Language Study- *Facebook*

The influence of language in Facebook on social identity

==Language acts as a window into social relations and== social media outlet *Facebook* is a unique "community of practice"[1] which demonstrates this. Facebook gives a fascinating record of the ongoing evolution of the English language. The constant evolution of new language patterns helps to distinguish Facebook language from more academic and formal language. In the short period since its establishment, a way of communicating has developed which has altered longstanding English usage. The use of various language techniques on Facebook such as colloquial language, parenthesis and acronyms, provide a sense of uniqueness and creativity in the language. This study focuses on language patterns seen regularly on Facebook and explores their social significance and functional importance.

Abbreviations & Acronyms

==One of the most frequent and noticeable language features used== on Facebook is the abbreviations or "textese". The use of acronyms generates a casual tone that is very popular among young people in particular. A representative example of a status update using acronyms is *'lms 4 a tbh'*. This, translated to formal English, would be *'like my status for a to be honest'*, a simple indication that by acknowledging the user's status, the user will, in return, acknowledge the respondent's presence back. This process creates a reciprocity relationship between the two users, in that there is a mutual exchange of favours between them. On the other hand, this relationship will not be maintained if one user responds negatively to the situation, as it is a relationship based on mutual co-operation and participation, values characteristic of peer-to-peer friendships.

Acronyms and abbreviations often revolve around shared emotional experiences. Obviously expressing a sense of emotion through written text is challenging. The function of abbreviations and acronyms helps the user understand the emotional nature behind the words. Typically, the acronym 'LOL' on Facebook, which for the majority of the time implies 'Laugh out Loud' (although sometimes interchanged with 'Lots of Love'), demonstrates that the user is feeling happy and functions as a symbol of laughter. This acronym, in conjunction with a pictorial representation of a facial expression (emoticon) such as '☺' helps to represent the desired emotion. In such ways the language of Facebook ==stands half way between spoken and written language, sharing characteristics of both.==

==The other function of acronyms and abbreviations is to== not only save time and energy, but also to convey a somewhat casual and relaxed persona and maintain intimacy. The significance of using such terminology within a social network is that language and social status barriers are broken

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[1] Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (1999). New generalizations and explanations in language and gender research. Language in Society, 28(2), 185-201.

down. The phrase 'language barrier' implies the difficulties faced when individuals attempt to communicate with little language commonality. The mutual knowledge of words and expressions is vital in perfect interpretation and in maintaining intimacy. Real communication struggles without it. The unity of a common language *(Vernacular)* amongst Facebook users, provides an opportunity to express their language in a domain where they will be both understood and respected.

Figure 1.1 Abbreviations and Acronyms

Language Technique	Common Examples on Facebook	Examples in a sentence	Effect
Abbreviations and Acronyms	R u- Are you LOL- Laugh out loud ROFL- Rolling on floor laughing LMS- like my status Thx- Thankyou YOLO- You only live once BTW- By the way OMG- Oh my God	'LMS 4 an inbox if u r bored' 'Great day, LOL ☺'	- Saves time and energy - Creates informality - Creates casual dialogue - Helps to express emotional nature

Colloquialism

Colloquialism is an informal expression more often found in a casual conversation than in formal speech or writing. Amongst the 854 million viewers of Facebook[2] , groups of young people often distort and adapt language to create closed communities or sub-cultures. This allows only the 'in-group' to understand the language being used. Expressions are changed regularly and keeping up with the latest expressions can be a status marker to users. Through using language in this way, users are able to communicate with their 'in-group' and preserve a distinct identity from the mainstream society. This creative use of specific words maintains privacy and may also prevent elders from gaining specific knowledge of activities of younger generations.

Colloquial language can often code taboo topics in informal (slang) language. This helps to further define the 'in-group' and distinguish them from the mainstream society. For some users, colloquial language can function as a protective language barrier, often using this secret language to cover activities that would otherwise be disapproved within the mainstream society. A user posting a status on Facebook saying 'I'm Smashed', meaning 'I am drunk', breaks down the distance and formality of writing to achieve this desired 'in-group' conversation.

Colloquialism imitates spoken language and helps to create informality and intimacy in the sense that the expression is unique to the user and their 'in-group'. A recent user posted a status on Facebook saying, 'I just creamed my first final'. Changing 'did really well on' to 'creamed' demonstrates that this metaphorical usage can also generate creativity and playfulness in the way the user communicates. By understanding this, other users can gain understanding of the social identity and persona of that user through their language choices.

From the perspective of mainstream society or prospective employers, colloquialism may represent a sense of immaturity or lack of literacy knowledge. The deliberate or unintended attempt to miss-

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[2] No author (2012) "Facebook user Statstics 2012 [Infographic]"

spell words may appear somewhat attention-seeking or melodramatic. Depending on the reader's perspective, this may also negatively influence the impression others receive.

