

LOCALIZING GLOBAL TRENDS IN SMS TEXTING LANGUAGE AMONG STUDENTS IN GHANA AND TANZANIA

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The main motivation for the development of various strategies to represent written text in a concise way among mobile phone users all over the world is the need to communicate full messages in abridged forms in order to save time, energy and money. These alternative forms of words and phrases are especially employed by the youth. In this paper, the innovative adaptation of global SMS texting trends in the form of intricate abbreviation and contraction of words and phrases in Kiswahili in Tanzania is examined and compared with trends in SMS texting language in English in Ghana. Using empirical data made up of SMS texts from students of the University of Dar es Salaam and University of Ghana, localized as well as convergent and divergent trends and the socio-pragmatic motivations of the phenomena are analysed and discussed.

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to contribute to the discourse on SMS texting language by examining the extent to which global trends in SMS texting have been adapted in innovative ways to the local environment among the youth (the most ardent users of SMS texts) in Tanzania and Ghana. Localized as well as convergent and divergent trends in SMS texting language among students are explored using empirical data made up of SMS texts from students of the University of Dar es Salaam (UDS) and University of Ghana (UG). The rationale for opting for SMS texts from university students as data is explained in the section on methodology and data.

In the literature, numerous studies on SMS texts and other computer mediated communication have been conducted from various perspectives. Al Kathib & Sabbah (2008) and Chiad (2008) undertake structural and linguistic analyses of SMS Text. Ling (2005) discusses gender differences in the use of SMS text among Norwegians. Barasa & Mous (2009) undertake to highlight the oral and written interface in SMS text among the youth in Kenya. They demonstrate that SMS is a “type of new technological communication that has brought with it a different form of language use, which breaks away from the norm or standard language as we know it and has led to a form of new orthography, specifically on spelling and punctuation”. Grace et al. (2012) compare Australian and Canadian students’ use of text messaging language. They describe the shortening strategies as contractive and elongation as expressive and refer to this kind of texting language as Textism. Others such as Shafie et al. (2010) and Aziz et al. (2013) examine the impact of SMS texts on academic writing.

Mutembei (2011) in his paper titled *Kukitandawazisha Kiswahili Kupitia Simu za Kiganjani: Tafakari kuhusu Isimujamii* ‘The Globalization of Kiswahili through Mobile Phones: A Socio-linguistic Contemplation’ (My translation) discusses the innovative use of shortening strategies in SMS text in Swahili among Tanzanian youths. He attributes the emergence of the mobile phone to globalization and refers to the resultant SMS texting language as a *Lugha Tandawazi* ‘globalized Language’.

In this study, I argue that the innovative adaptation of global SMS texting trends in the form of shortening of words and phrases as well as other strategies in Tanzania and in Ghana constitute localization. I compare how trends in global SMS texting language are localized by university students in Tanzania and Ghana. By global trends in SMS texting language, I refer particularly to the culture of shortening of words via the use of numeric homophones, letter homophones various forms of contractions; clippings and acronyms that has come to characterize SMS texting language in English which emerged from the United Kingdom and United states. Examples are *l8a* for ‘later’ *2moro* for ‘tomorrow’. Because many countries around the world have adopted English as their official language and medium of instruction (at various levels), it is regarded as a global language (Crystal 1997) and due to globalization, trends in fashion, advertising, that emerge in Europe and the USA, it gets adopted quickly by the rest of the world.

The term localization has been explained by Ho (2003: 2) as “How locality emerges in the context of a global culture and how global facts take local form”. The term is used here to refer to phenomena such as adapting a foreign concept to a local one such as the adaption of the Japanese sushi to Singapore environment by giving it a local twist or adapting a video game from a foreign language to a local one through translation to give it a local feel or association (Mangiron & O’Hagan 2006). For the purpose of this study, the term refers to the act of taking a global phenomenon and adapting it to a local environment.

SMS Texting Language

The primary purpose for the creation of SMS texting in the early 1990s (Crystal 2008) was to prompt users to voice messages on their phones as well as pass on weather forecasts and stock market information (Ling 2005). However, SMS has now become one of the main media for interpersonal communication globally, especially among the youth (Aziz et al. 2013, Al Khatib & Sabbah 2008, Ling 2005). Thurlow (2003) notes that “text-messaging is in fact yet another example of how the human need for social ... bends and ultimately co-opts technology to suit its own ends, regardless of any commercial ... ambition for the technology.”

In the early days of SMS texting, message length was limited to 160 characters (Crystal 2008, Ling 2005). If one exhausted the message limit, the recipient would only receive the first 160

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characters with a message reading ‘some text missing’. The sender had the option of sending a follow-on text to complete the message at an extra cost.

