3. THE NATIVIZATION OF ZIMBABWEAN ENGLISH: EVIDENCE FROM STUDENTS' WHATSAPP COMMUNICATION

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https://doi.org/10.59677/njllcs.v19i1.128

Abstract

While studies on African Englishes have proliferated, research on the development of the Zimbabwean variety remains limited. This qualitative study explores the emergent linguistic characteristics of Zimbabwean English (ZE) in WhatsApp-mediated communication among high school students in Harare. Through a Content Analysis of 4500 WhatsApp messages and Focus Group Discussions with 90 purposively sampled participants, the study reveals a dominant use of new English words, with neologisms being the most prevalent form. The findings also show users' overwhelmingly positive attitude toward the new language and the multifaceted communicative role of these linguistic innovations, although confined to informal communication. Guided by Schneider's Dynamic Model, the study argues that these results reflect the Nativization phase of ZE, characterized by the emergence of local linguistic features, a shift towards Endonormative stabilization, and the development of a distinct, localized variety of English. The study also offers insights into the complex dynamics of language change in digital social networking sites. It concludes that digital communication is shaping the development of postcolonial English varieties, highlighting the need to reevaluate traditional language standardization. Recommended is that language educators and policymakers should recognize the importance of digital communication in language development and support creative language use in informal digital contexts.

Keywords: Zimbabwean English, nativization, students, WhatsApp communication, dynamic model

Introduction

This study explores the development of Zimbabwean English (ZE) in digital communication. ZE is a distinct variant within the broader spectrum of World Englishes (WEs), spoken by the indigenous people of Zimbabwe. Kachru (1985) posits that WEsencompass global English diversities, formed by various linguistic and socio-cultural factors. These can be categorized into three main regions, each representing the dynamic and diverse nature of English language use: the Inner Circle (including traditional English-speaking countries such as the United Kingdom, USA, and Australia, where English is the primary native language); the Outer Circle (comprising post-colonial countries such as India, Nigeria,Ghana, and Singapore, where English is an institutionalized second language); and the Expanding Circle (incorporating China, Japan, and Brazil, where English is widely taught as a foreign language) (Kachru, ibid). The International Corpus of English (ICE) project has also documented various WEs, including African, Asian, and Caribbean varieties (Greenbaum, 1996). ZE falls under the category of African Englishes (AEs), which comprise the Englishes used in the continent (Bekker, 2019;

Kamwangamalu, 2019). Several of these varieties originated from the colonial era when English was introduced as a language of administration, education, and trade, subsequently evolving through contact with local languages and cultural exchange, shaping the linguistic landscape of Africa (Mesthrie, 2006). AEs comprise various types, including West African English, East African English, and Southern African English, each with distinct phonological, grammatical, and lexical features (Bamgbose, 1998). ZE is a Southern African variety, inherited from the former British administration, serving as the main official language of Zimbabwe, situating it within Kachru's (1985) Outer Circle region of postcolonial 'New Englishes'.

In recent years, there has been a surge in scholarly interest in AEs, with particular emphasis on exploring the complexities of English language evolution in the continent, yielding valuable insights into language development. This growing field has been shaped by the contributions of African scholars, including Bekker (2019) (South Africa), Peters (2024) (Namibia), Chapwanya (2022) (Zimbabwe), Callies and Oyebola (2025) (Nigeria), Adika (2012) (Ghana), Kasanga (2012) (Democratic Republic of Congo), and Atechi (2015) (Cameroon) among others. The advancement in research on AEs has enhanced our understanding of language variation, highlighting the importance of considering the unique sociolinguistic contexts in which these varieties emerge. While studies on AEs have proliferated, research on the development of the Zimbabwean variety remains limited. The scarcity of research on ZE is alarming, given the country's complex linguistic history and the significant role that English plays as the main official language of communication (Kadenge and Kufakunesu, 2018). Existing research, including studies by Chapwanya and Nel (2024), Mukenge (2020), Marungudzi (2016), and Kadenge (2010), suggests that ZE has reached the Nativization stage as outlined in Schneider's Dynamic model (2007), marked by the localization of the English language, wherein its features are adapted, modified, and integrated with local linguistic and cultural elements to create a distinct, context-specific variety.However, while these studies acknowledge the occurrence of Nativization, they do not delve into the intricacies of this process. Consequently, a significant knowledge gap remains regarding the nature, characteristics, and manifestations of Nativization in ZE. This study intends to address this gap by providing valuable insights into the development of ZE in digital platforms. Its specific aim is to investigate the emergent linguistic features of ZE in WhatsApp-mediated communication among high school students in Zimbabwe, focusing on the extent to which these linguistic innovations and adaptations signal the Nativization phase of this variety. This focus is justified given the current intersection of language change and variation with digital communication, where online platforms have become key sites for language innovation, diffusion, and stabilization (Ugwu, 2024; Selfa-Sastre, Pifarré, Cujba, Cutillas and Falguera, 2022; Danesi, 2017). Moreover, as Callies (2018) notes, young people, particularly students, have become key drivers of linguistic creativity and innovation, rendering this demographic ideal for investigating the evolving features of language.

