# A Discourse Analysis of Cyber Socialising Interactions in English among Students

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The influence of technology and engagement in cyber socializing has become a prominent part of modern communication. A new learning pedagogy with proper guidelines is needed to assist users in engaging with social networking platforms efficiently. The researchers investigated discourse analysis involving participants to answer questions about the contextual application of the language and the functions and results of aspects of discourse such as diction, cohesion, and metaphors. The researchers employed a quantitative approach in this study. The study randomly sampled 80 students from the University of Technology in Gauteng to participate in quantitative discourse analysis of communication using Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter texts. The data elicitation methods embraced extracts from Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter texts provided by 80 participants. Data were collected via email, and texts were numbered according to the participants. These texts remain anonymous, and the identities of the participants are concealed. The study found that the use of emoji characterized the language used on Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, low register words, code-switching, few spelling errors, and the modern tendency to shorten words by using clipping and number homophones, which are not seen as errors but a unique style of writing.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The use of technology to communicate is prevalent among students. A new pedagogy is needed to help students use social platforms for educational purposes (Karal, Kokoc & Cakir, 2017:677). This study attempted to meet the educational and academic objectives by examining social media platforms ethically and successfully by identifying cohesion and coherence of language used in social contexts as part of the focus on discourse (Gee, 2010:5). The world is dynamically influenced by the advancement of modern technology and its effect on language development and usage, as it is involved in social and informal interaction and for business purposes. Electronic devices embracing tablets, smartphones, and computers have granted students the opportunity to engage in communication even for entertainment purposes, and researchers point out that "English is increasingly used by these users globally since the various language speakers of diverse languages can connect to share knowledge" (Kumar & Sharma, 2016: 52).

On virtual social media platforms, users communicate, share personal experiences, and respond to the posts of other users. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter (X) are used to communicate informally, and marketers also use them as promotion tools to share information. More alarmingly, the language used on these

platforms can affect a business's online or e-reputation; accordingly, correctness and appropriateness are vital aspects that must be considered (Kumar & Sharma, 2016:52).

As lecturers/ researchers, it is important to examine how students use cyber-socializing because reflecting on using discourse as part of cyber-socializing can influence how they communicate academically. The content of their communication is also a source of interest to determine whether they use "trolling", why they use it, and the frequency of this phenomenon. Trolling is defined as posting inflammatory information and extraneous messages via social network sites to provoke readers and solicit an emotional response, disrupting the obvious topic of discussion. A troll creates discord by starting a quarrel and posting controversial information to cause an emotional response (Merritt, 2012:3). It is underscored by Bock (2014:68), who asserts that conventionalized genres should be interpreted from a discourse-analytical perspective.

The main research question guiding this study coalesced around the following: What are the frequencies detected through textual analysis when studying characteristic discourse variables on Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter (X) social media platforms as used or not used by the participants? This study aimed to determine the frequencies of characteristic variables through textual analysis when studying characteristic discourse variables on Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter social media platforms. The frequencies of the following discourse variables were investigated: Referencing, Clipping, Substitution, Ellipsis, Number homophones, Trolling, Emoji, Excessive punctuation, Code-switching, Conversational opening and closing, Sequencing, Metaphor/Simile, High register words, and Low register words.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW
### 2.1 Division of Discourse Theories
Discourse theories are divided as follows:
### 2.1.1 Post-structuralist discourse theory
This theory underscores the use of language in society. The social aspect of discourse is seen as an open, dynamic, and heterogeneous terrain. Foucault and Pecheyx (1982) contributed extensively to discourse studies (Angermuller, 2015).
### 2.1.2 The normative-deliberative discourse theory
It involves what can be regarded as acceptable content for all. Clashing norms must be ironed out. Conflict forms an integral part of discourse since unresolvable tensions and even contradictions are all part of discourse. Discourse is seen as a social practice embedded in power structures but also engages cultural differences and social problems and addresses three problems: power, knowledge, and subjectivity; it legitimizes knowledge as identified by social groups (Angermuller, 2015). Parker (1992) proposes a detailed, 20-step guide for conducting discourse analysis, which Willig (2008) has simplified into a six-stage guide. Usher and Perz (2014) list a summary of these aspects. They involve the following aspects:

