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"The thumb tribe":
Creativity and social change through SMS in Nigeria

Abstract. January, 2001, marked a watershed in the history of communications in Nigeria, with the introduction of the Global System for Mobile Communication, shortly after Olusegun Obasanjo was voted into power. Since this experience, which is popularly referred to in the country as the "GSM Revolution", mobile phones have become a popular social interactive technology in Nigeria, offering both young and old opportunities to communicate through voice and short messages (SMS), confirming Fischer's (1988) description of the mobile phone and text messages as "technologies of sociability." Text messaging has become a popular means of communication among Nigerians because it is inexpensive and it affords the users the opportunity to define themselves stylistically in this novel context. A growing body of linguistic research has focused on language use in SMS (see Thurlow, 2003; Bush, 2005 and Crystal, 2008, Chiluwa, 2008; Taiwo, 2008; Awonusi, 2004). One major focus of these studies is the emerging register and its effect on language practices of young people.

The younger generations of Nigerian, like elsewhere in the world, can be described as "the thumb tribe", a generation of people skilled in the manipulation of the phone and computer keys with their fingers, especially the thumb. The focus of this work is on the innovative constructions and creativity in the context of SMS usage in Nigeria and how this is helping users fulfil their social responsibilities in a novel way. This paper examines how the popularity of SMS has created a forum for Nigerians to articulate themselves in fighting all forms of injustices, monitoring political activities and building social relationships.

Introduction[*]

The introduction of Global System for Mobile Telecommunication (GSM) into Nigeria about six years after the technology went public is often referred to in the country as the "GSM Revolution." For Nigerians, this 'Revolution' came shortly after civilian Olusegun Obasanjo was voted into power. The GSM Revolution, according to Ernest Ndukwe, the chief executive officer of the Nigerian Communications Commission, is one of the major dividends of Nigeria's transition to democracy (Ndukwe 2004).

Immediately after being voted into power, the government of Olusegun Obasanjo commenced the process of improving the telecommunication system in the country. In January 2001, several would-be operators entered a decidedly transparent auction for four licences put on the market by the NCC. Four companies, MTN, ECONET, NITEL and another called CIL won, but ICL a Nigerian-based company lost out when it failed to meet a deadline for depositing funds (Bala, 2001). Now there are five mobile service providers in the nation: MTN, Globacom, Celtel, MTel and Etisala. As of October, 2008, Nigeria had 59 million active mobile phone subscribers and a teledensity of 42%.

Since the introduction of GSM to Nigeria in 2001, mobile phone has become a powerful tool for communicating across the country among both the young and the old people, as it has been changing the lifestyle of people. While the older Nigerians use mobile phones for voice communication, teenagers and young adults have adopted the use of SMS as their major way of socializing and maintaining real-time relationships. SMS has found relevance in almost every sphere of Nigerian social life. It has been adopted as the major means of establishing romantic relationships among young people. Several books are on sale in markets in the major cities around the country that give advice to tongue-tied young lovers

in the techniques of wooing ladies they admire through text messages. Andrew Walker, a BBC correspondence in Nigeria, noted in his report of October 10, 2008, on *BBC News*, 'Nigerians are compulsive text senders.' Text messaging has also become popular medium for the construction of Christian values, belief systems, and sentiments in Nigeria (Chiluwa, 2008; Taiwo, 2008). The thriving community of SMS users in the country has also grown into a strong force in fighting exploitation of the masses (Obadare, 2006; Taiwo, 2008). In the business sphere, SMS is employed in banking services for notification of payments and withdrawals. Several programmes on the electronic and print media also solicit SMS from the public for counseling and feedback.

The increasing interest of the teenagers and young adults in text messaging and the noticeable innovative English usage, coupled with the formulation of concentrated imaginative awareness that is reflected in the creation of text messages inspired this study. These young Nigerian text composers have been able to blend the experiential knowledge of their environment with the knowledge of conventions of organization of texts to create SMS texts that are meaningful within the Nigerian socio-cultural context. This study therefore looks at these innovative English usages and how they impact on the social behavior and attitudes of these young Nigerians to social relationships.