Theoretical Framework: Schneider's Dynamic Model

Schneider's Dynamic Model (2007) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the evolution of ZE in digital communication. This model proposes five stages in the development of 'New Englishes': Foundation, Exonormative Stabilization, Nativization, Endonormative Stabilization, and Differentiation. The foundation stage marks the initial language contact between the colonial power and the indigenous population. This is followed by Exonormative Stabilization, where the colonial power's language norms dominate; for instance, English and local varieties are stigmatized. The Nativization stage, the focus of this study, is where local speakers begin to assert their own language

norms, leading to the emergence of a distinct local variety of English.The Endonormative Stabilization stage involves the standardization and widespread acceptance of a new English variety, while the Differentiation stage sees the variety continue to evolve and distinctively diverge from other English varieties. These final two stages mark the culmination of the Nativization process, solidifying the variety's place in the local culture and identity (Schneider, 2007).

Since this study centers on the Nativization of ZE, it is crucial to delve deeper into this phase, exploring its applicability in this research. During Nativization, Schneider (2007) notes that the English language is shaped by the local cultures, history, and ecology, resulting in the emergence of distinct linguistic features. To explore the Nativization stage of ZE, this study examines the linguistic features that have developed in this variety owing to contextual factors, such as phonological, grammatical, and lexical characteristics. This involves analyzing English language use in WhatsApp communication to identify the unique and novel features of ZE.In addition to linguistic features, this study investigates the communicative factors that have influenced the evolution of ZE, as well as the attitudes of users towards this emerging variety of English.To explore these areas and gain deeper insights, the study also examines the context of the use of the new variety of English, as conceptualized in Schneider's Dynamic Model. Schneider (2007) emphasizes the importance of considering the historical, cultural, and ecological context in which English is used, making context a vital aspect of analysis. Therefore, this study examines how factors such as language contact, language attitude, and language policy have contributed to the development of ZE. By examining these factors, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how ZE is growing and evolving to the Nativization stage, pondering on its expedition towards stabilization and autonomy.

While Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model provides a useful framework for understanding the development of postcolonial Englishes such as ZE, it has several limitations. Critics argue that the model overemphasizes the role of colonialism (Mesthrie, 2017), neglects the agency and creativity of local communities, and fails to account for the complex and dynamic nature of language contact (Canagarajah, 2013). Additionally, the model presents a linear and deterministic view of language development (Buschfeld, 2013) and neglects power dynamics and social inequality (Pennycook, 2007). To address these limitations, this study incorporates a deeper understanding of the complex historical and social contexts that shape the development of ZE, drawing on a range of theoretical perspectives and existing study outcomes.

Methodology

This section describes the methods used to conduct investigations in this study, enhancing transparency and accountability in the research process.

Research Design

This research adopted a qualitative approach to investigate ZE in digital communication. A Content Analysis method was used to examine WhatsApp messages shared among selected Zimbabwean students, focusing on the nature and emergence of new English linguistic features. Complementing this, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with this sample of students to elucidate the new language's semantic meanings and communicative purposes. The qualitative approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of ZE's linguistic features and socio-cultural context, yielding rich, contextual insights into the complexities and dynamics of naturally occurring communication.

Sampling Techniques

The study employed purposive sampling to select the schools in Harare and the participants who provided the researcher with messages from their WhatsApp group chats and also participated in the FGD. This sampling approach enabled the researcher to target and recruit the appropriate schools where English is the primary mode of communication, as well as participants who were information-rich and knowledgeable about the use of the new English language in digital spaces. The selection criteria for schools included English-speaking schools in the Harare area, where the researcher is based, regardless of their type (public or private), size, or socio-economic profile. For participants, it incorporated Zimbabwean ethnicity, high school enrolment, smartphone ownership, regular WhatsApp usage, and willingness to participate, irrespective of age, form level, gender, and socio-economic background, ensuring a heterogenous sample. Three schools were successfully sampled, two private and one trust school. In each of these schools, five students were selected from each Form (Forms 1 to 6) with the assistance of the Form teachers, and 30 participants (male and female) were sampled. This procedure produced a total of 90 participants from all three schools, representing a diverse range of ethnicities, ages (13-19 years), and educational levels. Table 1 below highlights the demographic traits of the sample.

Table 1: *Respondents' Demographic Information*

Demographic Traits	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	13 – 15 years	36	40%
	16 – 19 years	54	60%
Gender	Female	49	54.4%
	Male	41	45.6%
Ethnicity	Shona	72	80%
	Ndebele	4	4.4%
	English, Indian and Colored	14	15.6%
Form Level	Form 1	15	16.7%
	Form 2	15	16.7%
	Form 3	15	16.7%
	Form 4	15	16.7%
	Form 5	15	16.7%
	Form 6	15	16.7%

The sampling criteria for WhatsApp data included English-based conversations from the participants' WhatsApp group chats, encompassing school and other social groups for students.Non-English messages, images, videos, and other forms of data were excluded. This targeted sampling approach ensured that the collected data accurately reflected students' English language usage patterns, thereby effectively addressing the study's research questions.

Data Collection Techniques

The study employed a multi-method approach to collect qualitative data. The first stage involved collecting messages that were shared on students' various WhatsApp group chats. To facilitate

WhatsApp data sharing, theresearcher conducted an initial visit to the selected schools to explain the study's intent, purpose, and procedures. Permission was sought and obtained from the schools' authorities. During follow-up visits on agreed-upon dates, the researcher initiated recruitments of potential participants, briefed them about the study, and obtained informed consent with assurances of anonymity. Participants were then asked to share their WhatsApp data. However, due to mobile phone restrictions in schools, most students did not have their phones with them and could not share their data. To address this challenge, arrangements were made for the researcher to collect data through online means, ensuring a convenient and accessible data collection process. The QRClip, a secure web-based platform, was utilized to collect WhatsApp data anonymously. A unique QR code was generated and shared with participants, who scanned it to access a secure upload page. Here, they uploaded their WhatsApp message data at their convenience, which was encrypted and transmitted to the QRClip platform. The data was stored securely, and the researcher retrieved it afterwards, decrypting it for analysis. Throughout the process, the QRClip ensured participants' anonymity and confidentiality, enhancing ethical standards for data collection. A total of 4,500 most recent WhatsApp messages were collected between 1 September and 31October 2024, with each participant sharing 50 messages.

