

Mapping the Contours of Language Used on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the language utilized on contemporary social media platforms. The exponential growth of these platforms is closely intertwined with advancements in web technologies, particularly those heralded by the advent of Web 2.0. This evolution has facilitated a transformative impact on the English language, as observed through the widespread adoption of neologisms, abbreviations, acronyms, numeronyms, logograms, and emoticons. The study will focus on the linguistic practices evident on platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, Flickr, YouTube, and in user-generated content on review sites like TripAdvisor and Amazon. The unique nature of online language can be attributed to several key factors. Cognitive orality refers to the way online communication mimics spoken language, despite being text-based. The semiotics of compensation highlights how users employ visual and textual elements to convey meaning and emotion that might otherwise be expressed through non-verbal cues in face-to-face interactions. Linguistic economy describes the tendency towards brevity and efficiency in online communication, often resulting in the use of shorthand and symbols. The economy of attention emphasizes the competitive nature of online spaces, where users must capture and maintain the attention of their audience in an environment saturated with information. Context collapse refers to the blending of multiple social contexts into a single online space, requiring users to navigate and adapt their language to diverse audiences simultaneously. This research will delve into whether the language on these platforms engages with all linguistic levels like Phonetics and Phonology, Graphology, Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics. By mapping out these contours, the study aims to provide a detailed understanding of how social media has reshaped English language usage, reflecting broader social and technological changes. The findings will contribute to the field of sociolinguistics by highlighting the dynamic interplay between technology and language, offering insights into the future trajectory of digital communication.

Keywords: social media, linguistic analysis, Web 2.0, neologisms, online communication, cognitive orality, linguistic economy, context collapse

Introduction

Social media refers to Websites, applications, and any media of communication that allow users to create or share content with other people in their network. Social media encompasses a wide range of websites and apps. In the present scenario, social media have a visible and sustained effect on the English language with the variable usage

of neologisms, abbreviations, acronyms, numerous logograms, and emoticons. In this age of social media, old words are invested with new meanings. Shortened forms of words are getting transformed from oral to written language, to oral sometimes causing ambiguity.

Social media may not be classified precisely because web platforms are updated and

reconfigured regularly, broadly speaking. They take stock of forms like weblogs; collaborative authorship sites, wikis such as Wikipedia; media sharing sites like YouTube and Flickr; social networking sites that include Facebook and Myspace; and also, sites that fuse constitutes of the above like Instagram (photo/video sharing and social network site) Twitter or Tumblr which combine microblogging and social network services.

David Crystal suggests that in the present millennium, the use of soft applications has changed the way people communicate with each other. "Will the English-dominated internet spell the end of other tongues? Quite e-vil: the mobile phone whispers" (Crystal 13). After a while, he further elaborates: "The term Netspeak is an alternative to Netish, Weblish, Internet language, Cyberspeak, electronic discourse, electronic language, interactive written discourse computer-mediated communication (CMC), and other cumbersome locutions. Each term has a different implication: 'Netish' for example, is plainly derived from English..." (Crystal 17) Shortening the abbreviations, acronyms, numeronyms, logograms, and Emoticons got their privilege and sway over the language used in social media. Scholars like Kern (2006) and Ali (2012) warn that an increase in the number of new English varieties under social media influence poses a threat to the standard English varieties.

Language of social media is hard to analyze because the material is familiar and all around. But ways of analyzing it to find wit, identities and one has already been taken for granted. Media attention to media language is superficial, systematic, and over generalised. This is most often used for moral evaluations like "Twitter is ruining the language". Mainstream media are biased. Some specific ways must be devised to

see how the language works by looking into it in a broader more systematic way and by linking language use to practices.

A closer scrutiny reveals that language is different online because cognitive orality imitates speech, semiotics of compensation try to make up and compensate for the lack of expression and Intonation. And herein advanced technological apparatus collapses multiple audiences into single contacts. As Marwick and Boyd suggest, context collapse is a phenomenon seen in many social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, "This is a deliberate attempt to flatten multiple audiences into one, the requirement to present a verifiable, singular identity makes it impossible to differ self-presentation strategies, creating tension as diverse groups of people flock to social network sites". (Boyd 2000) Messages are in ASCII. Quite significantly, American Standard Code for Information Interchange is the most commonly used common character encoding format for text data in computers and on the internet. Messages are in ASCII characters but can include other modes like line talk. Messages are constrained more or less by the 140-character limit like blogs. There are unique values ascribed to 128 alphabetic, numeric or special additional characters and control codes. Another noteworthy contention is that herein messages are asynchronous, i.e., the sender and receiver don't have to be there at the same time, unlike the internet chat. Messages are public in the case of Facebook and may be searched for less interesting but more talked about are the abbreviations emotions. Other interesting social media sites include Facebook, Snapchat, Flickr, YouTube, etc.

