



Texting and Relationship: Examining Discourse Strategies in Negotiating and Sustaining Relationships Using Mobile Phone

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Abstract: Mobile telephony along with the Internet has enabled and enhanced new forms of human interaction by providing users with easy ways of reaching, and communicating with their loved ones regardless of distance or geographical locations. The medium has also not only become very essential to the society, but indispensable to individuals, families and social groups (Hoffman, et al, 2004). Texting has shown a great deal of promise to remain indispensable to people's communication needs across their life span. This paper examines how mobile phones support intimate personal and romantic relationships in digitally emergent places, particularly Nigeria, and argues that texting is an active and effective medium of interpersonal communication for enabling and sustaining social and romantic relationships. Applying the appraisal framework and discourse analysis, the study shows that texting is culturally motivated and provides some of the emotional support needed in personal relationships; texting is also used to express romantic feelings both within and outside of marriage. Especially among dating and married couples, texting is sometimes used in an attempt to resolving conflicts.

Data for this study comprise 217 text messages obtained from texters at different levels of heterosexual relationships, namely formal personal friendship, courtship/dating and marriage relationships. Fifty couples were interviewed to identify the specific essential roles of texting in their relationships as they form and develop, and the tendency of such roles to continue across the couples' life span.

Keywords: texting/text messages, discourse, communication, relationship, friends, couples, courtship, marriage.

1. Introduction

It is a common belief that effective communication, comprising honest and direct interpersonal interaction is fundamental to building and maintaining healthy relationships, as it will normally boost intimacy, improve happiness and health, as well as inspire creativity. According to Coyne et al, (2011), text messaging (or texting) has the potential to foster or heterosexual

romantic relationships through enhanced interpersonal communication. Texting is said to break spatial barriers and provide the medium for lovers to keep track of each other and exchange emotional commitments (Goesll, 2008; Ellison, 2008). As to whether people actually carry their emotions with them in computer-mediated communication (CMC) at all, Chenault (1998) argues that 'emotion is present in CMC'

and people meet via CMC on a daily basis 'to exchange information, ... to woo, commiserate and support' and their relationships can 'range from the cold, professional encounter to the hot, intimate rendezvous' (P.1). And beyond merely carrying emotional contents, CMC is a new way for people to find each other and develop personal relationships, some of which may lead to marriage. Rheingold (1993) also observes that people who communicate through CMC not only exchange knowledge: they also share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, fall in love...play games and flirt... (p.3). And according to Herring (2001), participants in online interactions do indeed 'make love and get married' through CMC (p. 612); thus, texting or emailing can impact a relationship in a very significant way, but how it impacts the relationship mainly depends on the individuals involved. Previous studies on how text-messaging impacts relationships have argued that although individuals in romantic relationships use mobile phone and text messaging to express affection, relationship satisfaction does not necessarily predict a specific use of media: it does, however, predict several reasons for media use. Also, texting has strongest association with individuals' positive and negative communication within their relationship (Coyne et al 2011). Ruth & Bruce (2004) observe that females are more likely to initiate first moves using SMS than telephone; the latter

appears to be more preferable to males. But the study maintains that though males are more likely to initiate first moves and first dates through phone calls, there are no sex differences when initiating relationships via SMS. The study concludes that SMS indeed appears to have influenced the manner in which romantic moves are initiated. Reid & Reid (2004) argue that 'texters seem to form close knit "text circles" with their own social ecology, interconnecting with a close group of friends in perpetual text contact,' and that it 'appears that there is something special about texting that allows some people to translate their loneliness and/or social anxiety into productive relationships, whilst for others the mobile phone does not afford the same effect' (p. 1). Xia (2012) further shows that the Chinese use texting for relationship maintenance, social network construction, social coordination, emotional support, and business interaction.

Despite the important contributions of these studies for understanding the roles of text messaging in romantic relationships, none of the studies has closely examined the discursive/pragmatic contents of text messages and their different uses among dating and married couples. The present work study not only analyses the discursive contents of text messages, but will also show that texting performs relatively different functions in formal personal relationships, when compared with

the dating/wooing stage of romantic relationship and the relationship of married couples. Also, the present study will be among the very few that have examined the roles of texting in relationship from a linguistic/discourse perspective; it will thus contribute significantly to the literature in this field. It is also among the very rare studies of texting in the African context.

The current work applies a discourse-analytical methodology within the framework of appraisal theory in order to examine the contents and functions of text-message exchanges among friends and lovers (Nigerians) with the aim of providing answers to the following questions:

- (i). What discursive functions does texting perform at different levels of romantic relationship and what discourse strategies are applied?
- (ii). Are there language/discursive forms that are unique to relationship text-messaging?
- (iii). What 'local-colour' language forms are evident in the Nigerian text messages?

2. Style of Text Messaging

Text messaging (or *texting*) refers to the brief typed message that is sent using the Short Message Service (SMS) between two or more mobile phones. It is considered the fastest and cheapest means of telephone interaction between individuals. The first SMS was sent in December

1992 by Neil Papworth who used a personal computer to send the text 'Merry Christmas' via the Vodafone network (United Kingdom) to the phone of Richard Jarvis. Ever since, texting and emailing have almost replaced other forms of written communication. According to Nundu (2008), more than ten million texts are sent every second around the world. This development is attributable to the decrease in cost of texting as compared to the more traditional forms of communication such as letter writing and telephoning. Moreover, the increasing number of offers by mobile telecommunication companies further contributes to the attraction of using texting as the main mode of communication.