The second stage of data collection incorporated soliciting the participants' perceptionsabout the new English usages on WhatsApp, using FGDs that were conducted during follow-up visits to the schools to support the findings of WhatsApp data. The FGDs focused on eliciting information about the meanings of the identified novel terms and their communicative roles. These were guided by a set of open-ended questions, which included the following key inquiries:

1. Can you explain what you understand by the term [name the term]?

2. Do you think the use of new English terms on WhatsApp is important for effective communication among your peers? Why or why not?

3. How do you feel when you encounter new English terms that you're not familiar with? Do you try to learn their meanings, or do you ignore them?

4. Do you think the new English terms used on WhatsApp are a positive development of the English language? Why?

5. Can you give examples of situations where you use new English terms in real-life situations to achieve a specific purpose or to convey a particular message?

Three FGDs were held in the three respective schools during November 2024, each comprising 30 participants and lasting approximately 45 minutes. Carrying out discussions in the schools' settings guaranteed familiarity, comfort, and confidentiality for the participants. Ethical guidelines were strictly observed, ensuring informed consent, voluntary participation, and respect for participants' autonomy and dignity. To ensure the accuracy and richness of the data, audio recordings were made with the participants' consent. Situation-specific probing questions were employed to encourage elaborate responses. Immediately after the discussions, the recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve the participants' voices. This rigorous methodology yielded rich, qualitative data, providing valuable insights into the nature of the innovative English used on WhatsApp. The multi-method approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon, while the ethical considerations ensured the participants' rights and dignity were respected.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis methods employed in this study involved a multi-step process. The WhatsApp data, comprising new English terms, was analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. This involved a step-by-step procedure, where the data was first familiarized through repeated readings, followed by initial coding to identify patterns and themes. The codes were then grouped into categories, and themes were identified and labeled. This process enabled the classification of the new English words into distinct categories and their subcategories. A descriptive statistics analysis was employed to quantify these subcategories, resulting in a detailed description of their frequency distribution. The frequencies of these subcategories were then analyzed and interpreted in relation to the study's aim, examining the role of the new English in the advancement of English Nativization and the development of ZE. Existing literature was used to support arguments and provide context to the findings.

Data obtained from the FGDs were also analyzed using thematic analysis, involving transcribed data coding and grouping into themes. The emerging themes provided rich insights into the participants' perceptions about the meaning and significance of the new English terms, their attitudes toward the languageand its usage, relevance, and importance in everyday communication.The findings from the FGDs were then triangulated with the results of the WhatsApp data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the emerging language's contribution to English development in Zimbabwe.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to rigorous ethical standards to ensure the protection and well-being of the participants, some of whom were minors. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. Participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality, and all the identifiable information was removed from the WhatsApp and FGDs' data. To enhance confidentiality, all data was collected and stored securely to prevent unauthorized access. The study also ensured voluntary participation, and participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Additionally, the study was conducted in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner, with careful consideration given to the potential impact of the research on the participants and their online communities. The study received approval from the schools' administrators and sought guidance from teachers to ensure all ethical guidelines were strictly observed throughout the research process.

Study Findings

The WhatsApp data revealed new words and terminologies as used by students, categorized into four broad types (neologisms, short forms, derivatives, and figurative speech) and various subcategories as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: *New WhatsApp-based English word forms, sub-categories, and definitions*