Perspectives on SMS as a social networking tool

Since the technology of SMS first arrived in December 1992 and later became public in 1994, it has become one of the most popular modern ways to communicate. It was widely adopted because it is instant, location-independent, and personal (Reid and Reid, 2005). Scholars from different disciplines, especially, linguists, psychologists, sociologists, educationists, media experts, and medical experts have reported research on its use. There has been a growing body of research by linguists on the language of SMS. One of the most prominent issues discussed are gender differences in SMS usage. Ling (2001) reports that 'the great motor of

SMS culture' is found among the female gender in Norway. According to him,

> teen women write longer more complex messages. They include more literary flourishes in such as capitalization, punctuation. They are more likely to include emotional elements in their communications and they are more inclined to include refined formalities such as salutations and closings in their SMS messages.

Other studies also confirm that females are more avid texters than males. For instance, Kasesniemi (2003) observes that Finnish teenage girls are heavy texters and often place greater emphasis on emotional issues, while the boys tend to be brief, informative, and practical. Höfich and Gebhardt (2005) also observe that German girls send more and longer text messages. Nigerian women are reported to use their SMSes to fulfill social-relational function among their friends and family members (Taiwo, 2008).

One major issue that has been generating a great debate among scholars is the effect the language of SMS is likely to have on written language performance of the generation of the young people. Writers like Sutherland (2002) describes texting as "penman for illiterates." In his November 11, 2002, article in *The Guardian* of Sutherand comments,

> As a dialect, text ('textese'?) is thin and – compared, say with Californian personalized licensed plates – unimaginative. It is bleak, bald, sad shorthand. Drab, shrinktalk…. The dialect has a few hieroglyphs (codes comprehensible only to initiates) and a range of face symbols … Linguistically, it's all pig's ear….it masks dyslexia, poor spelling and mental laziness. Texting is penmanship for illiterates.

Five year later, John Humphrys in September 29, in an article in *Mail Online* describes texters as "vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbors 800 years ago." According to him, "they are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped." The fear of the critics of the texting culture is that the more young people text, the more their likelihood to forget about syntactic rules, since texting de-emphasizes the importance of correct spelling and grammar. These comments generated a debate on whether the texting culture should be encouraged to thrive or not. David Crystal's (2008) views on this great debate in 2008 are much different from those of Sutherland.

One of the major findings of scholars on the use of SMS is that it enhances relationship formation and maintenance. Interaction through SMS has been leading to the formation of communities of users. Within these close knit groups, users of SMS who are often referred to as 'texters' or 'text circles', regularly exchange messages (Thurlow, 2003; Taiwo, 2008). Reid and Reid (2004) observe that users of SMS capitalize on the social environment created by texting to form and manage close personal relationships. One of the findings of Thurlow (2003) is that one third of the text messages he studied were used to accomplish functional and practical goals, while the remainder is used to fulfill a combination of phatic, friendship maintenance, and social functions associated with highly intimate and relational concerns. In a related study, Ling (2004) observes that SMS is relied upon for coordinating social life among virtually all age groups in Norway.

A few scholars have also observed the incorporation of the texting culture into some religious traditions. Elwood-Clayton (2003) describes how the use of text messaging among Filipino Christians has created an independent community religiosity from the Catholic Church, the major denomination in The Philippines. In a related study, Roman (2006) discusses how the use of text messages in form of chain texts and prayer requests have helped to boost and encourage faith deepening in The Philippines. Chiluwa (2008) has similar observations on how SMS is used in Nigeria to construct values and sentiments among the Pentecostal Christians.

Young people, especially teenagers, just in other places, have been identified as the driving force behind the popularity of SMS. Their ability to explore and play about with the use of language makes texting a very attractive to them. Joyce (2000) describes these young people who are skilled at the use of their thumbs to manipulate cell phones and other computer keyboards as "the thumb tribe" or "the thumb generation." She also describes their culture at the "Thumb culture." Grinter & Elridge (2001) describe how teenagers are able to

retain their privacy in a parent-controlled life. Text messaging provides leisure and fun to these teenagers and some of them have *excessively inolved with it. Texting has been observed to play a major in facilitating romantic relationships among the young people. Solis (2007) establishes texting technology's capacity as a romancing gadget which allows users to create their own world, expressing real and virtual emotions.

