identified by Kilyeni (ibid) is derivation. Some social media terms are formed from addition of affixes to an existing word. The author concluded that terms used in social media should be considered specialised terms expressing social networking concepts. Based on this conclusion, the present study argued that Basotho youth social media discourse is likely to feature specialised orthographic presentation of words.

More literature to provide grounding for this study is drawn from Mustafa et al. (2015). The authors investigated the most common word-formation processes among Malaysian

Facebook users and identified causes for employing such processes. Results show conventional word-formation processes including clipping, abbreviations, acronyms, blending and use of emoticons. Zappavigna (2012) substantiates that emoticons are not used only to emphasise or clarify our feelings but also to soften an undesirable tone in the same way that smiles do in daily life. This makes language not only transmitter of information but also of emotions. Similarly, the present study explores the presentation of words used on social media by analysing WhatsApp messages by undergraduate Basotho youth studying at the National University of Lesotho. It is evident that the study is also interested in how these words are formed.

Furthermore, the present study draws on the study conducted by Tabe (2018) who examined how Cameroonians form words in social media contexts. The author explored the morphological processes that Cameroonians adopt and the extent to which these word-formation processes occur in the platforms of e-mail, Facebook, and Yahoo Messenger. Analysis of 230 informal e-mails and chats revealed that Cameroonians espouse and alter some of the English word-formation mechanisms to suit the context of social media. The following morphological processes were found in the data: accent stylisations, clipping, borrowing, neologisms, clitics, onomatopoeia, substitution, abbreviations, compounding, conversion, inflection, reduplication, hybrid, blending, slang, and smileys.

According to Tabe (ibid), most Cameroonians tend to form words on the social platforms from the way the words are pronounced in English or Cameroonian English rather than the literal spellings of the words. He argues that the deviation from the Standard British English (SBE) spellings to Cameroonian English (CamE) pronunciation structures is a new word formation mechanism aimed at not only abridging the words, but also simplifying the complicated English spelling system. In support of his observations concerning language used on social platforms, Tagliamonte & Denis (2008) highlight the characteristics of instant message language of teenagers. They found out that teenagers make use of short forms, abbreviations, misspellings slang,

numeric forms and emotional language in social discourse. It was evident from their study that instant message discourse reflects heterogeneous, dynamic and on-going processes of linguistic changes. The expectation is that this could be the case for Basotho youth.

Similarly, Farina and Lyddy (2011) identified emoticons, typographic symbols, acronyms, and initialisms as features of text messages. Contrarily for them, non-standard language accounts for a minority of words in text messages, with the majority of message content following conventional forms.

Drawing on this existing research from elsewhere, the present study is interested in how linguistically innovative undergraduate Basotho youths are on social media. Existing literature demonstrates that terms may be formed from using existing linguistic resources (Sager, 1997, p. 25). The author explains that in this process, new terms are created through terminologisation which is a concept that incorporates 'trans-disciplinary borrowing, conversion and semantic transfer within a special language.' Again, Sager (ibid) mentions that new terms are formed by modifying existing linguistic resources following conventional patterns of word formation such as derivation, compounding and others. Another process is said to be creating new linguistic entities whereby foreign language terms are adapted into the language in question. It is, therefore, worth establishing how Basotho youths manipulate the richness of language system to interact with one another on social media and their effect of language use of social media platforms.

Methodology

The study used a voluntary participatory approach to investigate orthography of social media discourse. Undergraduate students' WhatsApp posts were used as the source of data. This was found suitable as the commonly used platform by students at the National University of Lesotho. Documentation was used as data collection method. The researchers created a temporary WhatsApp group and shared it with students majoring in English courses in their 2nd and 4th years of

study totalling to 50 participants. The students shared old posts that they sent to their contacts. Both the sender and recipient identities were hidden for they were not significant for the purpose of this study. The researchers compiled snippets of posts which featured unconventional spelling of words. This means that posts which were written in Standard English were not included in the sample; therefore, the documentation resulted in 42 posts.