WORD CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORIES		
Neologisms	**Invented Words** *yabie* (girl); *oan* (person); *gwan* (rumors); *huzz/hun* (girl); *bali* (father); *quan* (mother); *gaf*(gaze)*gassing* (laughing); w*agwan* (hello); *rizz* (level ofattractiveness); b*addie*(attractive girl); *mugged* (attractive); o*ps* (rival); *vey (*show); *furry* (an animal); *ick* (unpleasant action); *gag* (eager); *cuffing* (courtship relationship); *shak/easing* (fail); *slay* (lookgood); *zaza* (drugs); *stan* (a fan); *pookie* (cute); *bop* (a good beat) geeking (excited); *bae* (romantic partner); b*ougie* (high class); *yeet*(violently throw an object); *doss* (sleep); *gwas* (eat); *clunking* (bad smell); l*ekker* (good); yappi (talkative); boo (romantic partner); noob (an inexperienced person); ong (I swear); skibidi (nonsense); yakking (being ignored); simp (someone who is too dedicated in a relationship) **Borrowed Words** *finesse* (to get what you want by manipulating); *gucci*(something great or classy); *Karen* (a woman who causes a scene in public); *Julling*(smoking); *catfish* (someone who pretends to be someone else); GOAT (meaning the greatest of all time); Vaping (meaning using drugs, deriving from the noun cigarette vapor)	**Adopted Forms** *cap* (indicates disagreement); *weave/brush* (beat); *jack* (no); *buff* (someone very strong); *ate* (to do something impressive); *touch grass* (step outside); *fell out* (not trendy); *cancel* (stop supporting someone); *salty* (someone who is bitter); e*xtra* (something exaggerated); *drag* (to criticize); *main character* (charismatic person); *tea* (gossip); *catching feelings* (developing romantic feelings for someone); *drip* (a cool style);*mid* (average or poor); *fold* (get nervous); *peak* (very good); *gagged* (to win an argument); big back (to eat a lot); *clock it* (to be on point); *cooked* (to be in trouble or unattractive); *couch potato* (lazy person); *vaping* (abusing drugs); *blue tick* (ignore); r*ent free* (occupying one's thoughts); *receipts* (proof); *mental/clapped*(someone who is crazy); *wild* (shocking); *whip* (car); *slaps* (great); *say less* (understood); *mood* (relatable); *dough/bread* (money); *facts/fax* (used to agree with someone); *lock in* (focus); *red flag* (a warning sign); *green flag* (healthy/positive behaviour); *fire* (cool); *baby girl* (girl friend); snack (attractive person); *snatched* (someone who looks good); aesthetic (vibe); *bet* (yes); *blueprint* (copy of the original); *fruity* (gay man); *pull* (attracting a romantic partner); sleep on (ignore); *vanilla* (boring); *serving* (looking/doing good); *tight* (in a close relationship); *vibe check* (to check on someone's mood); *cringe* (embarrassing/awkward).	**Social Media and Technology Innovations** *DM* (text me); *friend zoned* (ignored online due to unreciprocated love); *socials* (social media); *tweet*(post e message on Tweeter);*following (*keeping track of what someone is posting online);u*nfollow*(stop keeping track of someone's online activities*); unfriend*(stop being a mutual friend online*); like*(an expression showing interest on online content); *meme*(an idea, behaviour, or style that is spreading across the Internet);*influencer*(someone who builds an online presence through engaging content); *blue tick (read message)*; c*lout* (being popular on social media); *moots* (mutual friends online); *vanish mode (*an online system that allows users to send messages that disappear*); finsta* (fake Instagram identity); *LB* (like back); *FB* (follow back); *subtweet* (a message that refers to a comment that was made by another user on Tweeter (X) without directly mentioning it); *google* (perform an Internet search); *selfie* (a photo taken by oneself, especially for posting on social media); *hashtags* (social media posts that follow a # symbol,used to track content).
Short Forms	**Abbreviations**	**Acronyms**	**Clippings**

	WYD (What are You Doing); *OMD* (Oh My Daise); *YFM* (You Feel Me); *IYKYK* (If You Know You Know); *OMG;* (Oh My god); *V* (very); GOAT (Greatest Of All Time); *G* (good); *GTG* (got to go); *W*(win); *L* (lose); *HBU* (how about you); *BTW* (by the way); *AF* (as fuck); *IGL* (In Game Life); *IRL* (In real Life); *YW* (you're welcome); *BFR* (Be For Real); *NPC* (Non-Player Character); *DR* (didn't read); *LOL* (laugh out loud); *TBH* (To Be Honest); *BFF* (best friend forever); *TL* (too long); *DM* (discord message);*TMI* (too much information);*TBF* (to be fair); *NBD* (no big deal); *JK* (just kidding); *BRB* (be right back); *KYP* (know your place); *IDK* (I don't know); *FYI* (for your information); *TTYL* (talk to you later)	*YOLO* (You Only Live Once); *MIA* (missing in action); *FOMO* (fear of missing out); *IMO* (in my opinion); *TIA* (thanks in advance);*AMA* (ask me anything) **Misspelling shortenings** *whatevs* (whatever);*tym* (time); *xul* (school); *gratz* (congratulations); *dis* (this); *srsly* (seriously); *Wuh* (what); *boi* (boy); *gal* (girl); *dat*(that); *ting* (thing); *mrng* (morning); *tymz* (times);*anx* (thanks); *frenzy/frenz* (friend/friends); *tru* (true);*wht* (what); p*liz* (please); *thru* (through)	*sis* (sister); *sus* (suspicious); *ship* (short for relationship) *fit* (short for outfit); *obv* (obviously); *inf* (information); *sit* (situation); *vale* (Valentine's day) **Contractions** *LUV* (I love you); *Hwau* (how are you) *ULGr8* (you look great); *IFGr8* (I feel great); *Gr8* (great); *IH8U* (I hate you); *NVM* (never mind); *KMS* (Kill myself); *KYS* (Kill Yourself); *hud* (how are you doing); *ruok* (are you ok)
Derivatives	**Blends** *femboy* (a male that partly identifies as a female); *situationship* (people who are not officially dating but have feelings for each other); *baecation* (a vacation with your partner); *comps* (Computer Science); *looksmaxxing* (self-enhancement); *hoco*(homecoming); *hangry* (hungry and angry); *boutta* (about to); *chillax* (chill and relax) **Back Formations** *lytie* (someone little); *rents* (parents); *fam* (family); *delulu* (delusional); *thicc* (curvy woman with thick legs); *bestie* (best friend); *periodt* (end of statement emphasis); *xtra* (something which is extra good)	**Compounds** *faggot* (an offensive way of saying a person is gay); *gatekeep* (not sharing);*highkey* (to proudly emphasize something); *lowkey* (to secretly emphasize something); *crashout* (to get really angry); *brainrot*(low-quality online content); *deepfake* (manipulation of a photo to embarrass someone); *deadass* (not a joke); *bedrot* (staying in bed all day) **Phonological Derivatives** *xul* (school); *dahood* (the neighbourhood); *fione* (fine); i*nnit*(isn't); *bruzz*(boys); *boi* (boy); *smol*(small); *manz* (man's); *doof*(food);*stas* (sister); *dwee* (weed); *lewk*(look).	**Derivational Affixes** *twinning* (similarity with another person); *skimming* (to think); *ghosted* (Ignoring someone online); *shawty*(a girl friend); druggie (a person that does drugs); *workaholic* (someone that works very hard all the time**)**
Figurative Speech	**Idioms/Proverbs** *let him cook* (consent of what one is doing); *It's giving* (used to describe a mood); o*ut of pocket* (something unhinged); *catch these*	**Euphemisms** *gyatt* (buttocks); *hooking up* (sexual intercourse); *FWB* (friends with benefits/a sexual relationship between friends); *D* (short for penis or dick); *body count* (the number	**Slang/Colloquialisms** *It hits different* (something that stands out); *tune* (say); *creepy vibes*(something or someone who gives out an eerie feeling);