James Gibson (1977) in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* remarks "I have

described the environment as the surfaces that separate substances from the medium in which the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. The verb afford is found in the dictionary, but the noun affordance is not. I have made it up... it implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment...(n. pag.)” aspects of the environment that we see in terms of their use, for example: door handles, stair handrails, places to queue, and telling the time. But technology is not always used as designed for instance may be seen as a case in point. A chair as a step ladder, a phone as a microscope, missed calls, messages detonation. Each new web technology comes with a range of affordances that users might exploit in different ways. For instance: internet relay chat, moodle, and Snapchat. Technological affordances of a medium can be adapted to different uses forming different kinds of communities.

Twitter

Twitter is a microblog with 140-character messages. It was founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey as a company’s internal SMS message system. Hashtags, marked a shared topic (earlier used on internet relay chat), directed to the attention of another user but usually readable by anyone. RT- Retweets passing on a message, usually with some comment of one’s own. This may be compared to related social media such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Tumblr.

Twitter is now known for the x logo which is a minimalist, black-and-white design that is more in the founder Musk’s vision for Twitter. The new logo is meant to represent the “Crossing of Ideas” that takes place on Twitter.

A half-parted analysis tends to focus on the words, especially the unusual spellings. Phonetics and Phonology emphasize on sounds. Graphology

is the representation of those sounds in writing. Grammar deals with sentence and phrase structure. Semantics refers to the system of meaning and pragmatics engage with the meaning in context.

Graphology is one of the crucial points to ponder while analyzing chats on social networking sites like WhatsApp. The predominant graphological features identified in the chats include spelling, pronunciation capitalization the usage of low case and upper case letters, contractions, and emoticons.

Graphology refers to letter/ number Homophones. SMS (phone Texts) make use of letters and numbers as signs for words that sound the same. Examples- “Going to hear Dave Rosgen talk tonight”, “Father of natural channel design”, “Do I take notes, tweet or attempt not to exceed bank full?”, “Somehow I don’t see the excitement around the native Windows server Hadoop version besides the interested Parties and their press releases. Do you? Graphology engages with creative play with spelling. Example- “So much writing done today.” “Nursing must be +VE, not fearful.” “Unfortunately the emerging specialty of the general surgery graduate is the “On-Call- Ogist”.

Phonetics is about dialect styling. Example-

Sorry, been watching the wire too much.

That’s not possible. Itn’t no Thang.

Prepare ye for books that raineth like
r a i n , o h O x f a m , B o o k s h o p . #
Declutter(@Megrosoff).

When the BAE is sleepy but agrees to hold your hand.

Wow dat awesome.

Grammar is used for dialect styling. Example-

Was telling @ kmbtweets that that @Drisis is my girl! She calls and says let's roll I am out, show up on the scene W/ Vaseline on my face. No??? Asked

Through Grammar, words and phrases are given new functions. Example-

I am so not a working bee.. if you are the one running the show, then why don't you know what you are doing?#Amateurs, what does so usually modify? So nice when it works out that way. Amazed that some pundits are so quick to dismiss it. I am so sorry for your loss.

Semantics refers to the creative use of Hashtags. Example-

Needcoffee(see zappavigna).

Okay, still trying to find out how I can turn on the heating #APHDISNOTENOUGH

Treatyourself Tuesday.

#YODO

HELLOMYNAMES

Semantics offers transforming meanings. Example-

Negative words can be made positive and can change word class. Example-

Best Nerdy Proposal ever?

'Nerd' is typically negative, but for these scientists, it is positive, and can be made into a favourable adjective.

Also neutral to negative: Entitled much?

Semantics is Subjectivisation. Example-

LEGIT, Y'All. PUTS Me TO SHAME

Other examples-

Every time I watch something from #STARWARS I get LEGIT Goosebumps. Seriously. #NERDINGOUT

Love the word LEGIT IDK it's just such a KL word

This is Legit the best picture ever, I am crying.

Moving from an objective meaning (legitimate meaning that follows laws) to a subject gives meaning (one person's enthusiastic stance)

Pragmatics studies how flouts of conversational maxims are interpreted. Redwood Park, Berkeley, Hiking. How are meanings interpreted in context? E.g. politeness.. watching Top Gear in a hotel room in C.A. Sorry to the@ @ Jeremy Clarkson gloaters, It is brilliant and hilarious. All texts, written or spoken, dialogical or monological, have some elements of interaction. Start with Twitter tools: Retweets? Hashtags? Direct messages? Pronouns: I? You? Deleted? Who is the audience? Are they addressed? Are there other audiences? Then look for sentence types;and commands. Questions? Simulated responses to questions? Then look at shared knowledge—Elliptical (shortened) tweets and taken-for-granted references and of course language choice; what language is in your feed?

Other Platforms of Social Media

Social media is an umbrella term for different platforms. This includes Internet forums, Weblogs, Wikis, Podcasts, Pictures and Videos. Technologies include blogs, pictures-sharing, vlogs, wall-pasting, email, instant messaging, music sharing, crowdsourcing, and voice-over I.P. etc. Paradigm cases of social media applications are Google groups, Wikipedia, references YouTube (social networking and video sharing). It is interesting to note that it is often discussed as one entity. Again one must remind oneself that

the different platforms have their own social rules and consequently their own set of language nuances. Twitter is strikingly known for its short and snappy content while long, short-telling captions are currently popular on Instagram.