The analysis of the collected data was underpinned by the spatialisation principles of time, space and social relations between the subjects of this study talked to by Mosco (1996). In the words of Mosco (p.173), the theory considers measures taken by 'the players' to overcome the limitations of space and time in their everyday interactions. In the context of this study, the students were considered as a community that interacts with other people on daily basis. Despite their busy study schedules, they still have to communicate; therefore, they are likely to apply techniques that would not sacrifice their core business of studying while at the same time, they could still relate with the world. This theory provides awareness that 'the players, their activities and environments, and their motives and effects' (Mosco, 1996, p. 173) are forces that influence communication styles. In the context of this study, the different spelling conventions which characterise the language used by Basotho youth in social media discourse are influenced by the limited time and space that they have. However, the different spellings do not seem to distort their communication purpose, in fact they are close to 'normal' because there is an on-going understanding between the youth and their culture.

The study then applied textual analysis to identify the unconventional spellings of words and categorised them under specific morphological operations. The analysis showcased contextualised use of language by Basotho youths who share same education background. The language items that they use were transformed from standard language to their own lingua franca in the manner that is understood amongst them, though not restricted to them only. It is easy to argue that

this state of language transformation is influenced by the fact that language on social media is significantly influenced by constraints of space and time. It is true that since the time of the youths is shared between their studies and everything else, it is not easy for them to leisure on the kind of writing where they would observe all grammatical rules of Standard English; therefore, they adapted means of overcoming the constraint of time. The section below discusses the findings of this study.

Results and Discussion

Data from the selected WhatsApp posts collected from Basotho undergraduate students studying English at the National University of Lesotho revealed the following orthographic features of social media discourse:

Accent stylisation

The social media language of undergraduate students at the National University of Lesotho reflects a lot of words written as they are pronounced which is what Lyddy et al. (2014) and Tabe (2018) refer to as accent stylisation. Accent stylisation means that 'a word is spelled as it is pronounced in casual speech' (Lyddy et al., 2014, p. 549). For instance, the table below demonstrates words like dunno meaning don't know. The two phrases sound or are even pronounced the same but the correct spelling is that of the latter. In a casual speech, the letter 't' in don't is even silent hence the WhatsApp orthography in this case does not have that consonant. Moreover, linguists explain stylisation as a situation where language users would produce particular style that lie beyond their regular linguistic repertoires or beyond what is conventional in the situation at hand, thus, they style their speech. Lyddy et al. (ibid.) state that language users identify with a general quality of language use contemporary to the era in which they live. In the same way, the findings of the present study are associated with this group of Basotho youths. Data showed that these Basotho youths write words as they pronounce them as in going to school 'sux' instead of going to school 'sucks' because of the similar sound carried by these two

language items. It is believed that if a similar study is conducted in the future, the results may be different as the participants will be different in space and time. Additionally, in stylisation, language users acquire, cultivate identity, and act upon different ways of speaking and writing. In a nutshell, stylisation is about knowing deployment of culturally familiar styles and identities. The following are more examples of accent stylisation characterising Basotho social media discourse together with their standard forms of English.

Table 1. Accent Stylisation

WhatsApp orthography	**Standard orthography**
Errrwhere	*everywhere*
*Just got **outta** class*	*Just got **out of** class*
***Dunno** what happened but suddenly I don't feel so good*	***Don't know** what happened but suddenly I don't feel so good*
***Dis** day is, it ws boring*	***This** day is, it was boring*
*Not goin 2 **xul** is fun, bt sometimes it's boring*	*Not going to **school** is fun, but sometimes it's boring*
*School **sux** and all but*	*School **sucks** and all but*
*Grooving al **9t** wit **ma** sis & **cazin***	*Grooving all **night** with **my** sister & **cousin***
*Visiting my garden **dis afdanun***	*Visiting my garden **this afternoon***
*Everybody is **krazy***	*Everybody is **crazy***
*I'm not proud but **yasss***	*I'm not proud but **yes***

The above examples align with Farina and Lyddy's (2011) observation that accent stylisation follows legitimate letter-sound correspondences in a language. This is illustrated by instances of dis afdanun for this afternoon, krazy for crazy as examples of Basotho social media discourse; therefore, Basotho youths write words on social media as they are pronounced. This kind of writing is associated with youths as stated by Plester et al. (2008, p. 139) that accent stylisations as 'youth code' which is also used to inject humour in conversation.

Acronym

Basotho youth social media discourse also showed instances of acronyms. Many words happened to be abbreviated into shorter forms in one way or another. In this paper, acronyms are understood from non-morphematic word-formation approach detailed in Fandrych (2004). Fandrych explains that non-morphematic word-formation uses at least one element that is not a morpheme such as a splinter, part of a syllable, an initial letter, a number or a letter (p.18). For example, in some cases, acronyms will be realised where vowels are eliminated in some one-syllabic words, such as in k for ok, u for you, while in other cases an acronym will be a result of some other mechanism as in the instance of y for why reflected in the social media discourse of Basotho youth. This means that acronyms can be realised in various forms as illustrated in the table below.