	hands (about to start a fight); *glow up* (to go through a positive change); *I'm dead* (expresses that one finds something hilarious); *Sending me* (describes how funny something is); *elbow grease* (hard work)	of people one has slept with); *thirsty* (someone who is desperate); *pumpum* (alternative for vagina); *smash* (casual sex).	*pipe down* (keep quiet); *L take* (used to show you disagree with someone);*go off* (get angry); *hop off* (mind your own business); *old lady* (motherly figure); *flex* (show off); *chill out/lighten up* (relax); *pig out* (eat a lot); *joll*(give me); *dope* (excellent).

A total of 278 new English word forms were identified from the students' WhatsApp data. Neologisms are the most dominant word forms, accounting for 45% (n=125) of the entire data. The adopted words (n=56) constitute the main subcategory of neologisms, while borrowed terms represent the least (n=6). Short forms are the second most prevalent class of words, constituting 28% of the data, with abbreviations (n=35) being the most common terms and clippings (n=8) the least.Derivatives, predominantly comprised of phonological derivatives (n=12), account for16% of the data, while the figurative speech forms, the least represented category, constitute only 11% of the data, with slang / colloquial (n=14) representing the most prevalent subcategory. Figure 1 below visually represents the percentage distribution of the various word categoriesidentified in the data. Figure 2 highlights the specific frequencies of their subcategories, providing a detailed snapshot of thelinguistic features that characterize the WhatsApp data.

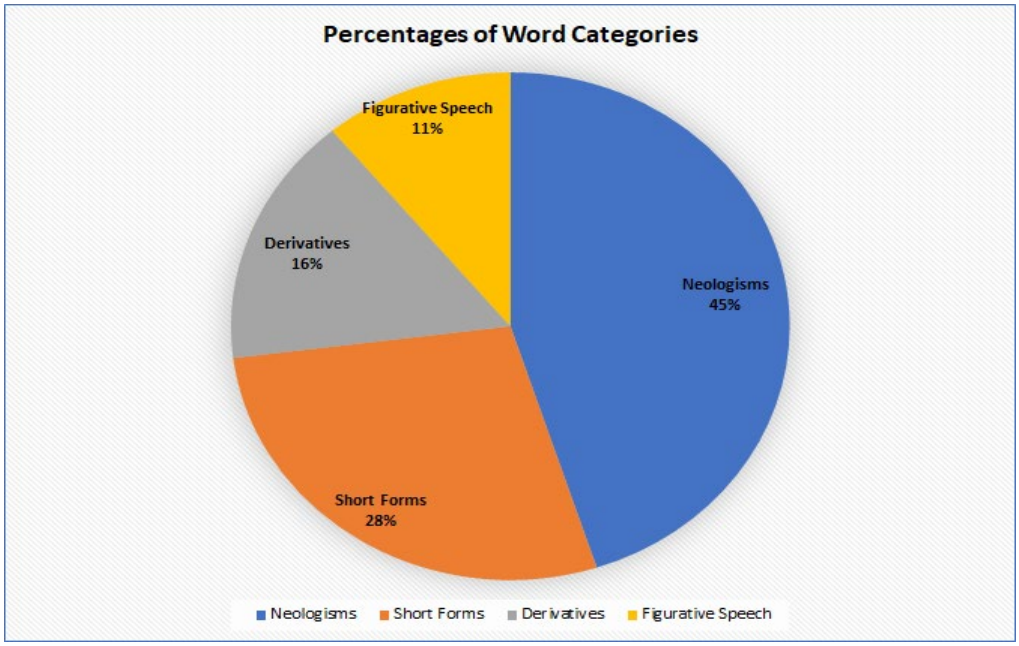

Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of the Identified Word Forms