Texting encourages creativity in language use and affords the users the opportunity to explore and develop imaginative ways of making CMC work best for them. It allows texters to experiment with language in an informal and playful manner, gradually leading to the adoption of a 'language of the internet' (Crystal, 2006), or to the 'language of texting' being recognized as a genre of language/style unique to CMC. However, Herring (2001) argues that the linguistic structure of computer-mediated discourse (CMD) is less standard, less complex and less coherent than that of standard written language. It 'falls uneasily between standard and non-standard English,' and illustrates writings that are largely unorthodox in terms of

spelling, punctuation and grammar (Crystal, 2006:244). Thurlow and Brown (2003) also observe that young people's use of mobile phone and text messaging tends to reinvent or 'damage' the English language. For instance, texting is usually replete with abbreviations and spelling manipulations where vowels are often omitted (e.g. yr, txt, bt (but)); non-standard spelling (e.g. luv, gud, ur, nite); letter-number homophones (e.g. gr8; 9t); syllabograms or rebus writing (e.g. b4, 2day, 4ever); phonetic spelling (e.g. neva, dose (those), dat (that)); and the use of symbols (e.g. &, @). Punctuation marks are generally omitted and writing is sometimes either in all upper or all lower case. Short words are often preferred to long ones and the articles 'a' and 'the' are often omitted (see Chiluya, 2008; Tagg 2009). Interestingly, Wood et al. (2010) argue that text messaging being used in this way can help in developing sensitivity, confidence and flexibility with regard to phonetics/phonology and orthography, which may in turn enhance the development of a student's literacy skills. In recent times however, the use of abbreviations and unconventional spelling is gradually decreasing in text messages, especially those associated with politics and commerce and those written by more mature adults.

3. Texting in Nigeria

The Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) was

introduced in Nigeria in 2001 with the licensing of *MTN* and *Vmobile*, now known as *Celtel*. This sparked off the euphoria of using mobile phones with almost a million subscribers (mainly in the cities) embracing the new form of communication (Chiluya, 2008a). By 2002, the number of mobile phone subscribers in Nigeria stood at 1.5 million (*Nigerian Tribune*, 2003) and by the end of 2003, MTN alone had 1,650,000 active subscribers on its network; Vmobile had a subscriber base of over one million, while Globacom and M-Tel (own by the Nigerian Telecommunications Limited - NITEL) also had no less than one million subscribers (Adomi, 2006). As of February 2011, the total number of mobile phone subscribers in Nigeria stood at 90,583,306 – the highest in Africa.

As highlighted above, in Nigeria, like in other societies, texting is used for group communication, advertising and business contacts, religious mobilization, pursuits of educational matters, political communication and the organization and implementation of protest. Thus, texting is used by people of all age groups, but particularly by the under 45 (Thurlow & Poff, 2011), to communicate issues that affect their lives directly or indirectly. For instance, Nigerian students send texts to connect with friends, get dates, control their relationships with others and often, to avoid oral communication (Adomi, 2006). According to Chiluya (2008b),

texting has been used by Nigerian Christians to promote religious doctrines, Christian values and sentiments (see also Taiwo, 2008). While older Nigerians use mobile phones for voice communication, teenagers and young adults have adopted texting as their major way of socializing and maintaining real-time romantic relationships (Enietan, 2012). According to Taiwo (2010), even the young males that are 'tongue-tied' in the techniques of wooing the ladies they admire, do so through texting.

4. Methodology

Data comprise 217 text messages collected from people of different ethnic groups and backgrounds, and from various occupations in Nigeria, between July 2011 and February, 2014. The respondents comprise people of different age groups at different levels of relationships namely (i) friends (i.e., formal/casual relationships among co-workers, neighbours or classmates of the opposite sex constituting 32% of the data). (ii) dating/courting couples (constituting 48% of the data), and (iii) married couples (constituting 19% of the data). In Nigeria, 'dating' and 'courting' stand for the same thing, and the terms are used interchangeably in the present study. Texters were informed that the message samples being collected were to be used exclusively for academic purposes. Hence, those that submitted the messages did so willingly. Even so, it was indeed difficult to convince respondents to

volunteer their private text-messages for research; which is the reason for the few number of samples available for this study. Real names of writers in the data are either modified or completely deleted. Samples in the data are numbered ME1-217 (ME= message). However, due to the restricted space of this article, only a few relevant text samples are reproduced in the analysis.

Fifty (50) couples (either dating/courting or married) from a University community were interviewed. Questionnaires were also administered alongside the interviews. Some of the structured questions were: how often do you send text messages to your partner? how positively does the use of romantic words express in texting affect your relationship? Are you always able to relate the words in the texts to your partner's character/personality? Do you think texting may continue to play some key roles throughout your life as married or courting couple? etc. (See the Appendices).