Today with the advancement of technology, although the limit for a text is still 160 characters, the sender is not restrained from sending more than 160 characters but is rather charged double or more depending on the number of characters that make up the message.

Although currently SMS texts cost very little, the culture of abbreviating words and phrases, is still very popular among the youth globally (Farina & Lyddy 2011, Ling 2005). This is because in today’s world where information is in abundance and time has become a rare commodity, the need to send messages across within the shortest possible time is one of the key motivations for carrying on with the tradition of abbreviation in SMS texting and even developing more sophisticated abbreviations and shortening strategies rather than the restriction on number of characters or cost. Of course among the youth, the desire to show a sense of belonging also accounts for the persistence of the abbreviation tradition. Even as many abbreviations of English words become global via the English speaking countries such as the USA and Europe, other languages such as Kiswahili and Arabic inspired by English have developed their own language specific abbreviations and other shortening strategies. In other words they have adopted the underlying principles that underpin abbreviations and shortenings from the USA and Europe and have adapted them to their writing systems. Crystal (2008) demonstrates how abbreviations and various shortening strategies are used in eleven languages including Chinese, Swedish, Portuguese and Spanish. In some post-colonial states where English is used as the official language and the medium of instruction in education, texting abbreviations tend to be localized, sometimes incorporating words and abbreviations from local languages as is the case in Ghana and Jordan (Al-Khatib & Sabbah 2008).

With the emergence of the smart phone, the mobile phone has become even more valuable and with it, new ways of saving time and energy in SMS texting and other social media platforms which involve interaction through written texts have become more exciting. The help-text tool is much easier to use and there is also the option of swiping the keyboard to form words instead of typing individual letters. The LCD displays of most smart phones are much bigger compared to the earlier models of mobile phones as noted in Ling (2005).

Indeed, they are designed to facilitate the use of the various mobile phone and other social media applications such as WhatsApp, Twitter, WeChat and other social media including SMS texting by making them more efficient and user-friendly. However, these interesting and handy features including emoticons have not been motivating enough to lead to a decline in the use of abbreviations in SMS texting language and other social media. If anything at all, the new technological features tend rather to consolidate the use of abbreviations since the smart phone

now stores all words created and stored by the user in its memory and brings them up when the help text tool is activated. It is also an established fact that the use of abbreviations is popular among the youth much more than the older generation (Aziz et al. 2013, Al Khatib & Sabbah 2008, Ling 2005, Mutembei 2011).

The culture of abbreviation has been in existence long before the invention of SMS and other social media applications that involve communication through written texts. Abbreviations such as RIP, RSVP, FYI, ASAP have been in use for many years. However the emergence of SMS texting and subsequently other social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Twitter has led to a drastic increase in the formulation and use of abbreviations and shortenings which are referred to in Grace et al. (2012) as “contractive” in contrast with “expressive”.

It must also be noted that especially in Africa, the mobile phone serves some special purposes which are distinct from the purposes they serve in Europe and America. In the first place, in many African countries the fixed line telephones are not reliable, hence the mobile phone has taken over their functions. Also today all over Africa, mobile money transfer has become a key function of mobile phone company as well as mobile phone users. This is a system where one can transfer money to people anywhere in the country without using the bank. Hahn & Kibora (2008) describe the utilization of only few of the available mobile phone technologies in Burkina Faso as cultural appropriation. According to them, “Cultural appropriation” explains how a globally circulating phenomenon like the mobile phone may receive specific usages and meanings.

In Ghana like in many other countries many middle aged people do not make use of SMS texting at all. On the other hand corporate bodies such as the telecommunication companies and financial institutions are increasingly utilizing more ICT means, including SMS texting for communicating with their customers. According to the Pew Research Center Report (2014: 5), “Overall, a median of 78% of mobile phone users across the 24 countries end texts, making it the most popular cell phone activity (other than making calls)”. The 24 countries used in the survey include Ghana and Kenya.

As pointed out by Barasa & Mous (2009), one characteristic of SMS text language is the oral nature of its language, apart from the various shortening strategies. Although the texts are written (typed), often they bear semblance to spoken (conversational) language. SMS, an electronic age technology illuminates the interface between orality and literacy, which Ong (1982) describes as second orality that is the conversion of what is oral into written text but maintaining its oral characteristics. This type of secondary orality is evident through repetitions, elongations and onomatopoeia in particularly the UG data.