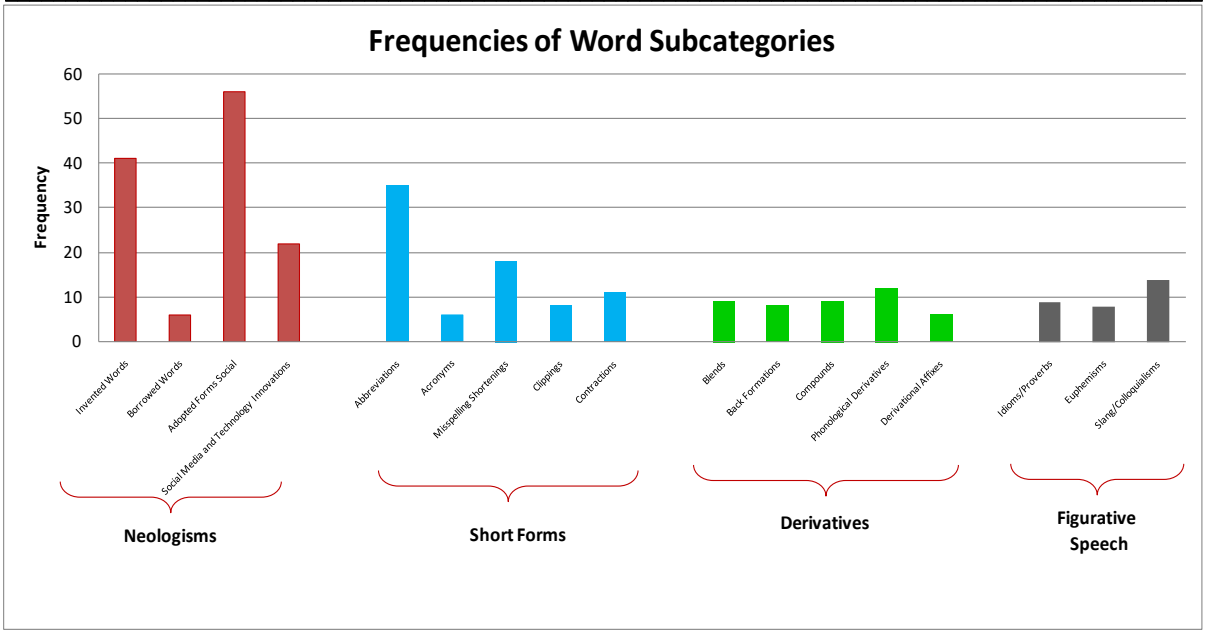

Figure 2: Frequencies of the Identified Word Subcategories

The FGDs' data yielded interesting insights about the meaning of the new English termsand their communicative roles, as presented in Table 2. It also revealed attitudes towards thisinnovative languageand its context and manner of use. In response to the question of whether or not they think the use of the new English language on WhatsApp is important for effective communication, the participants overwhelmingly revealed the beliefthat the novel language is crucial for effective communication among their peers.According to the participants, using the innovative terms allows them to express themselves more freely and authentically, as they can convey emotions, attitudes, and ideas that may not be easily captured by the Standard English language. Moreover, they noted that using new English terms on WhatsApp helps to establish a sense of belonging and group identity, as it signals that they are part of a shared social context. Additionally, they pointed out that using English innovations facilitates quicker and more efficient communication, enablingthe conveyance of complex ideas and emotions through a concise and abbreviated language. Furthermore, the participants highlighted that the emergence of new English terms on WhatsApp gives them a unique opportunity to create a private language code that is restricted to their peer group,effectively excluding adults and other groups from their online conversations.By and large, the participants believed that the use of new English terms on WhatsApp is an essential aspect of their online communication, enabling them to connect, express themselves, and handle their social relationships more effectively.

An inquiry into the participants' views about their first encounter ofunfamiliar new English terms to evaluate their attitudesindicated strong aspirations to learn the new language rather than ignoring it. Although some participants admitted that unfamiliarity with new terms on WhatsApp can be embarrassing and lead to misunderstandings among peers, they generally expressed a positive attitude towards the English language used on the platform.They rationalized that familiarizing themselves with these emerging linguistic expressions is necessary for inclusivity in the communication process, allowing them to fully participate and engage with others online. This

eagerness to learn and adapt to the evolving language highlights the participants' general enthusiasm towards the new language.When asked whether they perceived the new English terms used on WhatsApp as a positive development of the English language, the participants overwhelmingly agreed. They strongly believed that this novel languagecontributed to the growth of the English language, citing several reasons. Firstly, some argued that these terms enrich the English language by expanding its vocabulary, adding new words, expressions, and meanings. Secondly, they noted that the new terms enable creativity and playfulness of language, allowing users to express themselves in more trendy and imaginative ways. Some participants highlighted that the new language is fun to use, contrary to the traditional standard variety of English.

Further investigation into the context of the use of new English words in real-life contexts, to achieve specific communication purposes, revealed that the participants frequently use this new variety in informal conversations with peers, particularly outside the classroom environment, in social gatherings, and casual hangouts. They also mentioned using this language in text messages, social media posts, and online chats with other young peopleto add tone, humor, and personality to their digital communication. The participants acknowledged that using this new code in formal situations such as educational discourses would be inappropriate, as it is not formally recognized or accepted.Interestingly, the participants also revealed a striking convergence of language use, indicating that certain new linguistic forms employedlocally with peers are also being used online by young people globally, suggesting a striking universality in language use and development.