Needless to say, the language of social media is always evolving. As the features of each social media platform, Instagram captions worked much better if they were kept as short as possible, now long captions are highly popular. There are new fads, trends, and words each week and social media is forever adapting and changing. That's precisely one of the strong reasons that using social media is exciting and enjoyable it does not stay static. But obviously poses challenges as well. Keeping pace with social media, trends on different platforms can be a constant uphill battle.

It is fit to remember that language changes with the digital space and the social situations of different audiences. In order to keep oneself in the know, one would recommend the use of social media on a daily basis and analyze the way language is used. One must keep up to date with industry news if a feature is about to change. This might affect the language on the platforms. Any pop culture happenings within the social media group of a target audience might impact.

Emojis and Emoticons

The use of emojis is a popularly known and interesting part of language on social media. Emojis may be used to represent the text in the form of emojis and also objects, places and various other situations that were created in

Japan in the 1990s have pretty much replaced the emoticons which were created in the 1980s and are less complex. Emojis are “pictographs of objects, and symbols” (britanic.com) it is easy to find the distinct style of Apple's emojis, yellow cartoon faces with different expressions, faces with different expressions, families, animals, food objects, mathematical symbols among others. Emojis are pictures of everything from a set of painted nails to a slightly whimsical ghost. Emojis are pictures of everything from a set of painted nails to a slightly whimsical ghost. Emojis are now used more than ever, with more than 700 million. Statics are used each day on Facebook alone! Obviously, their significance can't be ignored. Emojis constitute a language of their own. They serve as a visual form of communication in their own right. For instance, when someone adds a “laughing crying face” emoji to the responses, this completely changes the meaning. And more importantly, some emojis have a whole multitude of connotations attached to them just the different words and phrases.

Emoticon	Emoji	Name
:D	😄	Slightly Smiling Face
:D ^_^	😁	Grimacing Face with Smiling Eyes
:-(😞	Sad Face
:P	😜	Face with Struck Out Tongue
:D	😃	Smiling Face with Open Mouth
:D	😄	Face with Open Mouth

Fig. 1. Difference between Emoji and Emoticons Adapted from www.webnots.com/emoticons-vs-emojis/

An **emoticon** is a typographic display of a facial representation, used to convey emotion in a text-only medium. Like so;-)



Fig. 2. *Emoji and Emoticons*
Adapted from *Encyclopedia Britannica*

Invented multiple times over human history, its internet-era genesis is widely considered to have occurred in September 1982, when computer scientist Scott Fahlman suggested to the Carnegie Mellon University message board that :-) and :-(could be used to distinguish jokes from serious statements online. (The Guardian)

It is fit to remember that emoticon is a portmanteau of emotion and icon. Emoticons are designed to convey human feelings and emoticons in the form of short symbols or in writing. Encyclopedia Britannica defined emoticons as “punctuation marks, letters and numbers used to create pictorial icons that generally display an emotion or sentiment . . . and because of the limits of our keyboard most emoticons need to be read sideways.” (n. pag.)

Conclusion

The language of social media offers innumerable options and opportunities, ranging from secondary analyses of information that exist in real life to monitoring sentiments, health, and economic

outcomes. The rapid advancement of technology ensures that computer scientists will continue to push the boundaries of what is possible, expanding the capabilities and applications of social media. Beyond language, other mediums of communication are also becoming increasingly prominent, including sounds, pictures, and images. Social media has now become an indispensable part of social life, necessitating that users become cautious and meticulous in their applications and approaches.

The digital revolution of social media has certainly transformed the language, making it more dynamic, expressive, and inclusive. This transformation is characterized by the creation and widespread use of new linguistic forms, such as neologisms, abbreviations, acronyms, and emoticons, which allow for more efficient and creative communication. As one investigates this ever-evolving and fascinating linguistic landscape, it becomes clear that social media has a profound impact on language. This impact inspires appreciation for the innovations that social media introduces while also necessitating a cautious approach to its challenges.

For instance, the ability to analyze large volumes of data generated on social media platforms can provide valuable insights into public opinion and behavior. Sentiment analysis can be used to gauge public reactions to events, products, or policies, offering real-time feedback that can inform decision-making in various fields, including marketing, politics, and public health. Similarly, the analysis of social media data can help track the spread of diseases, monitor economic trends, and predict market movements, demonstrating the practical applications of social media language beyond mere communication.

However, this dynamic landscape also presents challenges. The rapid evolution of language on

social media can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, especially among different age groups or cultural backgrounds. The brevity and informality of social media communication may undermine traditional language standards, posing a threat to the preservation of standard language varieties. Furthermore, the pervasive use of social media can contribute to the spread of misinformation, necessitating a critical and discerning approach to consuming and sharing content.

In conclusion, the language of social media is a powerful and versatile tool that reflects the dynamic nature of digital communication. While it offers numerous opportunities for innovation and practical applications, it also demands a thoughtful and cautious approach to navigate its complexities. As we continue to explore and understand this evolving linguistic landscape, it is essential to embrace the positive aspects of social media language while remaining vigilant about its potential pitfalls. This balanced perspective will allow us to harness the full potential of social media as a tool for communication, analysis, and social interaction.

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