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Linguistic Situations in Tanzania and Ghana

Both Ghana and Tanzania are highly multilingual post-colonial states who gained their independence from the United Kingdom.¹ However, they are very distinct in terms of their socio-linguistic situations. While Tanzania adopted a local/regional lingua franca, Swahili as both the National and the Official language, Ghana opted for English as its official language. Also, Tanzania adopted Swahili as the medium of instruction at the primary level of education while Ghana, over a long period, shuffled between English and one of the nine Ghanaian languages officially designated for use in education (see Dzahene-Quarshie & Moshi 2014).

Swahili had spread wide across East Africa prior to independence and it continued to develop thereafter. In Tanzania it still is the lingua franca used for daily communication in all spheres of society; at the bank, hospital, market, school etc. in spite of the fact that English becomes the medium of communication at the secondary and tertiary school levels. Over fifty newspapers are published in Swahili (Kihore 2004). Outside the classrooms students at the secondary and tertiary levels normally communicate in Swahili. For this reason, the medium of communication normally used for SMS texting among Tanzanians is Swahili. Ghana is described as a “typical post-colonial New English Second Language” country (Dako 2002: 53). In Ghana, no local language has been elevated to the status of national language yet. Although Akan² is the most widely spoken local lingua franca, English is the ultimate lingua franca for many Ghanaians. A common occurrence in most post-colonial states where English was promoted during the colonial period, is the development of Pidgin English a “simplified language ... which combines elements of several languages” (Crystal 1997: 11). In the case of Ghana a Pidgin English emerged distinct from the one that emerged in Nigeria. Ghanaian Pidgin English is usually used for communication among semi-literates. In Ghana and other African Countries urbanization has given rise to the emergence of varieties of languages used by the youth referred to as urban youth languages. In Kenya, where English was adopted as the official language until 2014 when Swahili replaced it, Sheng an “urban variety of Kenyan Swahili (KS) with origins in the low-income neighborhoods of Nairobi’s Eastlands among the ‘urban youth’ from the lower half of the social economic class pyramid” emerged (Githiora 2016: 1). Comparable urban youth languages also emerged in Tanzania and Ghana; *Lugha za mtaani* ‘street Swahili’ (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006) and Ghanaian Student Pidgin English (GSPE), an urban youth variety used predominantly among male university and secondary school students and distinct from Ghanaian Pidgin English (Dako 2002). GSPE is primarily a spoken variety without a standard written form.

¹ Ghana and Tanzania have an estimated number of 79 and 127 languages, respectively (Ethnologue 2015).

² Akan is the most widely spoken Ghanaian language Lingua Franca originally spoken in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. It belongs to the Kwa group of languages in the Niger-Congo family.

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In Tanzania an urban variety of Kiswahili described as Campus Swahili is characterized by a “form of mixed Swahili used by academic personnel of the University of Dar es Salaam” (Blommaert 1990: 24). According to Reuster-Jahn & Kießling (2006: 5) this variety of Swahili is “marked by code-switching between Swahili and English, which requires a high degree of competence in English” and they point out that, Campus Swahili is not only spoken by academics but also by “other highly educated people working with international organisations and firms.” Dzahene-Quarshie (2011) also observes that codeswitching between Swahili and English is quite a regular feature in Tanzanian parliamentary discourse. The variety of Swahili attested in this study certainly contains some codeswitched items in English but generally does not exhibit strong characteristic of either *Lugha ya Mtaani* or Campus Swahili.

A common feature of the various varieties of urban youth languages described above is code-switching. Winford (2003: 102) defines codeswitching as “cases where bilingual speakers alternate between codes within the same speech event, switch codes within a single turn or mix elements from two codes within the same utterance.” While codeswitching from Swahili to English is attested in the UDS data, a more complex type of codeswitching occurs in the UG data; codeswitching between Standard English and Akan and between Standard English and Pidgin English. In fact three languages are attested. They are used independently or alternated within single speech acts.

Methodology and Data

The data for this study were collected among both Tanzanian and Ghanaian university students. Young people are known to employ SMS more extensively than older people. Students were selected for the study because they use innovative texting languages more than any other group in both societies. Students at the secondary school levels also employ them but they have restrictions and regulations that prevent them from using phones at school. University students are usually adults (18-30) and are therefore not restricted in the use of mobile phones except in class. Students from UDS and UG were purposefully selected because the two universities are at a par in terms of their positions as first and top universities in the two countries. Often new trends emerge from such universities and subsequently spread to the other universities.

Out of the data collected from each university, a sample of 100 text messages containing any form of abbreviation, shortening, codeswitching or other innovation relevant to the study was selected.

The data were collected by three student assistants; one (male) in UDS and two (male and female) in UG. The data were solicited from their fellow students. Since the main objective was to examine the features of adaptation of SMS trends in English in to local languages, age was not

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considered as crucial as most students fall between ages 18-30. Although gender does play a role in language use, it did not form part of the focus of the study. The subject matter of the texts was also not of concern as long as shortening and other features of interest relevant to the study were employed.