5. The Appraisal Framework

The appraisal framework was adopted from Systemic Function Linguistics (SFL) and focuses on the social function of language as expressed in texts, not only as a means through which speaker/writers express their feelings and take a stance, but also 'engage with socially-determined value positions and thereby align or dis-align themselves with the social subjects who hold to these positions' (White,

2011:14). SFL views language in terms of its social functions namely: the ideational (representing the world of experience), interpersonal (constructing social roles, relationships and identities) and intrapersonal (constructing language as coherent text in relation to the social context; see Halliday, 1994). Within the interpersonal function, the appraisal framework shows how speakers/writers not only construct particular identities for themselves in relation to other members of society, but also negotiate relationships with co-members of their social groups. Appraisal is defined as ‘...the semantic resources used to negotiate emotions, judgement and evaluations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations’ (Martin, 2000:145).

The appraisal framework proposes three systems – attitude, engagement and graduation. Attitude refers to feelings, including emotional reactions, judgments of behaviour and evaluation of things (Martin & White, 2005) and is divided into three categories, namely: *affect*, *judgement* and *appreciation*. Affect is the ‘resources for expressing feelings,’ while judgement is the ‘resources for judging character.’ Appreciation refers to ‘resources for valuing the worth of things’ (Martin & Rose, 2003: 24). The system of ‘attitude’ with its categories of affect, judgement and appreciation is applied in the analysis carried out in the present study.

6. Analysis and Discussion: Texting among Friends

As stated above, ‘friends’ in this group refers to males and females within the age range of 18-30, who are either beginning a relationship or have known each other for a reasonably long time. The relationship here is between male-male, male-female and female-female in the normal (casual) heterosexual relationship. Some are already well acquainted and their friendship is obvious to observers. This type of relationship between persons of the opposite sex sometimes develops into a more meaningful romantic relationship. Many of the texts in the data are written by students in tertiary institutions, who are often described as typically more avid texters than are older people; they are the ‘slaves’ of a growing text message culture (Thurlow & Poff, 2011). This group of persons uses SMS in different ways in a range of cross-cultural settings (Ling, 2007). According to Kasesniemi (2003, cited in Thurlow & Poff, 2011), Finnish teenage girls for example, are heavy texters and often place greater emphasis on emotional issues, while the boys tend to be brief, informative, and practical. Young Japanese on the other hand, tend to rate their relationships as more intimate when texting becomes an aspect of the relationship (Igarashi, et al, 2005), which suggests that there might be ritualistic roles of texting in defining social boundaries through shared

linguistic codes. Nigerian women are reported to use their SMS to perform some social-relational functions among their friends and family members (Taiwo, 2008).

6.1. Discursive Features and Functions of Friendship Text Messages

Our study reveals that SMS sent by texters in this group perform both social and religious functions, such as reflecting inspirational messages as a result of strong attachment to religion or God. Others merely express goodwill and offer holiday or birthday greetings, while some simply make complimentary remarks aimed at maintaining the relationship, give information or make requests. Text messages that perform religious functions combine religious and philosophical assumptions with some bits of humour, which probably aim at providing emotional support to distressed or discouraged friends. Many of the messages were not originally written by the senders, but are forwarded to the receivers from other sources (e.g. the Internet) in order to communicate emotional support, encouragement and social bonding or identification. ME1, ME3, ME4 and ME5 are examples from the data.

ME1 ‘that idea that you have inside you can influence our society today and bring a positive change. Never underestimate your capabilities! Make that move.

ME3 ‘Everyday wen you wake up, you have 2 choices: to sleep again & continue to dream or stand up and strategize to make ur dreams a reality. The choice is urs.’

ME4 ‘A school of thought has it that “if all obstacles must be removed b4 anything is done, then nothing would be accomplished”. The Holy book also says “a wise man must consider the consequences of his action(s)’.

ME5 ‘wen planning be careful, wen executin be cautious, wen failing be courageous, if education is expensive Y nt try ignorance. Fear nt,4 fear means fake enemy appearing real’.

The writer of ME5 for example, encourages the receiver not to fear and creates a humorous acronym of the word ‘fear’ (‘fake enemy appearing real’). The sender attempts to reflect the level of the closeness of the friendship. Some of the messages sound poetic and personalized as a token of friendship. However, the writers appear to take the stance of a teacher or counselor; thus they sound more formal, instructional and didactic than is expected in an informal interaction. The messages seem to lack originality since most of the texts (in this category) are quotes and forwarded items. Unfortunately, asynchronous CMC (e.g. text message) does not provide real time interactional exchange patterns such as turn-taking.

As highlighted above, many of these inspirational messages are sourced from the internet, the Holy Bible, the Holy Quran, quotes from motivational speakers and religious sermons. Texts that express compliments or holiday/birthday greetings are more original and linguistically more creative than the philosophical/religious ones. It is a popular SMS culture in Nigeria to exchange text messages to friends and loved ones during birthdays, naming ceremonies, weddings and anniversaries, religious holidays, festive seasons and new months. About 35% of all texts in this sub-group are within this sub-type. The messages express prayers, good wishes and commemorate with celebrants. Texts are also used to express condolences to bereaved friends or to encourage others who had experienced some tragedy, as a show of emotional supports during their moments of grief. Friends generally send and receive texts during Christmas, New Year, Easter, Eid alfitr or Eid el-kabir holidays. Text messages below are examples from the data:

ME6 ‘a new dawn, a new life, a new beginning, a new thin, a new peace, joy, love n all in d gud things of life in dis new year. Cheers’.