Discussion

The dominant use of neologisms on WhatsApp by high school students in Zimbabwe, accounting for 45% of all the identified new English words in the data, is a salient indicator of language development, highlighting the profound impact of English Nativization on the country's linguistic landscape. Itbespeaks a process of localization, wherein English is being adapted and modified to suit the local context, giving rise to a distinct subvariety of ZE. Nativization in Schneider’s Dynamic Model is marked by the development of new terminology, reflecting local language users' creative and innovative endeavors. According to Schneider (2007), this stage involves a shift from Exonormative to Endonormative stabilization, where local norms and standards begin to emerge, and the language becomes increasingly embedded in the local culture. The findings of this study align well with the Nativization stage, as the widespread use of neologisms and local expressions on WhatsApp demonstrates a clear shift towards Endonormative stabilization, where Zimbabwean English is developing its own distinct identity and norms. As Bamgbose (1998) astutely observes, linguistic innovation in non-native regions is a hallmark of New Englishes, and the proliferation of neologisms in ZE is testimony to this phenomenon. The localized variety of English emerging among young Zimbabweans is distinguished by its unique linguistic features, which are shaped by the technological and cultural contexts in which they are used. This inventive use of language, as evidenced by the prevalence of neologisms, serves as a means for students to showcase their linguistic prowess, creativity, and uniqueness in their use of English (Ibrahim, Edan, & Alnoori, 2024). Furthermore, this deliberate divergence from Standard English enables young Zimbabweans to establish a distinct identity and differentiate themselves from other social groups. The resulting subvariety of ZE, characterized by its innovative linguistic features and technological influences, mirrors global trends in language evolution among young people, as also highlighted by Lee (2024).

The students' dominant use of invented English on WhatsApp further reflects the language's inherently dynamic and adaptive nature, particularly in the digital age (Soyoof, Reynolds, Vazquez-Calvo, and McLay, 2023). This phenomenon highlights the notion that language is a social construct, shaped by the cultural, historical, and social contexts in which it is used. As Schmid (2020) rationally observes, language is not a static entity but a dynamic and constantly evolving system that reflects the users' creativity, innovation, and diversity. The invented English used by students in Zimbabwe demonstrates this complex and multifaceted nature of language, highlighting their linguistic creativity and innovation.Young people are thus actively contributing to the evolution of the English language, expanding its vocabulary through linguistic innovation and creativity. This linguistic adaptation and modification process is a hallmark of language Nativization, enabling the language to become more relevant, effective, and empowering in the local context (Veettil, 2015). By inventing new terminology, young people are not only reflecting the dynamic nature of language but also shaping its future trajectory, highlighting their agency as language users.

The 28% prevalence of short forms, constituting the second most prominent form of new Englishwords employed on WhatsApp, highlights the importance of convenience and spontaneity in digital communication. Students' use of abbreviations, acronyms, and other short forms facilitates rapid and efficient communication, allowing them to navigate the digital space with ease and agility (Ok and Eniola, 2024). By developing new terminologies, students can convey complex ideas and emotions concisely and expediently, optimizing their online interactions (Ok and Eniola, ibid). This creative use of language highlights the adaptive and innovative nature of digital communication, where users continually develop new linguistic strategies to meet the demands of online interaction (Selfa-Sastre, Pifarré, Cujba, Cutillas, and Falguera, 2022). The need to navigate online communication has, in fact, given rise to a process of English Nativization, wherein the language is being adapted and modified to suit the local context and the demands of digital communication (Maryam, 2024). As English is being used innovatively to facilitate online interaction, it is becoming increasingly localized, reflecting Zimbabwe’s sociocultural context and linguistic nuances. This process of Nativization underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of English, as it adapts to new contexts and technologies.

Furthermore, informal, innovative expressions such as slang and colloquialisms play a pivotal role in identity formation among the students, transcending geographical and social boundaries. According to Manurung, Napitupulu, and Simangunsong (2022), creating and using novel slang words and expressions in social media enhances social bonds, permits the formation of intergroup relationships, and fosters a sense of belonging and shared digital identities among users. Manurung et al. (ibid) emphasize the everchanging and evolving nature of the slang discourse used by students as regulated by social circumstances, hinting at the role of sociocultural context in language development and change. This is a testament to the social nature of English Nativization, which ZE is experiencing. It also highlights young people’s desire for shared experiences and communal connections. As Oksanen, Celuch, Oksa, and Savolainen (2024) posit, individuals signal their affiliation with particular social groups, interests, or cultural orientations by adopting and adapting new slang terminologies, facilitating social bonding and solidarity. In this way, the linguistic creativity of slang becomes an essential tool for young people to navigate their social worlds, construct their identities, and establish meaningful relationships with others. It can be argued that English Nativization is both motivated by the desire to belong and, in turn, reflects the relationships and bonds created. In other words, the process of Nativization is driven by the need for social affiliation and identity formation in young

people, while simultaneously encoding and reinforcing the social relationships and communal ties that emerge from this process. Hsu (2019) agrees and notes that this reciprocal relationship between language use and social bonding highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of English Nativization, highlighting the intricate interplay between linguistic, social, and cultural factors.

The study's outcome further indicates the influence of various languages, universal names, and cultural concepts on the formation of the new varieties of English. Using borrowed words and terminologies from other languagesand cultures suggests that young people draw on external linguistic repertoires to create new words and expressions, thereby enriching the lexical landscape of their local variety of English. This process of language contact and convergence is yet anothersymbol of language Nativization, as it reflects the complex linguistic ecology where multiple languages intersect and interact (Miletic, 2022). Peterson (2017) agrees and notes that the Nativization of English through language contact has significant implications for language development, as it highlights the agency and creativity of language users in shaping the English language to suit their communicative needs. This phenomenon is not unique to Zimbabwe, as similar patterns of language contact and convergence have been observed in other African Englishes settings, such as Nigeria (Isiaka, 2021), Ghana (Ngula, 2014), and South Africa (Redelinghuys, 2019). These studies demonstrate that the Nativization of English is often characterized by incorporating local linguistic features, resulting in the emergence of distinct varieties of English that reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of their respective contexts. The incorporation of other languages and external cultural concepts in the formation of Zimbabwean English also highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of language contact, where languages are not mutually exclusive but intersect and influence one another (Isiaka, 2021). This perspective challenges traditional notions of language purity and highlights the dynamic and adaptive nature of language use. Ultimately, the Nativization of English in Zimbabwe, as in other African contexts, highlights the importance of recognizing and valuing linguistic diversity and indicates the need to acknowledge and support the complex linguistic repertoires of local language users.