Next, the various strategies were categorized according to formal characteristics after which each strategy was analysed in context in order to observe differences and similarities. A somewhat qualitative and quantitative approach was employed, by taking into consideration the statistics of the occurrence of particular strategies such as the use of numeric and alphabetic homophones and other contractions. In each sub-section the Swahili and English data are analysed and the findings discussed.

The UDS data involve two languages; mainly the Swahili language and a few codeswitched English words. In contrast, the UG data involve three languages, making it more complicated. They involve mainly English, GSPE and some codeswitched words in Akan.

Analysis of data and Discussion

In this section, I undertake a close examination of the UDS and UG data in terms of the various shortening strategies employed and the extent to which localization has taken place. The shortening strategies employed in the data are numeric homophones, letter homophones and various forms of contractions as there are clippings and acronyms. Although the study focuses on shortening strategies as a means of localization, there are other phenomena that are equally important in terms of localization such as codeswitching, the use of onomatopoeic words and sounds, repetition, elongation, non-conventional spellings as well as the use of discourse particles.

Number homophones

Letter/number homophones refer to letters and numbers whose pronunciations are identical with words or parts of words. They are used to replace words or letter sequences (Bieswanger 2006, Farina & Lyddy 2011). Numeric homophones have also been referred to as pronounceable numerals (Barasa & Mous 2010). The use of number homophones as a shortening strategy is quiet common in both data.

In the Swahili data this strategy seems to be most frequently used to achieve shortening. All numerals from *1* to *10* except *9* are used as numeric homophones in SMS texts in our data. In addition the numeral *100* is also used. The English numeral *2* is used 52 times in the one hundred sample to represent the Swahili phonetic sound [tu]. It should be noted that the phonetic representations of *2* in English and Swahili are not identical. This usage constitutes localization.

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Where the sequence *tu* (which often represents the first person plural prefix *tu*, as in (2)) occurs in a word, texters almost invariably represent it with **2**, as in the following examples.

- (1) *Nitaku**2**mia kesho*
*Nitaku**tum**ia kesho*
'I will send it to you tomorrow.'
- (2) *Sasa **2**mejuana kwa mema ye**2***
*Sasa **tumeshaj**uana kwa mema yetu*
'We already know about it for our good.'

Out of the 52 tokens of *tu*, it was used twice to represent the English preposition to in a code-switched item (3), and once to represent **2** in the figure 21 (4).

- (3) *Ameku**2100** ujumbe kuwa atajaribu **2** send barua yako leo.*
*Ameku**tumia** ujumbe kuwa atajaribu **to** send barua yako leo*
'Has he/she sent you a message that he will try to send your letter today.'
- (4) *Nilipomaliza fasting ya cku **21***
*Nilipomaliza fasting ya siku **21***
'When I completed the twenty-one day fasting.'

An innovative use of the number homophone **2** which was absent in Mutembei (2011), is its representation of duplicate syllables as in:

- (5) *Ma**2*** *mama* 'mother'
- (6) *ile **2*** *ile ile* 'that' (reduplication indicating emphasis)
- (7) *Mbalix**2*** *mbalimbali* 'different' (reduplication indicating different kinds of)

The **x** symbol in the third example seems to have been used to differentiate reduplication from the adjective *tu* 'only'. In *ma**2*** the use of **x** was not necessary as there is no word like *matu* in Swahili. However, *mbali **2***, could be interpreted as *mbali tu* 'just far' instead of *mbali mbali* 'different kinds of'.

The numeral **1** is used eight times and invariably represents the numeral one on its own or as part of a word as in *pa**1** pamoja* 'together'. So, here the usage is distinct from the use of **2**. The numeral **3** occurs only twice in the data. It is used to represent the sequence *tatu* in *tatua* 'resolve' and *tatu* in the adjective *matatu* as in (8) and (9).

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- (8) *Siku hizi kuna mambo ma3*
Siku hizi kuna mambo matatu
'These days there are three issues.'
- (9) *Nina shida ya elfu hamisini ku3a tatizo Fulani*
Nina shida ya elfu hamisini kutatua tatizo Fulani
'I need three thousand and fifty shillings to resolve a certain problem.'

The numeral **4** is used twice to represent *nne* 'four' in *Juma4* and *j4* being contracted versions of *Jumanne* 'Tuesday'. It is also used to represent four in *saa 4* 'four o'clock'. In contrast, in *nitaku4ta nitakufuata 4* is used to represent *fua* which is phonetically similar in pronunciation to the English word 'four'. Thus the numeral **4** is used innovatively to represent *nne* in one instance and the sequence *fua* in another.