Table 2. Acronym

WhatsApp orthography	*Standard orthography*
hud	*How you doing?*
k	*ok*
lib	*Lying in bed*
*Das r **poa***	*That's our **plan of action***
***Y** is lv so hrd on the hrt??? **Y** does it mk u hpy then tear u aprt **y** god???**y** do bys mxm*	***Why** is love so hard on the heart??? **Why** does it make you happy then tear you apart **why** god???**why** do boys mxm (exclamation)*
*Sometyms **u** jst hve 2 tel de truth! If **u** dnk lyk smel jst tel thm en stop making thm fools thnkin thy have smel who lyks thm lyk **u**!!!......*	*Sometimes **you** just have to tell the truth! If **you** don't like someone, just tell them and stop making them fools thinking they have someone one who likes them like **you**!!!......*

It is significant to note that acronyms can be spelled as one ordinary word. In most cases, the resulting words are formed from first letters of several words. Instances of such acronyms featured in Basotho social media discourse such as Das r 'poa' instead of That's our 'plan of action.' As a principle of spatialisation, the phrase plan of action has been contracted to just a three-letter language item poa which now occupies a smaller space in social media orthographical representation and also takes a shorter time to write. This realisation is in agreement with Carrington (2004) that social media text is squeeze-text since words may be contracted to the minimum syllable length by often removing some letters. Acronyms are presented in different recognisable forms hence a declaration by Stockwell and Minkova (2001, p. 7) that 'if the resulting word is pronounced like any other word, it is a true acronym.'

Data for this study revealed flexibility in acronimisation as it is not transparently consistent which letters are dropped and which ones stay, whether letters should be capitalised or in small case. This means that in the social media discourse of youths, there is freedom in deciding which initial letters of a phrase go and which ones stay in a newly

formed word as it is the case with hud for how are you doing. Nevertheless, the present paper evidences a steady observation of acronyms popularity in the youths' social media discourse. This is supported by Fandrych (2004) who says that acronyms have become increasingly productive due to the use of computers and electronic communication.

Substitution of numbers for letters

The use of numbers instead of words was recurrent in the data under study. Farina and Lyddy (2011) refer to this orthographic representation as substitution or phonetic reductions. Basotho youth social media discourse revealed at least two variations of this style of writing. For example, it featured substitution instances such as tym for time. Another type of substitution shown by this study which is also explained by Verheijen (2016) is alphanumeric homophone. This is explained by Verheijen as substitution of part of a word by phonologically resembling, an identical letter or number as in 2 for to and 4 for for/four. The findings in this study showed instances of substitution done by Basotho youth on social media discourse.

Table 3. Substitution

WhatsApp orthography	Standard orthography
Sometyms *u jst hve **2** tel de truth! If u dnk lyk smel jst tel thm en stop making thm fools thnkin thy have smel who lyks thm lyk u!!!.....*	***Sometimes*** *you just have **to** tell the truth! If you don't like someone, just tell them and stop making them fools thinking they have someone who likes them like you!!!.....*
*Not goin **2** xul is fun, bt sometimes it's boring*	*Not going **to** school is fun, but sometimes it's boring*
*My plans **4** de day are nt wrkin out! Let's jst hope as tym goes it will work!!*	*My plans **for** the day are not workin out! Let's just hope as time goes it will work!!*
*I dnt hav tm **2** hate pple who hate me bcoz i m **2** busy lving pple who lv me nd i m bsy living my life whl u ar bsy*	*I don't have time **to** hate people who hate me because I'm **too** busy loving people who love me and I'm busy living my life while you are busy*

What is of significance to mark in this orthographic representation as given by Farina and Lyddy (2011) is recognition of the pronunciation of the individual letter or number over the overall appearance of a homophone. Though data showed few instances of changing numbers for words; it is still a significant observation because it is one of the contemporary language changes that

have emerged with the advent of the social networking platforms.