The culture of texting is also thriving among the young Nigerians. Scholarly publications on the culture of the use of text messaging in Nigeria are still few and far between. One of the earliest studies was Awonusi (2004), which examines how Nigerians adapt text messaging to the constraint of space through the use of innovative writing strategies. Awonusi notes that apart from the peculiar phonetic representations and orthographic representations, Nigerian text messages have both orthographic and grammatical peculiarities, such as nonuse of internal punctuation (comma, colon, semi-colon), the admixture of upper and lower case characters, shortening of auxiliary and modal verbs as is often done in informal writing, for example: *I'll* for I *will, he'd* for *he would*, and the deletion of nouns, and groups functioning as nouns, so forth). In addition, there were features of what he describes as "text multilingualism" (code-switching and code-mixing).

Another study that documents the sociolinguistic relevance of SMS in Nigeria is Ofulue (2004). She notes the growth in the use of indigenous languages for texting and submits that this gives sociolinguistic relevance to the local languages in the domain of text message. Taiwo (2008) notes that many texts composed in Nigerian indigenous languages are typically greetings and prayers. These can be described as cultural expressions and English may not be able to bear the semantic and pragmatic weight of such cultural expressions.

This paper examines how the new generation of Nigerians harnesses their creativity potentials through innovative English usage in an intense language contact situation within the context of SMS to learn how this thriving culture facilitates social change in Nigeria.

Methodology

This paper reports on an investigation based on a corpus of 4876 personal text messages composed and sent by Nigerian mobile phone users in south western Nigerian, whose age range between sixteen and thirty years old. The latter group was targeted because of the potentiality of generating the creative text messages employing innovative English usage. The data was collected between 2006 and 2008. The data were descriptively analyzed, focusing on how the contents reveal creative and innovative usage of English and how this impacts social change in the country.

Findings and discussions

Our findings show that creativity is manifest in different kinds of text messages. However, for the purpose of this work, we will focus on four kinds of text messages, namely romantic, inspirational, humorous, and religious. Creativity in SMS is naturally induced by space constraints, giving Nigerians the opportunity to create an alternative reality in which representation takes over from reference (Carter 2004: 6). Wordplay in SMS is not just for entertaining or intrinsic pleasure. There are social and critical purposes for it.

One major advantage of SMS is that it allows users to create personal images by playing with words, thereby defining themselves stylistically. Creativity is successfully achieved when the composer is able to draw on the shared experiential knowledge of the context in which the text is being used to bring about some kinds of images, symbols and associations that will evoke the appropriate reactions – emotional attraction, reflection, laughter and hope. Odebunmi (2006: 3) also affirms that interactions move on smoothly when participants are familiar with referring expressions and how they are related to common socio-cultural and situational experiences (contextual factors). The culture of text messaging has provided ways for many young Nigerians to play with orthography and create an

imaginary state of well-being in the face of gloomy socio-economic and political situation in the country.

One major way of manifesting creativity is in the ingenuity of Nigerians to draw powerful positive symbols out of ideas that will naturally evoke seemingly negative ones. Creative texts therefore allow for broader interpretation of meaning of the texts messages by looking beyond the literal concept representation. For example,

M1:   You are such an IDIOT. It simply means that u are
    I - Intellegent
    D - Decent
    I - Impressive
    O - Optimistic and
    T - Tolerated.
    Are u smiling now u IDIOT. Make sure u calllllll me now IDIOT....lol...

M2:   I want 2 give u POISON, ready 2 take it; P- Progress, O- Overcoming, I- Independent, S- Success, O- Opportunities, N- New dawn. Swallow d poison!

M3:   I swear, I will make sure I give you HIV... H is for Happiness and joy forever with an I: Incomparable love that will never V: Vanish until death do us part. I love you

M4:   God is looking for someone 2 SLAP. S -safe, L -lift, A - assist, P - promote. God will SLAP u in Jesus name

M5:   Dear do you know you have AIDS
    A   abundant blessings from God
    I   Increase
    D   Divine breakthrough
    S   Signs and wonders of God to you

These texts will naturally elicit surprise from the readers at first, but it is not long before they see the dimension of the hidden humour in them. The first clauses in the texts appear first like threats or insult, because of the kinds of images they are likely to conjure in the mind of the text reader - surprise. The following clauses however put the expressions in context, making the addressee understand that they were not abusive, but playful. The element of surprise is the primary in the humor created. Aristotle asserts that the secret to humor is surprise, which in these cases will be brought about by somebody saying something out of character, like calling loved ones 'idiots', giving them 'poison', inflicting them with HIV, and 'slapping' them.

Another strategy used for creativity is to build the imagery on institutional names by foregrounding them and drawing out some clear messages specific to the Nigerian socio-cultural context.