The numeral **5** is used three times in the data; in *j'ma5* to represent *tano* 'five' in *jumatano* and also to represent the sequence *tano* in the noun *mkutano* as in *mku5*. **6** is used to represent the sequence *sita* which is the Kiswahili verb for hesitate as well as the numeral **6** as in *aka6* for *akasita* 'he hesitated' and *mandazi 6* 'six donuts', respectively. The numeral **7** is used to represent the sequence *saba* in *sababu* as in *7bu* only twice. The numeral **8** occurs twice in *2o8* to represent *nane* in *tuonane*. Here **2** represents the sequence *tu* and **8** represents *nane* 'eight', as in (10). The second occurrence concerns the use of the numeral **8** instead of the word 'eight' to save space, as seen in (11).

- (10) *Vipi leo hutaki 2o8*
Vipi leo hutaki tuonane
'Why, today don't you want us to see each other?'
- (11) *11 co 8 tena*
kumi na moja siyo nane tena
'Eleven, not eight anymore.'

In (11) *c* represents the Swahili sequence *si*. The numeral **9** represented in words as *tisa* does not occur in the data. This is probably because *tisa* which is the orthographic representation of the number **9** does not occur often as a sequence in commonly used Swahili words. The number **10** appears once to represent the sequence *ten* in *tena* 'again', as in (12).

- (12) *2ma 10a cjaona cm yoyote*
Tuma tena sijaona simu yoyote
'Send it again, I have not seen any phone.'

Another numeral that occurs in the data is **100**, used to represent the numeral on the one hand and the sequence *mia* on the other hand as in *nimeku2100* 'nimekutumia' 'I have sent to you'. There is

one instance in which *ku2mia* is used instead. Here *mia* is used and not *100*, perhaps not to confuse it with 2100 as a figure. However, the use of *100* instead of *mia* does not really save space as each is made up of three characters.

- (13) *Akazi100 njiani mara moja*
Akazimia njiani mara moja
'He set off on the way at once.'

In contrast with the Swahili data in which the numerals *1-8*, *10*, and *100* (altogether eleven numerals) are used as homophones, in the UG data, only the numerals *2*, *4*, *8* and *9* are used as homophones and these are in consonance with global trends as indicated in Crystal (2008) and Bodomo (2009).

The numeral *2* is used 8 times in the data to represent the sequence *to* in a word as in (14) or the preposition *to* as in (15).

- (14) *let's make it 2moro den*
'Let's make it **tom**orrow then.'
- (15) *vry hapi 2 meet u here*
'Very happy to meet you here.'

The numeral *4* occurs more than any other, i.e., 14 times. Often it is used to represent *fore*, as in (16) or the preposition *for*, as in (17).

- (16) *myt not get 2 de drug store b4 I collapse*
'Might not get to the drug store **before** I collapse.'
- (17) *Hrd de tym 4 de class has bn changed?*
'Heard the time *for* the class has been changed.'

The numeral *8* occurs only twice in the data and it represents the sequence *ate*, as in (18) and (19) below.

- (18) *Kk l8ta wai*
'Okay later ok.'

Wai is a contracted form of *wo ati* 'you have heard' often used as a discourse particle in Akan and comparable to the word *okay* in English. The numeral *3* does occur in the UG data but it is used to represent the Akan orthographic vowel ϵ , as in (19) and (20). Thus the number *3* which is a mirror image of the Akan vowel ϵ is used innovatively not as a shortening strategy but for convenience. This usage is pragmatically motivated because the Akan orthography has the mid vowels ϵ and ɔ that are not readily represented on mobile phone keypads and to have them

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represented one needs to download a special application. It is therefore convenient for texters to represent them with **3** and **)**, respectively. The latter does not occur in the current data.

- (19) *Morning T de33 e go hard small give me o! Gotta stay up l8t in de nytz...more ronnins n tinz*

‘The morning will be a difficult time for me for I have to stay up late at night because there are more things for me to do.’

- (20) My rum *di333* I didn get ooo

‘Regarding my room, I did not get one.’

Deε the standard spelling for *de33* ‘as for’ is an Akan discourse particle which is used as a contrastive particle that is often used in Akan and also tends to be used by Ghanaians even when they speak English. Its closest equivalent in English is the phrase ‘as for’. *O!*, which is a cross-linguistic interjection is also used in Akan. The numeral **9** occurs only once in the UG data representing the sequence *nigh* in *Good9t* ‘goodnight’.