The indication that participants strongly believe in the importance of the new English language on WhatsApp for effective communication and its positive contribution to language development points to the significance of informal digital communication in shaping language attitudes and use. This finding suggests that, from the participants' perspective, the incorporation of new English words into their online interactions enhances the clarity and authenticity of their communication. Furthermore, their positive perception of this novel language as contributing to the development of English acknowledges the creative and innovative role that language users play in shaping its form and function, as also indicated by Hsu (2019). Moreover, the positive attitudes towards language development are shown by the participants' strong desire to learn the meanings of the new language, signifying that they are actively engaged with the evolving linguistic landscape and are eager to expand their linguistic repertoire. Schneider's (2007) Dynamic model suggests thatlinguistic attitudes play a crucial role in language development, and as a postcolonial variety of English emerges, users' attitudes shift from Exonormative orientation (relying on external standards) to Endonormative stabilization (embracing local norms and standards), ultimately leading to the development of a distinct, nativized variety.As such, the study's findings showing positive attitudes towards the new English by users highlight that the Nativization of ZE has been set in motion and also signal the importance of considering the role of digital communication in shaping the development of this postcolonial variety of English.

Noteworthy is the finding indicating a distinctcontradiction in the use of English among students in Zimbabwe, where the new English vocabulary is predominantly confined to online informal

interactions, whileStandard English remains the language of education and official communication. This distinction suggests that young people understand language policy, enabling them to adeptly switch between different Englishvarieties depending on the context, a phenomenon known as code-switching (Myers-Scotton, 2017). However, this dichotomy also highlights the tension between Standard English, which is often associated with authority and legitimacy, and its informal varieties emerging in social media, which are often characterized by creativity and playfulness (Trudgill and Hannah, 2008; Reagan, 2016). This tension sheds light on the intricate and multifaceted dynamics of language use among young people in Zimbabwe, who must adeptly navigate a complex landscape of multiple language varieties and contexts in their daily lives. Moreover, this phenomenon highlights that although the process of English Nativization in Zimbabwe is underway, the stabilization and eventual standardization of this new variety remain a distant prospect, as it has yet to gain traction in formal settings or achieve widespread acceptance. This raises fundamental questions regarding the extent to which the linguistic practices of young people will exert influence on authorities to acknowledge and legitimize linguistic change, thereby paving the way for the recognition and institutionalization of the new variety. Ultimately, this inquiry necessitates a clearer understanding of the complex interplay between language, power, and identity in shaping the linguistic landscape of Zimbabwe.

Moreover, this study sheds light on the universality of language evolution, where certain new English terms are concurrently used and developed online by young people globally. For instance, the participants indicated that some linguistic innovationsare ubiquitous across the globe, transcending geographical boundaries and linguistic contexts. This synchronicity in language development suggests that while English Nativization is occurring in the Outer Circlewhere English is spoken as a second language, in the Expanding Circle (regions where English is used as a foreign language) and the Inner Circle (native regions), contact-induced language shift isalso underway, inspired by technology, and giving rise to sub-varieties of English, as posited by Miletic (2022). Consequently, research in these regions should strengthen investigations into the possibilities of sub-varieties of Englishemerging as a result of language contact in digital spaces. As Axundjanova and Axmedova (2024) note, the globalization of English through digital communication has led to the emergence of diverse English varieties shaped by local contexts and cultural practices. Therefore, a deeper understanding of English Nativization requires a comprehensive examination of language use and development across different regions and contexts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study have significant implications for our understanding of language development and use in the digital age. The creative use of language by young people in Zimbabwe highlights the need for a reevaluation of traditional notions of language standardization and purity, as Ayres-Bennett (2020) argues that structural or lexical prescriptivism and purism in linguistic standardization are not in themselves key to survival. Instead, language educators and policymakers should recognize the value of linguistic diversity and creativity and develop pedagogical practices that promote and support these aspects. Furthermore, in line with Al-Kadi and Ahmed (2018), the study's findings suggest that digital communication is playing a significant role in shaping the development of postcolonial varieties of English and that this process is likely to continue and intensify in the future. As such, language authorities and educators must be proactive in responding to these changes and develop strategies for supporting and promoting the development of these new varieties.

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations can be made. Firstly, language educators and policymakers should recognize the importance of digital communication in shaping the development of English language varieties and incorporate this into language teaching and learning practices. Secondly, further research is needed to investigate the emergence of sub-varieties of English in different regions and contexts, particularly in digital communication. Thirdly, language authorities should consider the need to develop language policies that acknowledge and support the creative use of language by young people, particularly in informal digital contexts. Finally, language teachers and educators should be trained to develop pedagogical practices that value and promote linguistic diversity and creativity rather than adhering to traditional notions of language purity and standardization.

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