M6:   God will take u FIRST 2 d ZENITH of joy, GUARANTEE ur ACCESS 2 success, put DIAMOND in ur SKYE & give u INTERCONTINENTAL testimonies.

M7:   Dis month, God will TANTALIZE u with his grace. Angels will be on guard to give u a SWEET SENSATION favor. God will make u MR BIGGS among ur equals. Have a TATEE month.

The text messages M6 and M7 foreground names of some popular institutions in Nigeria. Although these names ordinarily appear like brand names, they also metaphorically say something about the images being projected in advertisements of the institutions. *First*, *Zenith*, *Access*, *Diamond*, *Skye* and *Intercontinental* are names of foremost banks in banks in Nigeria. Likewise, *Tantalizers*, *Sweet Sensation*, *Mr Biggs* and *Tastee Fried Chicken* are names of popular Nigerian restaurants. Most Nigerians or anybody who is familiar with Nigerian socio-cultural context will be able to recognize the sources of these names used in the text to create prayers despite the fact that two of them (*Tantalizers* and *Tastee Fried Chicken*) were not fully reproduced in the text.

Sending prayers in text messages is one of the way Nigerians Christians construct values and sentiments in the context of this social interactive technology (Chiluwa, 2008). Such values and sentiments are commonly constructed through faith-based pronouncements and prayer and well wishing texts (p.15). Several such text messages are sent to encourage, assure, and pray for recipients. This is part of the coping mechanisms for Nigerians in the context of social problems and economic stress they face daily. Though prayer text messages can be sent anytime, they are more common at some periods considered strategic to Nigerians than at others, such as early morning, late night, first day of the week, month and year, birthdays, anniversaries, Sundays, and so forth. One of the commonest kinds of prayers used in SMS is imprecation. An imprecation is a prayer for evil or misfortune upon others,

perceived or real enemies. The use of imprecation is a common feature of prayers in many contemporary Pentecostal gatherings in the country. Though it is often condemned by some, many adherents justify imprecation, citing instances in the Psalms. M8 – M11 are some examples of imprecatory prayer SMS in the data.

> M8:   Surely, hardship & difficulties shall follow all ur enemies, every seconds of their lives, & dey will receive 10,000 bullets each in their foreheads, which will result 2 their death forever, Amen. Gd morni.

> M9:   Have u ever seen a heavenly bulldozer? Very mighty, bigger than ur imagination! I saw it last night breaking the heads of all ur enemies, destroying the house of failure & killing poverty to permanent silence in ur life.

> M10: Congratulations! 5 seconds 2 the end of d match, a penalty has been awarded in d box 18 of ur enemies in ur favour, I hope u'll score it! Think about it, dream about it, & let me hear d scores 2morrow. Sweet dreams.

> M11: Can u recollect how many halleluya u´ve shouted since when u´ve been born to this world? That´s the exact number of bullets each of ur enemies is receiving now-now.

Imprecations construct imagined weapons aimed at destroying the enemy, in these instance '10,000 bullets' (M8), 'heavenly bulldozer' (M9), 'a penalty in the box 18' of the enemy (M10), halleluya as bullets' (M11). Imprecations give a sense of victory to the person using it because it gives them a sensation of being able to diffuse the power of the enemies, which is a major source of fear and anxiety in the African consciousness. Creative ingenuity comes into play here as the text composer conceptualises an enemy as an object of attack for the addressee and creates some desired weapons for the attack. This in a way demonstrates some form of solidarity and identification with the causes of loved ones, as such text messages are reciprocally sent within some text circles.

One aspect of youth culture that SMS has found relevance in fulfilling in Nigeria is the construction of romantic expression by lovers. According to Abiola, reporting for *Mail & Guardian Online*, text messages have come to define the nature of romance in Nigeria. The medium has helped to develop the poetic instincts of many young Nigerians who are now able to express themselves using familiar socio-cultural symbols and poetic devices. The ingenuity in their creative abilities is seen in the use of metaphors to tell their stories of love.

M12:   d last time u dragged me 2 court for owing u some love, d justice asked me how much love I owe u, I told him it was uncountable & dat I won´t be able 2 Finish the payment, even til eternity. Den, d judge adjourned d case till after our wedding day! If it is raining, I´ll love u, if it is sunny I´ll cherish u, if it is dark I´ll value u, if it is hot I´ll admire u, & even in a cold weather I`ll handle u like a treasure.