Letter Homophones

The Roman letter **c** which is not used in Swahili orthography except with the letter *h* (*ch*) to represent a single sound [tʃ] as in *chui* ‘leopard’ is used 21 times to represent the sequence ‘si’, in the UDS data.

<i>co</i>	<i>siyo</i>
<i>ck(u)</i>	<i>siku</i>
<i>2kackilize</i>	<i>tukasikilize</i>
<i>bac</i>	<i>basi</i>
<i>cm</i>	<i>simu</i>

c is the only letter homophone which is used as a shortening tool in the UDS data. The homophone **c** is also used in a codeswitched English word **sinc** ‘since’ in (36). The letter **c**, is used for shortening in the UG data. It occurs 7 times to represent the sequence *ce* as in (21) or the verb *see* as in (22).

- (21) *ok, dats nyc*
‘Ok, that’s nice’

- (22) *ok, den I’ll tell dem nd c*
‘Ok, then I’ll tell them and **see**.’

The only vowel used as a homophone is found in the UG data. The vowel **u** is used as a homophone for *you* and *oo*, as in (23).

- (23) *hi, hope u're gud?*
 'Hi, hope **you**'re good?'

Contractions

Contractions refer generally to words with omitted middle letters, often vowels (Crystal, 2008). Various forms of contractions have been used in the data. The contracting of words through the removal of vowels are noted in both data. In the UG data, the principle of contraction is more consistent because of the syllable structure of the language. Often words are made up of syllables that consist of a consonant followed by a vowel or a consonant followed by a glide before a vowel. Only single vowels are omitted and this makes it very easy to predict them when contracted.

<i>Mwz</i>	<i>mwezi</i>	'month'
<i>Trh</i>	<i>tarehe</i>	'date'
<i>Km</i>	<i>kama</i>	'like/as'
<i>Lkn</i>	<i>lakini</i>	'but'
<i>Vp</i>	<i>vipi</i>	'how'

Often contractions occur with letter/number homophones as in:

<i>J'ma5</i>	<i>jumatano</i>	'Tuesday'
<i>Ck</i>	<i>siku</i>	'day'
<i>Cm</i>	<i>simu</i>	'telephone'
<i>M'ke</i>	<i>mwanamke</i>	'woman'

Altogether there are ten tokens of contractions out of which five combine letter/number homophones with vowel omission. Out of these only *cm simu* occurs twice. The contraction of *mwanamke* is more complex. It involves the omission of five letters.

The contractions in the UG data are more complex as seen in the contracted form of 'before', where apart from the omission of the vowel *e* after *b*, the rest of the word *fore* is represent by one number homophone **4**; in 'later' *er* is represented by *a*, and in 'forgive' the number homophone **8** represents *a* and letter homophone **a** represents *er*. The sequence *ut* in 'but' is represented by the symbol **@** which is not a number homophone.

<i>B4</i>	before
<i>l8t(a)</i>	late(r)
<i>4gve</i>	forgive
<i>b@</i>	but

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While the shortening strategies discussed so far constitute localization in the case of Swahili, for the UG data, they are mostly used globally and this may account for why they occur much more in the UG data than in the UDS data. There are 256 tokens of shortened words. These include both homophones and contractions. The exception is the use of **3** for the Akan ϵ as in (19) and (20) above. There are indeed varied shortenings that are unique to the individual texter. For instance in the UG data variants such as *Good9t* and *Gudnyt* ‘good night’: *cus* and *bcos* ‘because’; *wassap* and *wats up* ‘what’s up’ and in the UDS data *2umbo* and *2mbo* ‘tumbo’; *cmu* and *cm* ‘simu’; *cku* and *ck* ‘siku’ This is observed in both data. Also sometimes the same texter spells the same word differently in the course of a conversation.

Discourse Particles

One of the features of SMS texting language that makes them resemble spoken language is the frequent use of discourse particles. These are “words that are uttered not because of their contribution to propositional content, but because of some pragmatic function for ongoing discourse.” (Stede & Schmitz 2000: 126). They play a role in localization as they tend to be used more in spoken language than in written language. Indeed the hybrid nature of the language of SMS in terms of written and spoken conventions is attested in both data. In the Swahili data the discourse particles, *aise* an adulterated Swahili rendition of ‘I say’ and *sawa* ‘ok’ are used as interjections in (24) and (25). There was one token of *aise* and Three tokens of *sawa*.

(24) *Aise natamani 2ngepeana*
‘I say I wish we would agree with each other.’

(25) *ucmwambia chochote sawa?*
‘Do not tell him/her anything okay?’