Figure 1.2 Colloquialisms

Language Technique	Common Examples on Facebook	Examples in a sentence	Effect
Colloquialism	Wanna- Want to Gonna- Got to I'm Smashed- I'm drunk Coke- Coca-Cola Fetch- Get me Dumped- Broke up with	'Had a big weeknd, got tots smashed' 'Any1 wanna inbox?'	- Helps to create interactional identities - Enables effective communication between 'in-groups' - Ensures privacy when appropriate - Can demonstrate immaturity + lack of literacy knowledge

Hate Speech

The indistinct boundaries between what language is considered appropriate and what is not, creates a dangerous grey area which allows Facebook users to communicate in a way not usually socially acceptable. Commonly on Facebook, it can be seen that youths use this outlet to establish their status in society. When conflict arises, intolerant language known simply as 'hate speech'[3], is used as a substitute protective mechanism. The language behind Hate Speech is any comment which is made to attack a person or a group based on a variety of aspects including sexual differences, race and religion. For females and youths in general, feedback provided by other users on Facebook, is an important element for growth and self-respect.

A recent fight on Facebook between multiple women used hate speech to help protect themselves and their self-esteem. One comment in particular demonstrates the intensity which individuals are willing to use to in order to protect their self-image. The comment, *'I see why John broke up with you, because you're a b***h'*, demonstrates the language people feel is appropriate to use over Facebook. Many users clearly do not understand the consequences of certain language use. Receiving feedback through language such as Hate Speech can make individuals form an identity and gain an impression of themselves that may be harmful and demoralising. The consequences of cyber-bullying were evident in the case of Chanelle Raes, who committed suicide in 2009 due to receiving threatening language through Facebook one night[4]. The effect of constant abuse through Hate Speech is a sobering demonstration of the influence simple language can have on others.

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[3] See Foxman 2013 "Viral Hate: Containing Its Spread on the Internet"

[4] No Author (2009) "Chanelle Rae's mum says her daughter would be alive if she wasn't cyber bullied"

The Zuckerverb

<mark>The Zuckerverb refers to a word that has been transformed from a noun to a verb, a language technique characteristic of "management-speak", "techno-speak" and Facebook in particular</mark>[5]. Typical examples include "newsfeeding" (the act of reading the newsfeed) or "facebook me later" (contact me on facebook). The Zuckerverb is evident on Facebook when users change the simple noun 'friend' into 'friending', now describing an action rather than a physically existing object. Before this change 'friend' signified a relatively intimate relationship with mutual affection. By choosing to disregard this definition through turning a friend into an action, the interpretation has been diminished, having a significant effect on the social meaning. Through the Zuckerverb, the social bond of friendship has turned into a simple action, by implication reducing a friend to anyone you may have met once in your life.
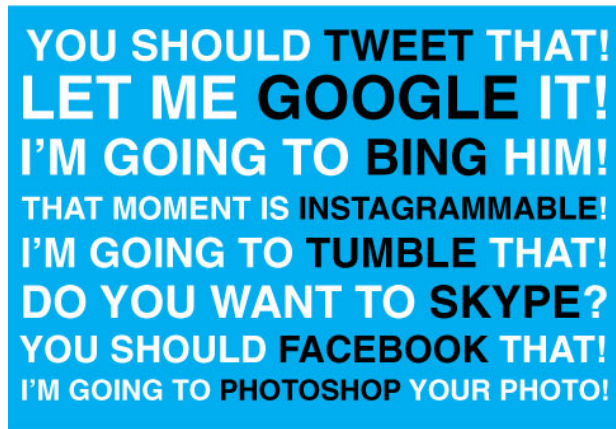
Figure 1.3 Nick Bilton:. *"For Start-Ups, the Ultimate Goal: Becoming a Verb."*

Figure 1.4 Calvin and Hobbes: *Verbing weirds language*

<mark>Another common example</mark> on Facebook is 'inbox' and 'inboxing'. Although this conversion poses no significant effect in comparison to the previous example, it still demonstrates a language technique that is characteristic of Facebook. Outside the virtual world of Facebook, people would not use the verb 'inboxing' to signify emailing or texting although 'inboxes' are by no means exclusive to Facebook. This shows that Facebook is more than a medium: it is a community of practice with its own emerging stylistic language features.