M13:   Court Order,
        U are accused of crawling into my life &
        hijacking my heart with ur sweet smiles & attitude,
        How can u plead innocence.
        U are hereby sentenced 2 be my darling 4 ever.

M14:   I´m eating the sweetest food on earth, I can´t finish eating it in a million years & I cannot invite another person to join me in eating it, but still, I'm seriously hungry of it. What is the food? YOUR LOVE!

M15:   If thinking of you was a disease, i could suffer to death
        If saying i love u was a crime, jail could be my homeplace forever.
        and if being with u was a sin, i could pay a ticket to hell

M16:   If I had the letters "HRT", I can add "EA" to get a "HEART" or a "U" and get "HURT". But I'd rather choose "U" and get "HURT" than have a "HEART" without "U".

The text messages above describe the value of love to the writers. M12 and M13 create a court scene and portray love as an invaluable debt (M12) owed by the writer that cannot be settled, even by a judge in the court of law, and a 'crime' that the addressee was guilty of. The object of love is to be cherished, admired and treasured. Love was also conceived in M14 metaphorically as food that will be eaten forever and cannot be shared by someone else. In M15, hyperbolic expressions were used to describe the depth of love for the writer.

If love could be compared with negative things like 'disease', 'crime' and 'sin', then the writer was ready to suffer the consequences – 'death', 'jail' and 'hell.' Hyperbole and metaphor were used in the text to heighten the effect and create a strong impression of the conceptualization of the value of love by the writer. M16 is a play on the orthography and rhyme of two English words 'heart' and 'hurt', which have opposite images in the repertoire of love. The homophonic abbreviation U is a significant character used in place of English second person pronoun *you.* Though *hurt* is not positive in a love relationship, it becomes positive in this poetic context.

The opened access to the information highway through the popularity of social interactive technology of SMS and the perceived potential power SMS has for being used as

an instrument for various kinds of political agenda has led Obadare (2008) to describe mobile phones as 'Pandora's box in the hands of the masses'. The use of SMS as an instrument for mobilizing the masses in politics has been documented by several scholars. The Philippines is a classical case where SMS is said to play an instrumental role in demonstration that led to overthrowing the corrupt government Joseph Esrada in 2001. Over a million Manila residents were mobilized and coordinated by waves of text messages that led to a peaceful demonstration against Esrada and his later overthrow (Rhinegold, 2002: 157; Roman, 2005). In other parts of the world SMS has played dominant role in the democratic process – for political campaign in Greece (Mylona, 2008); Spain (Suarez, 2006); Sierra Leone (Schuler, 2008). Other cases include Serbia and Ukraine where the youth used text messages to organize demonstrations.

The proliferation of mobile phones in Africa is not just helping the people to fulfill their interpersonal communication needs. It is also transforming the political and social landscape of these developing countries by empowering the people to participate in their own political affairs. In Nigeria, text messaging was used in the 2007 general elections as a tool for systematic election monitoring. The Network of Election Monitors (NMEM) associates in each of Nigeria's 36 states recruited additional volunteers and forwarded mass reminders about the program on the morning of the elections. Multiple messages from the same polling site were crosschecked for accuracy, and over 10,000 messages, describing both orderly voting experiences and widespread fraud, were received (NMEN, 2007). Below are some of the texts sent giving updates on the elections.

> M17   Almost all result sheets diverted by PDP stalwarts and INEC ad-hoc staff on the way to wards polling stations in Nsukka Enugu State.

> M18   At ward 4 and 5 of Calabar Municipality materials arrived at about 9:45am. Voting started by 10am prompt. All the security agencies and party representatives were all present and voting was conducted orderly though the electorate turn out was low.'

This kind of open monitoring of elections gives the electorate an overview of situations all over the country. It also tells the whole world what really transpired during the elections. It complements the work of elections observers, who may find it difficult to cover a country as vast as Nigeria in one day. In addition to this, in recent times, text messages are specially created to critique the state and its agents. Despite the fact that these creative messages only circulate among a group of young people, they say a lot about how Nigerians feel about the government and its agencies

M19   U'll soar highr than Vmobile's Eagle, Brighter than MTN's sun, Glitter than Glo, but all those who oppose u, hmmm… will've no story to tell like Mtel

M20   God luv 4 u is nt proud as GLO. It does not change ownership like CELTEL It is not expensive like MTN and does not have NAFDAC no, so it cant expire.