There are more occurrences of discourse particles in the UG data than the UDS data. This is because the use of discourse particles forms part and parcel of the Akan language and the tendency to transfer these into all spoken varieties of English by Ghanaians is very common. Also, most of these discourse particles have been incorporated into GSPE.

The first three discourse particles in (26) – (28) *papa* an intensifier, *kraa mpo* a negative emphatic and *tweaaaaa* also a negative emphatic are Akan and *eh* in (29) is more cross-linguistic. These can be said to constitute typical localizations as local language discourse particles tend to be used often in Ghanaian Pidgin English. It is one of the features that foreigners are quick to notice about English as generally spoken in Ghana. They are so embedded in the local languages (and they are often locally cross-linguistic) that speakers find them spilling into their English utterances.

- (26) *vry hapi 2 meet u here, mxx u papa*
 ‘Very happy to meet you here, miss you **very much**.’
- (27) *Lyk de way I’ll laf @ u maself kraa mpo*
 ‘I would **even** laugh at you myself.’
- (28) *Miz u???? tweaaaaa*
 ‘Miss you? Not a bit.’
- (29) *Gud...ur still celebrating ur birthday eh?*
 ‘**So** you are still celebrating your birthday?’

In fact the use of local language (especially Akan) discourse particles in the English speech of bilingual Ghanaians is quite common as there tend to be no English equivalents for quite a number of them. In this regard, it may be arguable that these constitute cultural borrowing that is borrowing Akan discourse particles into English rather than code-switching as posited by Myers-Scotton (1993). The tokens of Akan discourse markers are *papa 3*, *kraa (mpo) 2 papa 3 die 2* and *wai 6*.

Repetition and Elongation

Apart from the use of discourse particles as a localizing strategy, elongation and repetition which seemingly defeat the concept of shortening in SMS texting language, are very prominent in the UG data. The reason for this could be the fact that, often the varieties of Ghanaian Pidgin English are heavily influenced by some features from local languages which are usually colloquial and expressive. As noted by Barasa & Mous (2010), these repetitions and elongations are employed to achieve spoken-like qualities. In other words since SMS texts are usually used as a form of conversation, there is the tendency to write what one will say in a face to face conversation. Barseghyan (2006) refers to them as onomatopoeic spellings and rightly so since they aim at representing sounds. This usage expresses paralinguistic cues such as emotions, tone, stress etc. and they are clearly important to texters, since time and space is sacrificed to represent them in writing. These repetitions and elongations or onomatopoeic spellings in (30) and (32) - (34) are often applied to discourse particles.

- (30) *Ooo dnt wori kk.*
 ‘Oh! Don’t worry, okay?’
- (31) *I’m baaaaaacck...hope u didn’t miz me?*
 ‘I’m back; hope you didn’t miss me?’
- (32) *oooh... oooh... 4give me wai*
 ‘Oh! Oh! forgive me okay?’

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- (33) *Haaahaahaaaa...u wish*
Ha, ha, ha, you wish!
- (34) *Eee Jamani 2pendane kwa Imani*
'Eee folks let us love one another faithfully.'

Codeswitching

There are cases of code-switching with English in the UDS data, and codeswitching with local Ghanaian languages and even Ghanaian Student Pidgin English in the UG data. It must be noted that the codeswitching in the data is not a special feature of SMS text language as such but a reflection of the language culture in both societies. In both Ghana and Tanzania, codeswitching is quite common especially among the educated and because the texting language often represent spoken language, texters tend to text what they will normally say orally. Nevertheless, it is observed that while this type of codeswitching constitutes localization in the UG data (in that the codeswitched items are from local languages), it constitutes globalization in the UDS data (in that the codeswitched items are English), since there are no cases of codeswitching with other local Tanzanian languages apart from English which is considered a global language.

- (35) *Ntakcall*
Nitakucall
'I will call you.'
- (36) *sawa, mi cjamuambia ki2 ndio yeye anaact strange sinc juzi*
Sawa, mimi sijamwambia kitu ndiyo yeye anaact strange since the day before yesterday
'Okay, I have not told him anything since yesterday that is why he is acting a little strangely.'
- (37) *Ninaenda Arusha J4 then nikiwa na Afya nzuri nitakuja Dar*
Ninaenda Arusha Jumanne then nikiwa na Afya nzuri nitakuja Dar
'I am going to Arusha on Tuesday then if I am well I will come to Dar es Salaam.'

The codeswitched items are intra-sentential. That is the production of two or more languages within the same sentence (Myers-Scotton 1993). In (35) and (36), the verbs *call* and *act* are used with Swahili subject prefix and tense particles. See also (4) above.

In the UG data, the codeswitched items are often discourse particles from Akan as in (26) – (28) above and (38) and (39) below.