**Reading:** The researcher must read through transcripts and listen to recordings.

**Coding:** The researcher must select data arranged according to codes and themes.

**Analysis:** Data are analyzed, and contradictions and similarities are determined.

**The focus of analysis**: The main focal aspects are underscored, and how they are deployed is established.

**Foucauldian discourse analysis:** This entails examining discourse's psychological and physical effects.

**Writing:** the study must be contextualized, and other studies using a similar method.

Discourse is viewed as 'language beyond the sentence': This study of discourse is concerned with the language used in Internet texts and conversations. Readers can interpret texts by creating complex discourse interpretations of linguistic messages or fragmentary communication (Angermuller, 2015; Yule, 2018), which reinforces that a study of language used on social media platforms involves discourse. Variables that form an integral part of discourse theory are cohesion, coherence, conversation analysis, cooperative principle, hedging, implicatures, background knowledge, schemas, and scripts (Yule, 2018).

Different scholars have contributed to the corpus of knowledge on discourse analysis. Foucault (1982) defines discourse as statements grouped as part of communication practice (p. 80). He highlights that discourse must be studied in terms of its purpose of communication. In the same vein, Stubbs (1983) reiterates that discourse occurs within a certain context by those who interact using language (p.5). The previously mentioned definitions are supported by Allen and Corder (1974:200), who posit that discourse involves written and spoken language that happens in a specific setting. Stubbs (1983:56) proffers a clear distinction between these by stating that discourse serves a social purpose, whereas the written text involves the aspect of communicative functions. In this study, the focus is on written communication.

Likewise, Zappavigna (2012:3) advocates that discourse is interactive, whereas text is non-interactive. He also views discourse as an exchange of information between communicators and claims that a text is more viewed as a pertinent message sent with the following proviso: when there is a two-way communication and responses to messages are involved, only then does the text fulfill its purpose.

## 2.2 Approaches to discourse analysis

There are **five theoretical approaches** to **discourse theory** as proposed by Heracleous (2018). They include the following:

## 2.1.1 Conversation analysis

Conversation analysis involves social life as an ongoing occurrence rather than an assumed fixture. The focus is on conversational **turn-taking** and other features such as pauses and repair. Interaction is deemed as context-specific, context-shaped, and context-renewed. The focus is on a short-term frame, and the focus is on the micro level that involves conversations.

### 2.1.2 Speech act theory and discourse

This theory highlights the context in which discourse is employed. It involves the meso-level orientation and focuses on change.

### 2.1.3 Critical discourse analysis

This theory focuses on power relations and how identities are shaped. The interest is in how power can affect communication.

### 2.1.4 Structural discourse

The focus is on links over time and shifts in central themes. The focus is on the meso or macro level orientation with a long-term frame.

### 2.1.5 Rhetoric as discourse

The analytical focus is on themes and their construction, identification, rhetorical strategies, and organizational and institutional goals. It can be applied to the meso-level and macro level, which is the level of communication and social change. It is used for persuasive purposes. The reader can interpret texts even though these texts might be ungrammatical.

The discourse, as mentioned above, forms a central part of this study and is elucidated next.

Table 1. Approaches to discourse

| Approach | Detail | How it was incorporated in this study |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Conversation analysis** | Interaction is deemed as context-specific, context-shaped, and context-renewed. | Since the texts that were analyzed involved conversations, conversation analysis was also used, especially regarding the topics chosen and the diction used. Discourse aspects were identified, and statistics were calculated. |
| **Speech act theory** | The focus is on context and change. | In this study, the context was also taken into consideration. |
| **Critical discourse analysis** | Power relations and identities are of crucial importance. | In this study, the identities of the communicators were also taken into consideration. |
| **Structural discourse** | Links and shifts over time are part of this approach. | In this study, communication was studied in a specific time frame, and it was not a longitudinal study. The aspects pertaining to sentence structure were, however, also part of the focus since discourse also involves sentence structure and construction. |

| **Rhetoric as discourse** | The analytical focus is on themes and their construction, identification, rhetorical strategies, and organizational and institutional goals. | It was also part of the focus as the communication studied was spontaneous responses among interlocutors. Texts in this study were studied irrespective of grammatical errors. Themes were identified as part of interview data and content analysis. |
| --- | --- | --- |