M21   May your light not fluctuate like the one of PHCN, but remain stable like sunshine in its own time

M22   Just as vehicles queue up 4 fuel in time of scarcity so shall angels henceforth queue 2 refill ur joy, blessin & testimonies.

M22   I love u like NEPA love to take light
I love u like police love to collect twenty naira
I love u like our Government loves to owe teacher
I love u like Ibo man love to make money
I love u like Yoruba man love to go owambe
I love u like Hausa man love to pursue Nama
Have a nyce day

MTel is the subsidiary organization of the state-owned agency NITEL, whose quality of service since being licensed as one of the mobile telecommunications providers in the country has remained the poorest. In M19, it was described as having 'no story to tell' unlike the other service providers. This is a subtle way of critiquing the government for inefficiency of its agent. M20 was targeted at other service providers, which though provide better services that MTel, but still do not meet the needs of Nigerians completely, either because of their unfriendly tariff services or instability in ownership. As a result of these inadequacies, the general perception of the people is that their tariffs are too high and their services fail too frequently. These are expressed in M20. Comparing their services with God's love is a

reflection the overwhelming consciousness of God as the only hope of Nigerians. God's love overrides all the imperfections of human institutions.

The target of M22 is the nation's power supply company Power Holdings Company of Nigeria (PHCN) and unstable power supply by the company. Though constructed as a prayer or wish, the goal is to spotlight the problem of fluctuation in electricity in the country. M21 used allusion to a major social problem in Nigeria – fuel scarcity, which result in long queue of vehicles at petrol stations. Although it is a prayer, it is also a critique of government's inability to fulfill its social responsibilities to Nigerians. M23 uses simile and compares love with what some Nigerians and government agencies do, such as NEPA – constant power outage; policemen – bribery; the government – owing teachers. The last three similes are stereotypical ethnic jokes about the three Nigerian major ethnic groups – the Igbo and their love for money, the Yoruba and their love for celebrations and lavish parties, and the Hausa and their love for meat (*nama*).

Creativity also manifests itself in the ability of text composers to use the ASCII characters of the cell phone to make pictures, symbols and icons as reproduced in below.

M20
```
            /'''''''/
("'''''@      @ "''''''")
,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,
```
Dis car is loaded wit Blessns: Joy Peace Happiness Success & Gud Health All a urs. Offload them now and return my car. Have an encounta wt Jesus dis last qtr.

M21
```
       \|||/
       @@
  +oo0--(_)-------+
  |  I MISS YOU  |
  |              |
  +------------ooO+
      |_|_|
       |||
    ooOOoo
```

M22   `><(((:>` I send dis fish as a sign of friendship Plz take care of it & keep it in mobile & daily put ur mobile in water so tat fish wont DIE

M23:   TITANIC   _||__
                _„„ „„=·_/t__''
                _____/
u see how special you are to me,
that i came by ship to say
GOODNIGHT.

M24:   (_/)
        (=.=)
        ('')('')
a sweet little rabbit, just like you, because I love you!! Kisses.

The use of pictures and icons involves two levels of creation: artistic and poetic. Artistic creativity entails knowing how to combine the ASCII codes to form different pictorial images and the poetic creativity has to do with the choice of the appropriate kinds of words to go with the images created. Artistic creations are not as common in Nigeria SMS as poetic ones.

Conclusion

In the paper I have examined how young Nigerians explore their creative abilities in the context of SMS. For many young Nigerians, sending SMS serves different purposes. It is primarily used for social bonding. Beyond this primary function, it also draws on social and cultural symbols to create humour, affection, prayer and critiques of the government and its agents. The paper shows how metaphor, hyperbole, pun and symbolism are used to convey text messages in the Nigerian socio-cultural context. Though SMS is now subtly being used among the Nigerian people to deride the state, its agents and the people, it has the potential of becoming an instrument for active agitation for social reforms. Some state governments in the country (eg, Lagos, Jigawa, Imo) recognise the potential use SMS can be put to and now use it as a medium to receive feedback from the people they govern. The Nigerian government also used SMS recently for their propaganda on the Rebranding Project. All these show that in future the young people will take SMS beyond the present level of its use for interpersonal relationship and subtle use for critiquing to play a major role in the political and social institutions in Nigeria.

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