Inanity

Another observation on how Basotho youth write words is inanity. According to Farina and Lyddy (2011), inanity is about miscellaneous spelling deviations. These also featured in the social media discourse used by

Basotho youth. This finding is supported by KSE Academy (2022) who defines such this orthographic feature as creative re-spelling. According to him, creative re-spelling happens whereby a word is spelled in a different way so as to make it more practical, eye-catching, or to fulfil some particular purpose. This paper argues that despite their knowledge of English orthography, the youths preferred to write their language in a creative way that suits their communicative purpose. Table 4 below shows instances of inanity.

Table 4. Inanity

WhatsApp orthography	Standard orthography
I mis u guyz 'espciali' my5 besties…	I miss you guys especially my five besties…
So 'whatchu' up to?	So what are you up to?

Clipping

Data also showed clipping instances in the language used by Basotho youth on social media. Clipping is the reduction of a word to one of its parts. It is a process whereby one or more syllables of a polysyllabic word are eliminated so that the word becomes shorter (O'Grady & Archibald, 2015). Fandrych (2004) affirms that clipping is not a new word-formation concept in English, but it has been very productive in technologically-mediated backgrounds, resulting to numerous innovative terminologies. Some proper nouns are also shortened to make them appear new and appealing. Basotho youth social media discourse also featured instances of clipping as shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Clipping

WhatsApp orthography	Standard orthography
*I'll **prolly** swing by later*	*I'll **probably** swing by later*
***Prolly** hangover marr its intense*	***Probably** hangover but it's intense*
*Hy guyz, my class dnt mis me too much **m** still alive **m** still ther **m** nt goin i will still bck whn **m** ready, ryt nw **m** painin like hell! Youls must help with prayer thn myb i myt cm back sooner thn expecr!!!! I mix u guyz espciali my5 besties…*	*Hey guys, my class don't miss me too much. I **am** still alive, I **am** still there, I **am** not gone. I will still be back when I **am** ready. Right now I **am** in pain like hell! You all must help with prayer then maybe I might come back sooner than expected!!!! I miss you guys especially my besties…*
*We **prolly** share some*	*We **probably** share some*
*Grooving al 9it wit ma **sis** & cazin mnate waya_waya*	*Grooving all night with my **sister** & cousin fun all the way*

Poetic Language

Findings for this study also revealed that Basotho youth form words which reflect poetic features on social media. This is corroborated by KSE Academy (2022) that sometimes one's preference of writing is to make the writing practical and eye-catching. The below text demonstrates a mixture of rhyming and repetition which are usually features of poetic language.

> *Y is lv so hrd on the hrt??? Y does it mk u hpy then tear u aprt y god???y do bys…mxm (exclamation). Why is love so hard on the heart??? Why does it make you happy then tear you apart why god???why do boys… mxm*

Deletion

Data from the undergraduate students at NUL also featured words which have undergone deletion of either a vowel or a consonant. The examples include rn for run and doin for doing. Deletion is a form of shortening where speakers delete some letters in a word. The following are instances of deletion that characterise Basotho youth social media discourse.

Table 6. Deletion

WhatsApp orthography	Standard orthography
rn	*run*
hy	hey
*Hy guyz, my class **dnt mis** me too much m still alive m still **ther** m **nt goin** i will still **bck whn** m ready, ryt nw m **painin** like hell! You **ls** must help with prayer **thn myb** i myt **cm** back sooner **thn** expecr!!!! I **mis** u guyz espciali my5 besties…*	*Hey guys, my class **don't miss** me too much I am still alive, I am still **there**. I a**m not going**, I will still be **back when** I am ready, Right **now** I am **paining** like hell! You **also** must help with prayer **then maybe** i might **come** back sooner **than** expected!!!! I **miss** u guys espcially my five besties…*
*So whatch **doin** right*	*So what are you **doing** right*
*Look me in the **fc**. i **wnt** lie u **hv** gone far enough stop being unjust. Don't condemn me. I m in the ryt, but **thnk** i m lying, u **thnk** i **cnt tl** ryt 4rm **wrng***	*Look me in the **face**. I **won't** lie you **have** gone far enough stop being unjust. Don't condemn me. I am in the right, but **think** I'm lying, you **think** I **can't tell** right from **wrong***
*I **dnt hav tm** 2 hate **pple** who hate me bcoz i m 2 busy **lving pple** who **lv** me **nd** i m **bsy** living my life **whl** u ar **bsy***	*I **don't have time** to hate **people** who hate me because I am too busy **loving people** who **love** me **and** I am **busy** living my life **while** you **are busy***
*Y is **lv** so **hrd** on the **hrt**??? Y does it **mk** u **hpy** then tear u **aprt** y god???y do **bys** mxm*	*Why is **love** so **hard** on the **heart**??? Why does it **make** you **happy** then tear you **apart** Why god??? Why do **boys** mxm (exclamation)*