Adapted from Heracleous (2018)

## 2.3 Reasons for studying discourse analysis

Literature has highlighted several reasons why we study discourse analysis. Previous studies by Stubbs (1983:98) focused on how language is used and how humans use language to communicate. Lecturers focused on how they could teach their students to improve their writing. Surveys such as those conducted by Zappavigna (2001:3) found that cyber socializing is user-generated content that is self-publicised and supports ambient, interpersonal connection. Since it is length-delimiting communication, the use of language is affected, and a new way of self-expression occurs. Users need to be equipped to use the language succinctly as this communication can exert an influence on information generation and linguistic self-expression, and the involvement of electronic devices such as smartphones focuses attention on the importance of corpus linguistics, as information can be spread widely and instantaneously. Social media users enjoy being part of the peer in-group, and if the group enjoys using these platforms, there will be those who follow and interact (Thurlow & Poff, 2012).

Apart from focusing on the use of modern technological Internet communication sites like social media platforms, the focus is also on the English language used in discourse. It has also been observed that poor English proficiency in speaking and writing impacts academic performance and that language learning is central to meaningful interaction, whether spoken or written (Van der Walt, Evans & Kilfoil, 2010:97). It should, however, be noted that the idea was not to conduct an Error Analysis (EA) by analyzing the language errors since these are an undeniable part of cyber chatting (Bock, 2014); rather, the focus was more on discourse and aspects pertaining to discourse as well as content.

Recent research in promoting English language proficiency skills (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015:210) has generated renewed interest in upgrading learners' speaking and writing skills. English is used globally to connect, and it facilitates communication when trading and marketing. Language is socially constructed, and the construction of meaning is biased and defined relative to the Internet users' social and cultural experiences involving relations of power. The use of these Internet/ social media platforms also involves social expression and using language to influence users by deliberately misleading people or coaxing them to react in a certain manner (Saichaie, 2011:2).

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

A quantitative approach was employed in this study. There are numerous methods within a quantitative research approach, namely, descriptive, experimental, exploratory, and explanatory research (Struwig & Stead, 2001:7). Indeed, Kumar (2016:12) concurs that a study is classified as a quantitative study when the researcher wants to quantify the variation of phenomena. Interestingly, Creswell (2009:55) maintains that quantitative research methods are of paramount importance because they delimit the focus of the research study with regard to the sample size and semi-structured interviews, which are inclusive. In quantitative research, analysis does not begin until all data have been collated and converted into numbers. Quantitative research tends to rely more on deductive reasoning, moving from the general to the specific. In this study, the researchers aimed at statistical results in order to get answers to the research question. The study involved statistics gained from the frequencies of Internet discourse usage.

### 3.2 The Research Site

The study was conducted at the University of Technology (UOT) in Gauteng. Most of the participants reside in Soshanguve, which is a township north of Pretoria. Soshanguve was a town where Black people from different backgrounds were forced to reside together, far from urban areas. The City of Tshwane (2008) maintains that Soshanguve was established during the Apartheid era in 1974. The name Soshanguve comes from the first letters of the languages spoken in its township, namely, So (Sotho), Sha (Shangaan), Ngu (Nguni), and Ve (Venda). Soshanguve Township is mainly a residential area with educational facilities and shops. According to the figures from the GDE (2003), the township has about 50 schools, which fall under the Tshwane North District. It includes 27 primary schools, 13 middle schools and 10 secondary schools. The selected University of Technology (UOT), previously known as Technicon Northern Gauteng (TNG), is based in Soshanguve.

### 3.3 Research Participants

The participants who submitted their Internet platform texts consisted of 80 participants, 45 female (56%) and 35 male (44%). Their ages ranged from 20 to 35. The participants were all enrolled students at a UOT in South Africa. The participants came from three different courses and different levels of study, starting from level 1 to level 3 and from different cultural orientations. They were randomly sampled for participation. Further, only students who were active on the three social media platforms (SMPs) involved in this study were sampled. In addition, the researchers made use of personal invitations to approach the participants who participated voluntarily.