By gravitating from nouns to verbs, Facebook language contrasts significantly with academic English which tends to be "noun heavy"[6]. The demands and complexity of academic language require technical nouns and long noun phrases. Often these technical nouns are in fact verbs turned

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[5] Deutscher 2005 The Unfolding Of Language p.247

[6] Introducing Applied Linguistics: Concepts and Skills Susan Hunston, David Oakey p.32

into nouns or "nominalisations". For the majority of Facebook users, this is not their goal when using Facebook. All communities form and communicate their distinctive identity through the language they use. Facebook is no exception. The Zuckerverb appropriately accounts for this desire, and its introduction has helped to define the language of Facebook and the people who use it.

Figure 1.5 The Zuckerverb

Language Technique	Common Examples on Facebook	Examples in a sentence	Effect
The Zuckerverb	Friending- becoming friends with Liking- Clicking a button to say that you appreciate the post Inboxing- a way of communicating with someone without a physical presence Poking- A way of getting someone's attention without physically poking them	'There's a serious poking war going on' 'Some random person has just started inboxing me'	- Defines a whole new language specific to Facebook - Allows for far more universal connections - Can demoralise certain definitions of words e.g friend

Parenthetical expressions and run-on sentences *(tag questions)*

Spoken language tends to have longer and more free-flowing sentences than written language[7]. This often includes "real time" editing where the speaker self-corrects and adds ideas as they go. Parenthetical language is a technique used on Facebook, seen when users attach certain phrases to the end of a sentence, which are generally not needed. The second statement to the sentence, *'I want ice cream.. but I only want blueberry'*, is an example of parenthetical language. Although this parenthetical statement may not be necessary, it adds clarity to the sentence and helps to support ideas.

Parenthetical is regularly used at the end of a sentence by saying *'Ya, know?'*. The use of *'Ya know?'* is referred to as a tag question as it is creating a question from an already grammatically complete sentence. This very spoken-like pattern is clearly not necessary in the sentence, yet is simply put on the end, altering the normal word flow. However when reading a status with a similar parenthesis on the end, it compels the audience to respond by either agreeing or disagreeing. This is one of the functions of tag questions; it compels people to respond. On Facebook, this ultimately opens the door to an entire conversation where users feel they are able to comfortably express their own opinions.

Not surprisingly, tag questions are used more widely in Colloquial language than formal English, possibly demonstrating why they commonly appear on Facebook. However, they are also characteristic of spoken language, and the rising or falling of intonation distinguishes between the person just seeking confirmation, and if the question being asked is real. As the absence of intonation on Facebook cannot help distinguish between what the correct purpose is, users can be

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[7] Halliday, M A K, 1985. *Spoken and Written Language.*Victoria, Australia: Deakin University.

left confused, indicating how effective it really is. Yet this is characteristic of the way young people speak, and Facebook is a reflection of this.

Figure 1.6 Parenthesis

Language Technique	Common Examples on Facebook	Examples in a sentence	Effect
Parenthetical	Ya know Aye As far as I know In fact Don't You reckon/think?	'All Blacks will win the rugby for sure, Aye' 'I want to go to da shops…need new shoes' 'This looks better on me, don't you think?	- Adds clarity - Provides more information to form stronger opinions of others - Can disrupts grammatically complete sentences - Leads to stronger identity formation

Vernacular Vocabulary

All the examples of language use on Facebook are demonstrations of informal vernacular language. This is the way people really talk and communicate with each other when we believe no one is listening.

The use of vernacular vocabulary assists in displaying a wide range of emotions, including playfulness (through the use of acronyms) and creativity through the constant renewal of vocabulary. Development of new vernacular language serves its function on Facebook by keeping users interested and engaged in the changing environments.

Vernacular vocabulary helps to define relationships as friends/peers other than, for example, colleagues/business partners, due to the absence of hierarchical relational structure. The flexibility of vernacular language helps build a sense of happiness and light-heartedness about a Facebook conversation that cannot be achieved in a formal situation.

 An appearance of emotional intimacy is defined between users through vernacular vocabulary. For instance, sarcasm in a relationship between people is a sign of intimacy as it symbolises a mutual understanding of humour. In a conversation, a friend may refer to another user as a 'Loser' or 'Weirdo', yet due to their emotional intimacy within the relationship, the friend will accept and even reciprocate the sarcastic gesture. Both the users have mutual knowledge to help interpret what message the user is trying to send.

Vernacular vocabulary is largely based on this emotional intimacy and mutual knowledge. In the absence of this, language interpretation can be greatly affected.

Conclusion

<mark>All language is borrowed and adapted from the wider culture</mark>. Facebook is not unique in adapting the English language for its own needs. However the fact that language used on Facebook has caught on so widely is a sign of its success. Many of its unique features relate directly to its uniqueness as a medium sitting between the worlds of speech and writing. It shares many of the advantages of speech, with a certain amount of immediacy and feedback. Yet it is still essentially written. This is neatly captured by the name itself "Face-book". This explains many of the tensions and innovations of this unique and growing language community.

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