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Science, and Education
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A Pragmatic Analysis of the Language of Facebook Posts and Status Updates

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Abstract

This study explores the formal features and the communicative functions of digital discourse through investigating some Facebook posts and status updates. On account of that, the data is analyzed through Searle's Speech Act framework, together with Grice's principle of cooperative maxims and implicature. The data includes 49 posts and statuses of males and females in the age between 25-34 years collected along a period of 3 years (2016-2018) and categorized according to its semantic domains. The results show that digital discourse has some characteristics. They are classified into formal features, which are related to the form of the posts, and functional manifestations, which are associated with the function of the posts. Mingling verbal and pictorial elements is the most dominant and explicit digital formal feature. As for the functions of digital discourse derived from the data; they include: spreading awareness among people, greeting and revealing constructed online identities. It is noticed that the speech acts that are frequently used in Facebook posts and status updates are the assertives and expressives. Furthermore, it is observed that people sometimes use indirect speech acts beside the direct ones. Additionally, there are some pragmatic features related to meaning, such as the various inferences that can be drawn from a very little amount of given information. Finally, considering that the posts are shared by Egyptians, they reflect some aspects of their society.

Keywords: Digital Discourse, Pragmatics, Facebook, Posts, Status Updates.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Concept
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
CP	Cooperative principle
DD	Digital discourse
DSA	Direct speech acts
IFIDs	Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices
ISA	Indirect speech acts
SAT	Speech act theory
VP	Verb phrase

0.1.1. Introduction

Nowadays, everyone can witness the importance of the internet and the role it plays as a means of communication. One of the top social networking websites these days is Facebook. On this social site, users create an online profile by listing personal information and interests, link up with other users, and share updates of the information posted on a daily basis (**Hargittai & Hsieh, 2011, p. 47**). Furthermore, language and its dynamics are areas of great interest to many scholars, especially linguists. Facebook and other platforms occupy an essential role in discourses. Some attempts are made to associate new forms of discourse with old linguistic disciplines under the name of digital discourse (DD). **Crystal (2003)** states that linguists are inevitably inspired by the amazing medium of the internet, which deals with linguistics from its various aspects. Other way stated, it acts as an asylum for the many styles in the written language, and even presents novel ones. Thus, internet can be considered as a linguistic revolution, exactly as it is a social one (p.6).

The current study attempts to trace the formal features and functions of digital discourse (DD) of Facebook. Moreover, it investigates the communicative functions of Facebook posts and status updates. In order to achieve this, the study employs tools from pragmatics represented in **Searle's (1969)** speech act (SA) framework, together with **Grice's (1975)** principle of cooperative maxims and implicature. By incorporating these approaches together, the data is investigated. The researcher resorts to analyzing a number of randomly chosen comments because they complement the analyzed posts. By applying these pragmatic devices, it is revealed

that there are unique formal features and functions that distinguish the discourse used in the digital world.

0.1.2. Aim of the study

The study aims to examine Facebook posts and Status updates in order to:

- 1- Discover the prominent formal features and functions manifested in the selected Facebook posts and status updates.
- 2- Explore the communicative functions that emerge from the analysis of posts, status updates and some of their comments.
- 3- Demonstrate how people attain various functions through updating their statuses or sharing posts on their Facebook walls.
- 4- Test the validity of the analytical framework in analyzing digital discourse (DD).

0.1.3. Research Questions

This study targets to answer the following questions:

- 1- Which type of speech act (SA) is used most frequently in Facebook posts and status updates?
- 2- What are the different communicative functions that emerge from the analysis of statuses and posts?
- 3- What are the different functions and prominent formal features manifested in the selected data?
- 4- How can Facebook be an extension of real-life identities?

0.1.4. Rationale of the study

Since Facebook is viewed as a social utility that connects people with those around them; this platform is chosen for conducting the current study. Posts, status updates, and comments are presented to see to what extent their analysis helps in revealing traits of constructed-online identities and reflecting aspects of the Egyptian society.

0.1.5. Hypothesis

The study hypothesizes that digital discourse (DD) has distinctive features related to the form and function of the shared posts and status updates.

0.1.6. Scope and limitations

The study comprises theories from pragmatics and discourse analysis. It deals with posts of different semantic domains; religious and social. Political posts are one of the prevailing posts found on Facebook; yet, being one of the controversial issues, they are excluded from the selected data. Though the study analyzes posts with images that are significant for the communicative effect and meaning, multi-modality is not included in the analytical framework because it is beyond the scope of the study; it is not used as a tool for analysis. However, images are not totally ignored but are dealt with according to their communicative functions. The data is not categorized according to their speech act type, because one single post can fit into more than one category. Therefore, for convenience, the researcher decides to classify them according to their semantic

domains. Consequently, this results in inconsistency in the number of posts found in each domain. However, the numbers of speech acts (SAs) used in the posts of each semantic domain cannot form generalizations; they just pave the way to the most frequent type of SAs used on Facebook in respect to the data analyzed. The posts analyzed have short textual content, longer ones are excluded for the essence of being focused and accurate in dividing the sentences and classifying them into the SA categories they fit most.

0.1.7. Research Methodology

The theoretical framework is eclectic because it employs tools from pragmatics and discourse analysis, represented in **Searle's (1969)** framework, together with **Grice's (1975)** principle of cooperative maxims and implicature. The analytical model is applied to the selected data.

0.1.8. Data

Status updates and posts selected for analysis in this study are chosen from accounts of people on Facebook. Not all of them are public figures. This means that some of them have private profiles that cannot be accessed by everyone. That is why taking their consent was necessary. Some are relatives and close friends of the researcher, whereas others are people whom the researcher is interested in what they write and post. Names of some status sharers are left anonymous for the sake of privacy, others are mentioned by the name of their Facebook accounts after taking their consent.