### 3.4 Data Collection Methods

The researchers used discourse analysis and frequency counts, which are similar to quantitative methods of linguistic inquiry and word count (LIWC), to collate data. The procedures involved the collection of the texts from the volunteer participants, including

the following: the participants presented three entries of a larger size, for example, at least five sentences minimum and ten maximum per platform. Texts were sent via email to the researchers after being approached by personal invitation. The texts were stored on a computer to investigate the data further. Texts were extracted from Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter (X) platforms, and the content was analyzed according to aspects pertaining to discourse.

## 3.5 Data Analysis

Hand tabulations were used in the initial step of counting the responses for each item. The number of occurrences was recorded for each item by the researchers. Selection of specific occurrences, such as done by LIWC, was used as proposed by Carpenter (2018), who asserts that frequencies can reveal informative detail, although the selection in this study was done manually because aspects like trolling and metaphors are not indicated by merely counting words.

## 4. FINDINGS

## 4.1 Characteristics and Frequencies as Reflected Within the Extracts

It must be noted that the frequencies derived from the text refer to the number of users that used that specific phenomenon and not the number of occurrences of the phenomenon within the text, as the focus was more on the use of the discourse as a phenomenon. Due to the length of the text varied, it made the counting of the phenomenon within the texts unnecessary, as a longer text will obviously provide the user the opportunity to use the phenomenon more. These salient aspects are discussed next. It is an estimate of internal consistency reliability. All reliability estimates are estimates of reliability. Table 2 below provides a summary of the statistics of the three technological platforms and their frequencies.

Table 2. Summary of the statistics of the three technological platforms and frequencies

|  | % Twitter | % WhatsApp | % Facebook |
|---|---|---|---|
| Low register | 97,5 | 100 | 97,5 |
| High register | 16,25 | 3,75 | 5 |
| Metaphor/Simile | 2,5 | 3,75 | 8,75 |
| Sequencing | 11,25 | 20 | 12,5 |
| Conversational opening and closing | 5 | 16,25 | 13,75 |
| Code-switching | 21,25 | 31,25 | 27,5 |
| Excessive punctuation | 10 | 16,25 | 22,5 |
| Emoji | 31,25 | 43,75 | 52,5 |
| Trolling | 33,75 | 11,25 | 37,5 |
| Number homophones | 5 | 7,5 | 7,5 |
| Ellipsis | 0 | 0 | 2,5 |
| Substitution | 1,25 | 7,5 | 1,25 |
| Clipping | 5 | 8,75 | 3,75 |
| Referencing | 56,25 | 72,5 | 60 |

Table 3. Referencing

| Technological platforms | % |
|---|---|
| Twitter | 56,25 |
| WhatsApp | 72,5 |
| Facebook | 60 |

The researchers investigated the use of referencing on social networks. Referencing, in this instance, refers to how the writer introduces participants and keeps track of them throughout the text (Eggins, 1994:95). It is a relationship that exists on a semantic level. All referencing types were taken into consideration. The results indicated that students mostly used anaphoric referencing on WhatsApp (72, 5%), followed by Facebook (60%), and very little on Twitter (X) (56, 25%), as indicated in the table above. Taylor (2020) explains anaphoric references as words in texts that refer to other aspects within the text to create meaning. However, little evidence was found on exophoric references. Exophoric references refer to aspects outside the discourse or shared knowledge between the interlocutors (Taylor, 2020). The evidence of referencing is crucial in that it testifies to the fact that the anaphoric referencing used pertains more to the relationship within the specific piece of communication. Users thus did not refer to other participants outside the text but kept to a closed group when communicating, designating an atmosphere of intimacy. This finding resonates with the finding by Bock (2014). The communication stays linked with the interlocutors within the text, and they focus on the topic they discuss.

Table 4. Clipping

| Technological platforms | % |
|---|---|
| Twitter | 5 |
| WhatsApp | 8,75 |
| Facebook | 3,75 |

The results showed that only 8 75% of the students used clipping on WhatsApp; 3, 75% on Facebook and 5% on Twitter (X). Clipping was used as a means to create a shorter text, be concise, and communicate the text using as few characters as possible. It is interesting to note that clipping amongst WhatsApp users featured most prominently, and this is in line with the general description of Twitter (X) using the smallest number of characters since it is a medium that is used for a different purpose than other social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. The nature of Twitter (X) to provide shorter tweets limits the user to use only a few characters. Contractions like 'res' are used instead of residence. Yet another common contraction is the widespread use of 'u' for 'you.