ME7 ‘Dis day & 4eva, God’ll fortify, identify, sanctify, purify, glorify, dignify & satisfy u. upwards & forward u’ll go as u jorny in lyf. Api xmas/nu yr’.

ME8 ‘being alive as a Muslim is neva by chance not even by right but by Allah’s rahma 2 just a few. Alhamdulillah ala nimatul Islam. Happy eid-fitr’.

ME11 ‘Happy birthday. Long life and prosperity. May the good Lord grant u peace, uplift u, mak his face to shine upon u and be with u’.

Also in this sub-group are messages that simply give information or notice, or make requests. One major discourse feature of this type of texts is that they are more tacit, less emotional and straight to the point. And they often have one line or two like in the examples below:

ME23 ‘why are u flashin, anyway am in class’.

ME24 ‘hi friend, dere is nothing inside d email. Anyway don’t bother urself cos d sch is on strike until further notice. Good 9t’.

ME25 ‘the e-mail address is afi-olkiwu@yahoo.com’. (*Modified*)

ME27 ‘I don’t want to disturb the person beside me. I’m in Akure, I wl be in Ado 2moro’.

ME28 ‘sorry I had an international call. I’ll have to call back if I missed it’.

ME32 ‘I can’t reach u, network is bad. How far? Hv u sat down?’

ME34 ‘Gud pm, can you send me a call car against 2morrow, cos I want to

use it for an assignment
thankz’.

This sub-type appears like a continuation of discourse in progress usually among friends in a social group or classmates. Some are invitations to events or meetings while others are replies to previous written or spoken discourse. Request text messages sometimes include some bits of pleading and coaxing from the sender (e.g. ME34), thus performs functions similar to what Searle (1969) refers to as directive acts.

6.1.2 Linguistic and Rhetorical Strategies in Friendship SMS

At the micro level of analysis, lexical and grammatical strategies of texts are identified, which often reflect some interesting features of the text. For example, texts between friends exhibit a number of short forms (e.g. u (you), ur (your) wl (will) etc. that are quite understandable (usually between young people) and not likely to diminish the intended psychological effect of the message on the reader/receiver.

Social discourse is not completely reflected by linguistic items; rather, we resort to the pragmatic power of language to express perceptions and emotional processes, thereby also predicting the kinds of gratification that speakers/writers receive when they send and receive information. Thus in texting, writers send messages using bizarre lexical forms/structures and expect their receivers to understand them. The writers of the texts above for

example, apply both linguistic and rhetorical elements for persuasive effects. The repetitions of ‘new’ in ME6 and words ending with *-fy* in ME7 not only produce some highly pleasurable lines of alliteration, but are also capable of adding a great deal of persuasion to the messages. The same is also noticeable in ME8 with the achievement of assonance in the sound of the message. The unique creative spellings (e.g. gud (good), 4eva (for ever), Api (happy), lyf (life), neva (never) etc, are informal and a lot more fascinating; they also and fit better into the kinds of language used in informal interpersonal communication than into the didactic and preachy ones.

In the inspirational messages, there is less use of intimate or shared language codes as these messages may also be forwarded to various other friends. Thus, mostly the popular forms of abbreviations are used (e.g. in ME5). The messages that give information or notice incorporate a lot of incomplete sentences, condensed expressions, letter/number homophones and non-conventional spellings (e.g. ‘good9t,’ i.e. goodnight in ME24 or ‘gud pm’ i.e. good evening in ME32). Some of the messages depend on the context of communication for their interpretation as friends may have references or code names for things which may be unintelligible to an outsider. The messages are characteristically short and precise, especially those that do information passing and request messages.

7. Texting among Courting Couples

Texting among dating/courtship couples is said to boost intimate personal contacts while at the same time offering the detachment necessary to manage self-presentation and involvement (Reid and Frazer, 2004). Couples who are away from each other often use texting as their major medium of communication because of its relatively cheapness and speed. Individuals who are courting have made a decision to get married, therefore would want to constantly communicate to reassure each other. In courtship, the wooing stage is assumed to have passed; thus, both the man and the woman often tend to make efforts to sustain their relationship. Texting therefore, in addition to information exchange, acts as a channel for communicating emotional feelings to a partner even when on the move. Most of the text messages in this sub-group are poetry-like and contain a lot of romantic language. Males especially use texting mainly to send love texts, because they often do not use words for their emotions. Females on the other hand, use text messaging for various other reasons, such as reply to a love text, give information or to express disagreement. Our research shows that only about 3.5% of those interviewed (i.e. 32 courting couples) might not want to express disagreements via texting; most couples would prefer meeting face to face to voice their emotions and

problems. Expectedly, romantic SMS exemplify some forms of rhetoric in their content. Our questionnaire shows that men text more than do women, with over 50% of courting couples sending romantic message to their partners.