- (38) *Kk...Ve a gudnyt wai*
Ok have a goodnight ok (you hear)
 ‘Okay have a good night okay’
- (39) *My rum di333 I didn get ooo*
My room dee I didn’t get it o
 ‘as for my room I did not get it’

In the UG data, depending on the orientation of the texters, Ghanaian Student Pidgin English which is commonly spoken by students is used. As indicated earlier, this variety of pidgin emerged among high status secondary school students in the late 1960s to early 1970s (Dako 2002). From here it proceeded to become popular in tertiary institutions. Today it is very prevalent especially among male students in both tertiary and secondary schools. Currently the number of female student speakers is increasing gradually. It is not surprising that its usage has infiltrated SMS texting domain. Dako (2002) notes that speakers of this variety of pidgin use vocabulary and structures of common Ghanaian languages such as Akan and Ga³ to complement its vocabulary and structures, thus making it predisposed to codeswitching as demonstrated in (40).

- (40) *Ooooh ma guy... Diz no fresh kraa*
 ‘Oh my guy this is not nice at all’

Kraa ‘at all’ a negative emphatic particles is sometimes spelt *kora*. Dako (2002) also demonstrates that Ghanaian Student Pidgin English more or less adapts the syntactic structure of Akan as is observed in (40) – (42). *Charle*, an adulterated form of the English name, Charlie is a common address term that can be compared to the address term ‘mate’ commonly used among males in the UK or ‘bro’ in the USA.

- (41) *4 ur syd?*
 ‘On your side?’

Although **4**, in (41), corresponds to *for*, it should be interpreted as ‘what about you?’.

- (42) *U make we c wat go happen*
 ‘You let us see what will happen’

Texters find GSPE easy and convenient to use because it is very colloquial. It emerged primarily as a spoken language rather than a written language. Thus, prior to the advent of SMS and other instant messages social media, GSPE did not usually involve writing. SMS has encouraged the

³ Ga is the most widely spoken Ghanaian regional language Lingua Franca spoken in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Like Akan, it belongs to the Kwa group of the Niger-Congo family.

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documentation of GSPE. Its frequent use in SMS messages also buttress the point that texters of SMS often, seek to communicate in a more aural manner. This phenomenon does not occur in the UDS data, however it is possible that gradually, *Lugha ya Mtaani* ‘Street Kiswahili’ which is gaining popularity and acceptability among the Tanzanian society may penetrate student SMS texting language.

Conclusion

The emergence of SMS and other instant message social media, has brought about innovative ways of using language especially championed by young people. The restriction on the number of characters in the early days of SMS was the initial motivating factor for the innovative use of various shortening strategies. Although English took the lead in this new way of expression, the culture has caught on in other parts of the world leading to the localization of these trends according to the linguistic landscape of a particular society.

This study has demonstrated that students of UDS in Tanzania and UG in Ghana through innovative ways localise the global features of SMS texting language to suit their linguistic environments. Thus there are features that make them unique. Numerals lend themselves to homophonic abbreviations in UDS data more so than in UG data. In the UG data usage of number homophones is fairly uniform across interlocutors. Vowel omission as a contraction strategy is less localized in the UDS data compared to the UG data. Contractions in the UG data are more varied, intricate and complex than in the UDS data. Although the Ghanaian data generally conform to global trends and strategies because its core language is English, there is a high degree of localization through the use of especially, discourse particles from local languages, codeswitching with local language as well as well as GSPE.

The UDS data also involve a high degree of localization through the adaptation of some English number/letter homophones in Swahili texts.

Especially the UG data indicate that in as much as economy of characters is desirable to texters, time and space is not spared in order to express and communicate important features such as emotions, state of mind, emphasis etc, through the use of repetitions and elongations.

Although the development of ICT initially fast-tracked the process of globalization, by shortening the distance between continents, countries, and cities through media such as skype, SMS, the internet and other instant messaging applications and social media and in the process has promoted homogeneity across the globe by disseminating trends from the western world to other parts of the world leading to massive adoption of trends in fashion, cinema, music, and other popular culture genres, today the dynamics of popular culture are gradually changing. The need to project a local identity has led to a gradual shift from the need to adopt global trends in many

aspects of life to the need to adapt global trends to the locale in order to make them relevant and suitable for the needs of the local environment. This is evident in several popular culture genres such as music, fashion, advertising, etc. including SMS texting language as demonstrated in this study. The current study has served as a preliminary research on the localization of SMS texting language among students of UDS and UG. Further studies involving a larger corpus and scope need to be undertaken to uncover more subtle findings about the global and local dynamics of SMS texting language.

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