Table 5. Substitution

| Technological platforms | % |
|---|---|
| Twitter | 1,25 |
| WhatsApp | 7,5 |
| Facebook | 1,25 |

Substitution is used to avoid repetition in a text, and it is a relationship that exists on the lexicon-grammatical level between linguistic items, such as words or phrases. According to Bloor and Bloor (1995:), the main reason for using substitution is to fight monotony and to avoid repetition. The use of substitution by students on WhatsApp was at 7, 5%, while students did not use substitution on Facebook and Twitter, as reflected in the table above. This finding corresponds with the need to keep the text short and concise.

Table 6. Ellipsis

| Technological platforms | % |
|---|---|
| Twitter | 0 |
| WhatsApp | 0 |
| Facebook | 2,5 |

The researchers investigated the use of ellipsis on social networks. Ellipsis is the act of deliberately removing a linguistic unit from a piece of discourse. It has the function of replacing words in sentences and is often used to stimulate thinking. Ellipsis is "words deliberately left out of a sentence when the meaning is still clear" (Harmer, 2004:24). The results indicated that students on WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter, as indicated in the table above, did not use ellipsis consistently. It is interesting to note that thisphenomenon is not well represented in social media communication platforms. The absence of the use of ellipsis canprobably be ascribed to the need to stay short and to the point.

Table 7. Number of homophones

| Technological platforms | % |
|---|---|
| Twitter | 5 |
| WhatsApp | 7,5 |
| Facebook | 7,5 |

Crystal (2008) is of the opinion that texting contains examples of numerous examples of homophones. She explains this phenomenon as laziness, and she posits that this non-standard way of writing is criticized, yet it has become a fashionable or "cool" feature that has become part and parcel of daily communication. Messages on Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter are also part of texting and are a succinct way of sharing messages and information. She claims that abbreviations such as lol (laughing out loud) and brb (be right back) are evidence of an awareness of sensitivity towards other users' needs. She avers that the potential benefits of texting are ignored, and purists complain about poor literacy. Instead, she is of the view that new opportunities to communicate and the use of the language, even in modern form with abbreviations and shortening by omitting letters, must be seen as additional opportunities to hone writing skills. Students can develop a strong sense of when it is appropriate to use the abbreviations and when not to, and they must concentrate on using language appropriate to the context.

The results of this study showed that only a few students made use of a number of homophones on Facebook (7, 5%), WhatsApp (7, 5%), and Twitter (X) (5%), as indicated

in the table above. It was interesting that WhatsApp users were recorded to be more frequent users of homophones. This finding can be explained by stating that since WhatsApp communication often embraces an opening of content and a closing section, there is a need to keep the conversation short. One would expect Tweets to have more examples of homophones, but in this case, WhatsApp and Facebook users used this phenomenon more.

Table 8. Trolling

| Technological platforms | % |
|---|---|
| Twitter | 33,75 |
| WhatsApp | 11,25 |
| Facebook | 37,5 |

Internet trolls refer to an online subculture that posts upsetting or shocking content and spreads false information for their enjoyment, causing quarrels that upset readers. Trolls deliberately annoy others to get a reaction (Merrit, 2012:54). Further, Shringapure and Dharam (2019) further posit that there are specific reasons for trolling, such as doing it for fun and crossing limits; trolling due to boredom, because of a need to take revenge or to be amused; self-assertion, in an attempt to assert themselves and is a characteristic of mentally weak people; lack of legal knowledge, ignoring that there is a limit to self-expression; false assurance of security, as they think they can even use a false name or a pseudonym to avoid detection and subsequently escape persecution by the authorities. It is a false assumption because it violates the right to privacy. Indeed, the Information Technology Act 2000, Section 66 E, was created to protect users' privacy, and the publishing of offensive material is punishable, according to this promulgation. It is worth noting that lascivious appeals are used to incite or corrupt Internet users and also to embrace offensive comments regardless of whether these are sexual in nature or not.