Coalescence

According to Lyddy et al. (2014), coalescence is a wide spread phenomenon in which two distinct sounds blend together to produce a single sound, which is an amalgam of the two original sounds. The authors add that coalescence is particularly frequent with vowels, and that a very common example is the coalescence of a diphthong such as /ai/ or /au/ to a single vowel /e/ or /o/ respectively. The data collected from the WhatsApp messages of the Basotho youth in this study revealed the amalgamation or coalescence of some sounds as shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Coalescence

WhatsApp orthography	Standard orthography
Ryt	Right
***Sometyms** (sometimes)u jst hve 2 tel de truth! If u dnk **lyk** (like) smel jst tel thm en stop making thm fools thnkin thy have smel who **lyks** (likes) thm **lyk** (like) u!!!.....*	***Sometimes** you just have to tell the truth! If you don't **like** someone, just tell them and stop making them fools thinking they have someone one who **likes** them **like** you!!!.....*
Gud nyt/*9t*	Good night

Hybrid

Data also demonstrated instances of hybrid in Basotho youth social media discourse. Words that fall under this classification were a result of more than one morphological operation. The commonly found hybrid was deletion coupled with other morphological operations. For instance, data featured a combination of deletion, coalescence and compounding as in *wassup*. This construction is formed from a Standard English sentence written as *what is up*. The youths have preferred to shorten this sentence by deleting all letters after the letter *w* and joining the free morpheme *up* with the retained part. There was also deletion and coalescence instantiated by *aryt* for *alright*. Tertiary students tend to delete letters and amalgamate sounds to produce written forms of their preference as shown in Table 8. Sometimes, the deletion was coupled with substitution or clipping as in *sme1* for *someone*

and *9t* for *night.* Further examples of hybrid are shown in the table below.

Table 8. Hybrid

Types of hybrid	WhatsApp orthography	Standard orthography
Deletion, coalescence and compounding	*Wassup*	What is up
Deletion and coalescence	*Aryt*	Alright
Deletion and substitution	*Sometyms u jst hve 2 tel de truth! If u dnk lyk smel jst tel thm en stop making thm fools thnkin thy have smel who lyks thm lyk u!!!.....*	Sometimes you just have to tell the truth! If you don't like someone, just tell them and stop making them fools thinking they have someone one who likes them like you!!!.....
Deletion and clipping	*Grooving al 9it (night) wit ma sis & cazin mnate waya_waya*	Grooving all night with my sister and cousin fun all the way

Generally, the data analysed above showed that students apply various yet recognisable features which convey their messages as intended. As indicated by Crystal (2008), social media discourse is complete and sufficient on its own right. Furthermore, Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) assert that the use of non-standard linguistic forms found in the language used by youths as it is the case with this study, reflects that the youths possess a skilled command of language and make use of the available linguistic systems. Furthermore, instances of different orthographic representations shown in this study are agreeable to Songxaba and Sincuba's (2019) declaration that language is a systematic means of expressing ideas by means of signs or marks hence people use language to share what they know or feel with others. Against this backdrop, this study argues that the language of the youths indicates creativity in the language use and it is sensitive to space and time as advocated by Mosco's (1996) principles of spatialisation. Basotho social media discourse is no exception to this.

Conclusion

This paper set out to explore how social media discourse is presented by Basotho youth at tertiary. Data showed that Basotho youth are creative in their communication even though they still use conventional morphological operations popular in computer-mediated-communication studies (Lyddy et al., 2014; Farina & Lyddy, 2011;

Fandrych, 2004) to mention a few. Data indicated orthographic features of accent stylisation, acronym in different forms including words pronounced letter by letter and one-word acronym. Data also showed instances of hybrid which included combinations of deletion + coalescence, accent stylisation + clipping and deletion + substitution. Inanity and poetic language also marked Basotho youth social media discourse. Based on the findings, this study concludes that the language of the youths is characterised by various orthographic features which enable them to save time and adapt in the world that they live in. It further concludes that the existence of social media platforms has led to a development of what can be termed as the specialised language of the youths.

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