7.1 The Rhetoric of Romantic Messages

Romantic messages sent to a partner generally suggests that the receiver is being thought about and the partner is likely to feel good, when – regardless of how stressful a day might be (or might have been), a partner takes the time to compose a romantic text to express his/her feelings. However, most of the messages in this sub-group sound rather exaggerated and unrealistic. A few examples are presented below:

ME45 ‘If only a star would fall every tym I miss u; den all d star in d heaven would all bin gone. Don’t b surprise if dere are no stars 2nite! It’s all ur fault cos u mak me miss u a lot. Luv u’.

ME46 ‘Misn u is an undastamnt, wntn 2 c u is jus d simple truth, membrn u is a day2day activity... mis u so much. .

ME47 ‘Tinkn of u is my hobi, dream of u is nt voluntary, wantn u is natural, talkn of u is not cok n bulstori. Luvn u is wat I do. Hapi day’.

- ME48** ‘Roll Roll Roll ur eyes, gentle down 2 slip... merily merily merily! Hv dsweetest dream!! Jst singing u a bedtym poem. Try nd kip ur sef warm o! gudnyt dear!’
- ME49** ‘Nyt time is nt only time 2 sleep its also a tym to think of dat pesn u cheris, care 4 n luv, now is my nyt tym and u r dat pesn! I love you more.’
- ME50** ‘We cannot be 2geda now, but we’ll never b apart, 4 no matter what lyfe brings us, u’re always in my heart’.
- ME51** ‘If I culd choose 4 u d kind of d’day u deserve, then frm al d brightest days of d entire begins wit thinkin abt u my pretty, sexy charming, baby. Av a luvly day dear’.
- ME53** ‘Every1 wants 2 be d sun dat lyts up ur lyf. But I’d rather be ur moon, so I can shine on u during ur darkest hour wen ur sun isn’t around. I luv u’.

Following the appraisal framework, the above texts express emotional intensity (affect) and appreciation, which are normal with people in love. Most of the texts end with ‘luv u,’ ‘mis u so much,’ ‘gudnyt dear,’ ‘I love you more,’ or ‘I luv u.’ In the most of the samples above, language

structures are stretched to some ambiguous shapes to embody what the sender feels emotionally. The meaning of the texts is not necessarily derived from the literal meaning of words, but rather from their metaphorical implications. Because of their highly sensual tones, figurative language becomes inevitable; hence, exaggerations, metaphors, imageries and alliterations occur frequently. In the above samples *exaggerations* (or hyperboles) feature more frequently. In ME45 for example, the writer tells his lover: ‘*If only a star would fall every tym I miss u; den all d star in d heaven would all bin gone...*’ Another lover writes: ‘*misn u is an undastamnt, wntn 2 c u is jus d simple truth, membrn u is a day2day activity...*’ Though exaggerations reflect the intensity of emotions, they (like the ones above) sometimes (unfortunately) precede relationships that later broke up prematurely. At the beginning of relationships, young people often make unreal promises. While some of these promises have been sincere, culminating in fruitful marriages, many others have been deceptive, resulting in frustration and heartbreak. Interestingly however, about 90% of those interviewed and responded to our questionnaire agreed that they were able to relate the words in text messages from their partners to the latter’s personality and character. Unfortunately, 70% of married couples claimed that texting actually had a negative influence on their relationship, for instance, by

threatening to replace the important face-to-face interpersonal communication.

In terms of style, there are no stereotypes for this type of messages, since relationships and what people feel are different. Couples who have some secret language codes incorporate this in their texts, sometimes to deal with private matters. While the texts are generally passionate, some of them (e.g. ME45) do not sound original; some that might have reflected what the writer feels could have been culled from some sources; e.g. an edited previous message, a movie dialogue, magazine or the internet (e.g. ME47). Little wonder that critics of texting in relationships argue that it is impossible to distinguish sarcasm, sadness and sincerity in a text message, especially in the absence of facial expression, gestures, appearance and tone of voice; thus, texting is deceptive and avoids real life situations (Vanessa, 2009; Ellison, 2008). Some couples no doubt could have composed their own romantic messages (e.g. ME50). In ME50 for example, the writer frankly says: *'we cannot be 2geda now, but we'll never b apart; 4 no matter what lyfe brings us, u're always in my heart.'* This message suggests that the writer is under some kind of pressure to conclude the marriage and, perhaps prematurely, had to send a message of reassurance to his/her partner.

In some religious circles in Nigeria (and Africa), a courtship period of

six months is mandatory to members; in others, it is three months. In some cases, parents insist on a courtship of a least one year, thereby placing some young couples under serious emotional pressure. Some lovers (especially among Igbos), may decide on their own to extend their courtship period for economic reasons in order to be ready to adequately cover the expensive marriage rites. Especially among the Igbos, marriage is one way to display a man's wealth, as well as his social connections. In either of these situations, one of the partners has to provide the prop to hold on and frequently send reassuring messages, as in the cases of PE50 and PE47. Some of the messages therefore are used to maintain a kind of absent presence in a relationship by closing the mental and emotional gap between partners. Unfortunately, spellings in the texts are heavily manipulated, which tends to lend credence to the argument that spelling manipulations in texting might destroy meaning and the intention of the writer. Some words in PE46 and PE49 (e.g. 'undastamnt,' i.e. 'under-statement,' 'membrin', i.e. 'remembering' and 'nyt', i.e. 'night') may be misunderstood. Some of them are actually unintentional mistakes which are often confused with 'SMS spelling.' Sometimes writers reach a saturation point where they no longer know when to spell out some abbreviations, because they are used

to only seeing them, not the full forms (Thurlow & Poff, 2011).