From the research findings, trolling occurs mostly on Facebook (37, 5%) and Twitter (X) (33, 75%). Only a few students resorted to trolling on WhatsApp (11, 25%). It is an interesting finding that WhatsApp is viewed as a more conversational medium.

Table 9. Emoji

| Technological platforms | % |
|---|---|
| Twitter | 31,25 |
| WhatsApp | 43,75 |
| Facebook | 52,5 |

The use of emojis is very high in all the SNSs investigated. The results showed that 52,5% of students made use of emojis when communicating on Facebook, 43,75 % of student participants made use of emojis on WhatsApp, and 31,25 % of students used them when engaging on Twitter (X). The following extract is an example of how emojis are used in SNSs. It was revealed that of the three SNSs involved- Facebook had the most emoji

use. Twitter (X) relied more on written words. It is an interesting finding in that it can be asserted that Facebook and WhatsApp communication have a more conversational nature, and emojis are used more frequently. The character limitation might also influence the limitation of emoji usage on Twitter (X).

Emojis add emotional appeal to confirm the content of the text, as can be seen in the following text, where the praying hands and face with the heart were used to create a pleading atmosphere, adding a measure of feeling to the text, thus humanizing the medium. The finding that this phenomenon, when compared to other discourse features, was so prominent proves that emojis have become an integral part of communication on various social media platforms and are a new way of incorporating pictures to strengthen messages. They are fit-for-purpose features as part of digital textspeak, but their function is not to usurp language but to add emotional impetus and cues. Furthermore, they also link with the more cryptic way of writing (Alshenqeeti, 2016).

Alshenqeeti (2016) asserts that emojis can represent a feeling or even a word and are strung together with words to create a sentence carrying meaning. He asserts that the assumption that emojis are devolving language ignores the humans' need for non-verbal information, as technologically savvy users use emojis. In addition, they are universal and can be understood by speakers of different languages. It is of particular interest in this study as the users involved as participants were all from different cultural denominations and communicated with people who did not always share the same home language. In this study, the researchers found emojis to be a means of reaching people of other cultural denominations. Emojis were also excessively used by those who incorporate them in their discourse, and this tendency links with the excessive use of punctuation to communicate strong emotions.

Table 10. Excessive punctuation

| Technological platforms | % |
|---|---|
| Twitter | 10 |
| WhatsApp | 16,25 |
| Facebook | 22,5 |

Beck (2018) asserts that digital communication is undergoing "exclamation-point inflation", referring to the use of excessive punctuation. It is deemed a quirk of social media to use excessive exclamation points, all caps, and repetition of letters. Garber (2014) advocates the use of exclamation points to indicate emotional coloring, enthusiasm, and excitement. She mentions the movement from purely lexical-based communication to image-based communication in modern times and claims that the use of punctuation is strongly linked with visual communication.

The use of excessive punctuation in SNSs was investigated and revealed interesting data. The table above provides the results of how excessive punctuation is used on social networking platforms. The use of excessive punctuation (repetition of a single punctuation mark) was recorded on WhatsApp as 16, 25% compared to 22, 5% on Facebook and 10%

by Twitter (X) users. It emerged from the analyses that Facebook posts revealed the most instances of the use of excessive punctuation. It can be deduced that excessive punctuation has become part of the nomenclature of Facebook and conversational communication.

Table 11. Code-switching

| Technological platforms | % |
|---|---|
| Twitter | 21,25 |
| WhatsApp | 31,25 |
| Facebook | 27,5 |

Cardenas-Claros and Isharyanti (2009) investigated code-switching and the influence of culture in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), and they report that the use of English on Internet/ social media platforms has increased considerably. They claim that English is used to communicate, especially in the case where Internet users belong to different cultural groups and have different home languages. Code-switching occurs from the mother tongue to English. Language diversity is a characteristic of South African Internet users who could belong to one of the 11 official languages in South Africa (Da Costa, Dyers & Mheta, 2014). The participants incorporated in this study are all English second language speakers, and they showed a tendency to code-switch.