7.2 Local Colour Items in Courtship Messages

Also in this sub-group are text messages that are sent to courtship partners mainly to keep the relationship going. Some of the messages are almost similar to the religious didactic ones, comprising advices, prayers, birthday messages and some general social discussions. A few samples are presented below:

ME55 ‘Don’t be scared of disappointment; lots of success have evolved out of some very sad state. Think of how u can benefit from & make the next move to greatness’.

ME56 ‘Learn to reciprocate because “when the right hand washes the left hand and the left hand washes the right hand; both hands become clean”’.

ME60 ‘How was ur day, hope u had a great day? Tanx 4 2day I really appreciated it’.

ME62 ‘Bawoni Ate, I was @wrk wen u called! Oshe o, eku igba gbogbo, mabinu dt I dnt cal u@ al,soon thins wil be beta for me..! I miss you o!’

Interestingly, some of the texts show examples of ‘local colour’ in discourse such as code-switching and idioms. There are no too many of them in the data but the few in the

above samples are worth mentioning. The writer of ME62 above switches between English and Yoruba: ‘bawoni Ate’ (how are you Ate), Oshe o, eku igba gbogbo, mabinu dt I dnt cal u@al (thank you; enjoy yourself, don’t be annoyed that I didn’t call you at all). Codeswitching here, reflects familiarity and functions as a form of cultural identity of the interactants. The use of the indigenous language in texts also reflects the acceptability and indigenization of CMC in the social life of the Nigerian people. Thus, texters are able to force technology to conform to the dynamics of local language systems, providing a more discreet way for couples to communicate without physical contact. A proverb is used in ME56: *when the right hand washes the left hand and the left hand washes the right hand; both hands become clean*. This proverb is commonly used by the Igbos to teach reciprocity in a relationship. Thus, ME55 and ME56 above are didactic and preachy like the inspirational messages. ME55 however, suggests a negative outcome of the relationship, which the receiver might not even be aware of - the fact that the writer is almost like (perhaps unwittingly) preparing the mind of his partner for a possible disappointment.

8. Texting among Married Couples

The small size of samples of this category suggests that Nigerian married couples are yet to embrace the culture of texting in matters

concerning their relationship. Compared to dating/courting couples, texting is less frequent among married respondents; our findings show that 41.7% of married respondents rarely text their partners, while a low 23.1% rarely text while dating/courting. One of the men interviewed said his wife and he preferred the traditional person-to-person (physically present) communication to texting. They only text each other when extremely necessary, and for reasons other than romance. Newly married couples that use texting at all do so infrequently for reasons almost similar to those of courting couples: for information exchange rather than for the expression of romantic feelings. Generally, discursive functions of marriage SMS are those of love expressions, conflict resolution, making requests and information sharing.

8.1 Message Structure and Functions

Text messages that express love in this category are similar to those sent by courting couples. However, the ones sent by married couples appear to be more genuine, heartfelt, and straightforward romantic.

At this point of their romantic relationship, it is assumed that married couples have passed the stage of deceiving themselves with exaggerated love messages. In terms of structure, most of the text messages in this sub-group begin with openings such as greetings (e.g. 'good morning' as in ME82) or a

form of address (e.g. 'dear,' 'my dear' or 'drly' as in ME83, ME88, ME85). Some begin with the first name of the addressee (e.g. 'BH' in ME81). Rather than the flowery exaggerated poetry of the courting couples, the contents of the messages here reflect originality and seriousness, with many of them being prayers, well-wishing, romantic words and reassurance of love. Some of the messages make reference to children, who also seem to share in the love expressions (e.g. ME83). A few of the samples are reproduced here:

ME81 'Bh my prayer for you this week, strength for Monday, peace for Tuesday, favour for Wednesday, victory for Thursday, smiles for Friday, mercy for Saturday and joy for Sunday'.

ME82 'Good morning, as you wake up this morning, God will show you the direction that leads to ur destiny & guide you there. Always be assur'd that God is ur strength'.

ME83 'Dear, my luv 4 u has no bound, infact am just thinking about you and the children, hapi weekend'.

ME84 'Have u check d result of d exam u wrote last 9te? If "NO": I checked it 4 u dis morning Long life: A. Riches: B, Happiness: A; u were absent in the following subjects: Difficulties,

Divorce. The following subjects were seized: Disease, Death.

ME85 ‘Drly! Appreciate u like oasis in d rain. May d Lord God strengthen & uphold u as d new month smiles wit fortune’.

ME86 ‘Drly, tanx 4 luv & concern’.

ME88 ‘My dear, this MTN card is for you 2036 4903 3523, please load it from the bottom of my heart, I love you’.