When students attempted to connect on Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter (X), code-switching featured prominently since all users did not belong to the same mother tongue. Different ethnicities are recognized as they all connect using English. Comparing the three SNSs, code-switching was used mostly on WhatsApp (31, 25%), followed by Facebook (27, 5%), and Twitter (X) (21, 25%) revealed the lowest percentage. Since WhatsApp leans more towards having conversations, it did not come as a surprise that code-switching was more prevalent on WhatsApp than on any other social media platform. This finding lends credence to Andújar-Vaca and Cruz-Martínez (2017) study, where they maintain that WhatsApp is a useful communication tool to socialize and become educated. It also echoes the opinion of Kwon and    Schallert (2016:138) that code-switching enables Internet users of various social platforms to connect and understand one another.

Table 12. Conversational opening and closing

| Technological platforms | % |
|---|---|
| Twitter | 5 |
| WhatsApp | 16,25 |
| Facebook | 13,75 |

Yule (2018) discusses conversational analysis as part of the discourse. Conversational analysis involves turn-taking during conversations that are opened and closed. In written communication, the moment of silence is not so obvious but can be observed in the time taken to respond. Alli and Kootbodien (2017) maintain that WhatsApp is the leading Internet communication medium, and they assert that Facebook and Twitter (X) take a backseat to WhatsApp communication as the preferred medium.

Communication barriers also ensue when messages and pictures sent are interpreted differently; nevertheless, they consider WhatsApp an effective communication medium.

The results presented in Table 10 above show how conversational opening and closing are used on SNSs. Facebook users (13, 75%), WhatsApp users (16, 25%), and Twitter (X) (5%) all used the conversational opening and closing. WhatsApp had the most instances of opening and closing of conversations. This finding can be explained by viewing WhatsApp as an instant message service and the conversational nature allowing more characters than Twitter (X). Interestingly, Facebook and WhatsApp scores were close. The data also revealed that Facebook users also sometimes tend to use opening.

Table 13. Sequencing

| Technological platforms | % |
| --- | --- |
| Twitter | 11,25 |
| WhatsApp | 20 |
| Facebook | 12,5 |

Yule (2018) asserts that sequencing also deals with the coherence of messages since it is all about how users make sense of what they hear. In order to make sense, there must be order and a sequence to follow, including a beginning, middle, and end. Turn-taking took place, and pauses were also observed. The researchers investigated the use of sequencing on social network discourse, and the findings showed that there are more instances of sequencing on WhatsApp discourse when compared to Facebook and Twitter (X), as shown above. Conversations on WhatsApp revealed that turn-taking and order are clearly observed in the opening, the content, and the closing in most instances. Facebook communication revealed that the pauses to respond were not always followed up immediately except for when Facebook Messenger was used. As for Twitter (X), the responses were more cryptic because of character restriction.

Table 14. Metaphor/simile

| Technological platforms | % |
| --- | --- |
| Twitter | 2,5 |
| WhatsApp | 3,75 |
| Facebook | 8,75 |

Herrmann (2016) asserts that metaphors are highly important as communicative devices. Metaphors are often linked with power interests, and there is a comparison between two aspects where one is assigned power. Metaphors are obscure and can hide and limit perspectives, promote a sense of belonging, togetherness, and participation, and bolster ties via communication. Online platforms must also be culturally relevant, and it stands to reason that metaphors that are used must be interpretable by the parties involved to create a platform of shared meaning. These platforms demand fellowship, tolerance, and

patience since cyberbullying, discrimination, and intimidation are obstacles to Internet/ social media communication.

The researchers investigated the use of metaphors and comparisons during communication on SNSs. Metaphors deal with the meaning beyond the text (Herrmann, 2016). The findings revealed that 8, 75% of Facebook users 3, 75% of WhatsApp users, and 2, 5% of Twitter (X) users used metaphors and similes. Here, all the texts were scrutinized for examples. These findings confirmed what was found in the text, as a few examples of metaphors and similes were found as proof of linguistic operation on an advanced abstract level. These findings revealed that metaphors and similes predominated as exemplars of figurative language.