As evident in the above samples, the messages are short but do not include too many spelling manipulations. Many of the lines are in conventional writing probably because the messages are meant to be read and re-read. Although married couples have passed the stage of wooing and impressing each other with hyperbolic esthetic words, it was still important to reassure each other of their love as evident in ME85, and ME88. A partner in ME85 for example is described as ‘oasis in the rain.’ Also, the assurance of love in ME88 is accompanied with a gift of a recharge card in an effort to reflect what is felt.

Interestingly, too, some of the samples contain allegory and jokes (e.g. ME81) with creative prayers for each day of the week. ME84 below is a creative prayer analogous to writing and passing academic examinations; the partner is said to earn very high marks in long life, riches and happiness, but does poorly

in other subjects such as difficulties, divorce, disease and death. These are various forms of rhetoric that are expected in love messages. Although it is difficult to conclude that writers of these messages actually mean what they write, the messages do indeed suggest that couples value each other, especially when at different locations. Couples appear to long after each other more when they are temporarily separated by distance than when they are together. Like in the dating couples sub-group, texting is used by married couples to make requests and exchange quick information. The examples below however, show that texting is used much more for making requests than for passing information.

ME98 ‘Drly! Appreciate u 4 who u a. pls giv mi chaps d best support in dia academics & b security conscious’.

ME99 ‘Choice, abeg mk food redi as I dey come oo, hunger dey catch me’.’Nkem pls I want u to manage d money I gave u for the week. Pls do not let d children know that things are not working ok. Lov u’.

ME100 ‘Pls send me credit’.

ME101 ‘My sister would be coming today, pls help me welcome and take care of her. I would be coming late today’.

ME102 ‘Pls I need you to quickly help me go and deposit money today in mama’s acc. I wud giv u

back when I return. Her
acc nos is on my table’.

ME108 ‘I will be home in d next
10 mins when r u
coming back?’

As noted above, texting suggests that two people communicating through SMS are not present in the same place at the same time. Hence, couples may prefer to hold on to certain information (if they are not too urgent) until the partner comes home. Some requests in the data appear to be impromptu (e.g. ME100), while some may have resulted naturally from a previous message. A request may be such that a spouse does not feel comfortable making it physically. For example, in ME101, a spouse informs the partner that his/her sister is coming for a visit. If the partner had no previous knowledge of this, the person sending the message may not feel too comfortable making the request in person for fear of possible refusal or argument, so the way out is texting. ME99 is written in the Nigerian pidgin, which is a major medium of informal communication in Nigeria, often used in homes (even among the educated), and at informal gatherings. Couples often use it to poke fun, make difficult requests, or apologize for wrongdoings.

Expectedly, issues associated with finance and money management occur in the messages written by married couples, unlike what is the case in the other sub-groups (e.g. ME99 and ME102 in particular). Culturally, the man performs the role of breadwinner in a family, and the

woman is the home keeper and manager of finances. The writer of ME99 reflects this traditional belief and practice. The writer (likely the husband) is asking for food to be ready before his arrival, also appealing to the wife to be judicious with money and not allow the children to know what was going on. This is a typical concept of marital relationship in African society, just like in other patriarchal societies, where the man is expected to work and provide for his family; the woman stays at home, bears children and raises them. The man is essentially the boss and the provider; the wife and children are the dependants. This is simply the summary of the Nigerian (or African) patriarchal assumptions about marriage. The man is the husband (the head); the woman, the ‘weaker vessel’ stays at home, bears children and nurses them. Little wonder a fairly large number of respondents (i.e. 75.5% of courting/married couples perceive that texting is healthy in their relationships where the man adequately performs his roles; 64.4% of respondents reported that texting is more associated with men.

8.2 Conflict Resolution among Couples

Conflicts and their resolutions also occur in text messages in this sub-group, though minimally. The methods of conflict resolution such as apologies and promises to make amends are the same here. In this sub-group however, only about 16%

of the samples show that married couples use texting to provoke and resolve quarrels. They prefer to solve their differences face to face rather than through mobile phones. As a matter of fact, none of the couples interviewed agreed that mobile phones should be used to resolve conflict in a relationship. ME93 and ME94 below are examples from a couple; one of them complains about an embarrassment caused him/her and how it was seemingly resolved.

ME93 ‘Nkem, I didnt like wt u did dis morning, aw can u embarrass me in d presence of my sister’

ME94 ‘Nkem, I am sorry, it was just a joke. I love u’.

From the above samples, it is obvious that though texting is asynchronous, it is sometimes used in a slow interactional exchange, where the texters take turns. In the above example, one person sends a message and gets an instant feedback and then sends another and on and on, in a short conversation. ME94 is a logical reply to ME93 and the dialogue might have continued. ‘Nkem’ in the text is an Igbo word for ‘mine,’ which is common among married couples in Nigeria, including non-Igbos. The couple in the above samples addresses each other by that name, which also suggests that they still love each other, the offence notwithstanding.