Table 15. High register

| Technological platforms | % |
|---|---|
| Twitter | 16,25 |
| WhatsApp | 3,75 |
| Facebook | 5 |

The researchers also investigated the use of high-register words by students on SNSs. It is worth noting that Yule (2018) defines register as a conventional use of language linked with a specific context. Language linked with specific fields is called jargon; e.g., wicket is used in cricket. Register refers to a variety of languages preferred to create a formal or informal atmosphere (Baker, 2011). Baker (2011) identifies the parameters of the register by referring to:

- Field – Linguistic choices are influenced by whether the field involved is a formal setting requiring high register words or an informal requiring lower register;
- Tenor – This is an abstract term referring to the interpersonal relationships that will influence whether more formal language must be used. The level of formality is influenced by the age and even the ethnicity of speakers;
- Mode – This term refers to the medium of transmission that will bear an influence on the level of formality.

Crystal (2014) asserts that the novelty of Electronically Mediated Communication (EMC) offers new communicative opportunities; language is less complex (more informal with lower register and slang), contains spelling errors, and social chitchat. The senders manipulate the text, and semantic differences are observable when comparing traditional written and Internet texts. She also asserts that EMC is characterized by both formal and informal vocabulary, all appearing on one page. These musings are echoed in the data accumulated from the Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter (X) texts. High-register words refer to more formal words and more elaborate language (Crystal, 2014). The analyzed data revealed that students used high-register words on Facebook (5%), WhatsApp (3, 75%), and Twitter (X) (16, 25%). This finding lends credence to the study of Mafhouz

(2018), who found that Twitter (X) users tend to engage with higher registers (more advanced and formal vocabulary).

Table 16. Low register

| Technological platforms | % |
|---|---|
| Twitter | 97,5 |
| WhatsApp | 100 |
| Facebook | 97,5 |

Further, the researchers investigated the use of low-register words in Social Networking Services (SNSs) as employed by students. In this instance, words were counted manually inside the texts. Low register words refer to informal and slang words such as taboo words, e.g., 'shit' (Yule, 2018). Pedersen (2007) posits that the use of slang in British English incorporates slang and colloquialisms. Slang seems to proliferate Internet communication but has an expiration date, as new examples follow it after a period. Anderson and Trudgill (1990) maintain that slang is often identified as bad language and is chosen by people who assign a certain status to it. Slang is about coming up with new meanings and versions of words rather than inventing new words. The gap between males and females using slang is closing since it was found that more females, especially those belonging to feminist movements, used slang.

The average for this aspect regarding frequencies was much higher than the other aspects. This frequency attracted much attention because of the high score for all three sites. It surfaced that low register is an integral part of Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter communication but is used the least on Twitter. Interesting is the fact that WhatsApp posts revealed the most examples of low-register words. It can be explained by the fact that WhatsApp is part of conversation interactions, whereas Facebook contains different types of posts, including formal texts shared. Twitter has a character limit, and the attention paid to language is more focused on language use because of the brevity of the messages.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study has achieved its objectives of investigating discourse on social media by focusing on three specific platforms, viz. Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter(X). The discourse analysis yielded interesting and useful results that can guide Internet users on how to behave on social media or Internet platforms and how to protect themselves. This study highlights the importance of how users engage using social media platforms, and there is a dire need for users to adopt language appropriate to the medium they use. Hence, it is incumbent that users are sensitive to others using social media platforms to communicate, lest they offend. Students and lecturers must be open to learn and embrace new technological developments. It emerged from the study that users of SNSs (the three studied), interestingly, did not say much about the legal implications of using these

networks. It is worth noting that legal steps against users can cause many challenges and must be an aspect that everyone must consider.

## 5.1 Recommendations

After reflecting on the findings, the researchers offer the following recommendations for students and future researchers.

### 5.1.1 Recommendations for future research

- Future studies may use a larger sample since this study has been conducted on a small scale and is limited to the use of Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter (X).
- Future research can tackle the use of other SNSs, such as Skype, and the use of other social media platforms.
- The use of emojis is also a topic that needs more investigation, especially regarding the ambiguous interpretation of visuals and the misunderstanding of pictures.

### 5.1.2 Recommendations for students and lecturers

It is recommended that students be educated to use digital platforms for their academic and personal benefit. It follows that lecturers must make an effort to upgrade their technology skills so that they can service their students in a modern way. Universities must do training to equip technology users to use the functions to the benefit of all.

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