9. Conclusion

We conclude that texting has the potential to help build and sustain relationships. Rather than diminishing the level of intimacy associated with face to face communication, texting can possibly keep relationships at various levels active and up to date. Through texting, a partner is likely to track, and keep in touch with, his friend or lover despite spatial or geographical barriers. Our study has revealed that texting gives friends, dating/courting couples and married couples the opportunity to share their feelings anytime they like, receive religious and psychological motivations, exchange information and greetings and make requests in meaningful (and sometime interactive) atmospheres. Courting and married couples more often utilize texting to express romantic words. They also use it to attempt to resolve conflicts and solve family management problems, including problems of finance. While it is arguable that lovers need to meet in person to resolve conflicts completely, texting certainly begins the process of reconciliation; the healing process can begin with sincere words transmitted through SMS. Due to its implicit potential to maintain and sustain relationships, 96.2% of respondents agree that texting would continue to play some positive roles throughout the lives of married and dating/courting couples.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Dating/Courting

Total Number of Respondents: 26

No	Question	A	B	C	D	Total (%)
1.	Kindly tick the most appropriate	Married	Courting/ Dating (26) 100%			
2.	How often do you send text messages to your partner?	Always (6) 23.1% %	Often (14) 53.8%	Occasionally (6) 23.1%		100
3.	Basically, on which of these issues do you mainly dwell on when you text your partner?	Love messages (10) 38.5%	Give information (15) 57.7%	To settle disputes (1) 3.8%	Others (please specify) (3)	100
4.	How would you rate texting in your relationship?	Healthy (15) 57.7%	A distraction (2) 7.7%	Not necessary (0) %	Necessary (9) 36.6%	100
5.	On a scale of 0-10, how would you rate the positive impact of texting in your relationship?	0-4 (1) 3.8%	5-6 (2) 7.7%	7-10 (23) 88.5%		100
6.	On a scale of 0-10, how would you rate the negative impact of texting in your relationship?	0-4 (22) 84.6% %	5-6 (2) 7.7%	7-10 (2) 7.7%		100
7.	Who texts more?	The man (14) 53.8%	The woman (12) 46.2%			100
8.	On a scale of 0-10, how would positively does the use of romantic words affect your relationship?	0-4 (2) 7.7%	5-6(5) 19.2%	7-10 (18) 69.2%	Neutral (1) 3.8%	100
9.	On a scale of 0-10, how would negatively does the use of romantic words affect your relationship?	0-4(18) 69.2%	5-6(5) 19.2%	7-10 (2) 7.7%	Neutral (1)3.8%	100
10.	Are you always able to relate the words in the texts to your partner's character/personality?	Yes (21) 80.8%	No (5) 19.2%			100
11.	Do you think texting may	Yes (24)	No (2)			100

	<i>continue to play some positive roles throughout the life of married or courting couples?</i>	92.3%	7.7%			

Appendix 2: Married Couples

Total Number of Respondents: 24

No	Question	A	B	C	D	Total (%)
1.	<i>Kindly tick the most appropriate</i>	<i>Married (24) 100%</i>	<i>Courting/ Dating 0%</i>			
2.	<i>How often do you send text messages to your partner?</i>	<i>Always (4)16.6 %</i>	<i>Often (10) 41.7%</i>	<i>Occasionally (10) 41.7%</i>		100
3.	<i>Basically, on which of these issues do you mainly dwell on when you text your partner?</i>	<i>Love messages (6) 25%</i>	<i>Give information (18) 75%</i>	<i>To settle disputes (0) 0%</i>	<i>Others (please specify) (0)</i>	100
4.	<i>How would you rate texting in your relationship?</i>	<i>Healthy (18) 75%</i>	<i>A distraction (0) 0%</i>	<i>Not necessary (1) 4.2%</i>	<i>Necessary (5) 20.8%</i>	100
5.	<i>On a scale of 0-10, how would you rate the positive impact of texting in your relationship?</i>	<i>0-4 (3) 12.5%</i>	<i>5-6 (6) 25%</i>	<i>7-10 (15) 62.5%</i>		100
6.	<i>On a scale of 0-10, how would you rate the negative impact of texting in your relationship?</i>	<i>0-4 (24) 100%</i>	<i>5-6 (0) 0%</i>	<i>7-10 (0) 0%</i>		100
7.	<i>Who texts more?</i>	<i>The man (18) 75%</i>	<i>The woman (6) 25%</i>	<i>Both (1)</i>		100
8.	<i>On a scale of 0-10, how would positively does the use of romantic words affect your relationship?</i>	<i>0-4 (3) 12.5%</i>	<i>5-6(3) 12.5%</i>	<i>7-10 (17) 70.8%</i>	<i>Neutral 4.2%(1)</i>	100
9.	<i>On a scale of 0-10, how would negatively does the use of romantic words</i>	<i>0-4(22) 91.7%</i>	<i>5-6(0) 0%</i>	<i>7-10 (0) 0%</i>	<i>Neutral 2)8.3%</i>	100

	<i>affect your relationship?</i>					
10.	<i>Are you always able to relate the words in the texts to your partner's character/personality?</i>	Yes (20) 83.4%	No (4) 16.6%			100
11.	<i>Do you think texting may continue to play some positive roles throughout the life of married or courting couples?</i>	Yes (24) 100%	No (0) %			100