

Has the Power of Language been Compromised by the Influence of Social Media?

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Abstract

In discrete linguistic terminology, the power of discourse hinges on hedging together a host of key elements including conversational maxims, speech acts, situational context, reference, pragmatics, and language functions. The main instruments which lend power to these elements feature an elaborate array of lexis, grammar, phonology, and graphology. Another source of power in discourse resides in the personal characteristics of the participants/interlocutors in persuading and reaching out to their audience. In the last decade, however, the pure linguistic influence on discourse has been minimized and challenged by the growing power of social media in shaping and influencing all discourse types.

This study investigates the role of social media and its networking websites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc. in influencing discourse. The study builds on the hypothesis that the different modes of social media communication have been effective in determining an individual person's or a party's power of discourse. Social media can create an alternative source of power which supports the creation of ideologies, cultural attitudes, and political views.

The data for the present study have been compiled from materials and information shared on You Tube, Facebook and other social networking applications. The data have also been drawn from tweets on political, social, cultural, human rights issues, presidential campaigns, recent waves of immigration, etc. The data were analyzed to show how the sharing of social media memes has done the work more efficiently than the most linguistically eloquent discourse.

Keywords

discourse, communication, language, power, social media, web blogs

1. Introduction

Social media as an offspring of the digital revolution has drastically changed people's patterns of communication at all levels, with language being at the core of this change. However, with this accelerating rate of worldwide disseminating of information, privacy, accuracy, and authenticity have

been compromised and even breached with the lack of censorship or filtering on what social media networks transmit. It is the freedom of speech in the broadest sense. Blogs, hashtags, snapchats, texts and messages are only few examples of the strides communication technology has taken. However, multi-media innovations are double-edged weapons that need to be handled with caution.

Of late, social media has secured an unprecedented position to shape up public opinion in political, social, and other types of discourse. Its influence has been stronger than ever before, and will, most likely, continue to do so. Surprisingly, the linguistically elaborate and eloquent forms of spoken or written address have been less influential than social media memes which circulate the message fast by sharing it round. In presidential elections, for examples, supporters rally for their candidates through circulating messages via Facebook, Twitter, etc. (cf. *The Guardian*, 2016). It has become a common practice for political party leaders to rally for support through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., and many of them have benefited from their supporters' active use of social media audio or video blogs.

Compared to the previous two elections of 2008 and 2012, the 2016 US presidential elections showed how social media and digital technology have played a more vital role by changing the shape of elections and politics. Candidates reached and communicated their messages to the public without the interference of the press (cf. Hwang, 2016).

2. Social Media and Discourse

The dictionary definition of discourse is "communication of thought by words, talk, and conversation", <https://www.play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.dictionary> (Dictionary.com). According to Crystal (1985, p. 96), discourse is "an instance of language use whose type can be classified on the basis of such factors as grammatical and lexical choices and their distribution in main and supportive materials, theme, style, framework of knowledge, and addressee".

The evolution and growth of social media is a landmark in modern-day technological advancement, with social networking and blogs reshaping the norms of politics and culture drastically. Although the roots of social media are old, "it gained prominence in the early 2000s ... by 2006, Facebook and Twitter had both become available to users throughout the world" (Hendricks, 2013, p. 3). The uptake was inspiring that it appealed to all age groups, social classes and genders. Subscriptions skyrocketed and so did the profits of the major social media networking sites.

Kimanuka (2015, p. 2) reports that "Email, SMS and social media communication tools have made irreversible impact on the way we write and communicate, ... now we have realised that Twitter pushes us to get to the essence of what we are trying to say". In other words, social media has significantly influenced and shaped our discourse patterns.

Accessing the Internet has enabled users to communicate instantly and across continents. Now, with the distinctive features of the social media discourse, (i.e., brevity, economy, and speed), the standard discourse markers of elevated style, vocabulary, grammaticality, well-formedness, coherence, connectives, etc. are hardly attainable in this genre of social media discourse. According to Stubbs

(1983, p. 1), “discourse is language above the sentence or above the clause”. In this case, the language of social media, especially chat acronyms and text message shorthand, which is fragmentary in nature, does not fit the standard pattern of discourse proper. For McWhorter (2013, p. 1), “texting is really not a written language”, as it does not reflect or observe the rules of standard language use and mechanics of writing described above.

The kind of discourse used in social media may be described as a special jargon featuring symbols, abbreviations, acronyms, contractions and numbers to create new words and to consequently open channels for private communication with users. According to Hansen and Bunt-Kokhuis (2004, p. 3), “innovations in digital technology will accelerate ongoing changes in languages and affect the cultural attitudes, norms, and values of Internet users”.

An advocate of “Systemic Functional Linguistics” (SFL), a theory of language use in its social context, Zappavigna (2011, p. 788) argues that “language has been used to build community with microblogging service, Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>)”... and that “the hashtags can mark functional roles in the linguistic structure” (ibid, p. 791). This thesis, which poses a challenge to that of Stubbs (1983) and McWhorter (2013), was supported by Kimanuka (2015, p. 4), who concludes as saying: “for better or for worse, we are all in a new world of communications and most of us will have to learn the new language whether we want it or not!”

By reviewing the literature on language and power, we find that the roots of modern-day social media and its revolutionary power are decades old. Winston (1998) argues that the history of modern-day communication technology dates back to the introduction of the fax in 1847, digitization in 1938, and finally the concept of the web in 1945. For example, the telegram operated on the notion of brevity, speed and economy exhibited by social media language through using abbreviations and code words to compress the meaning of phrases to the minimum possible to facilitate transmission. Early instant messaging programs were primarily real-time text, where characters appeared as they were typed (<https://www.google.com.kw/webhp?ie>).

In her article “The Language of Power: Towards a Dynamic Pragmatics”, Jenny Thomas (1985, p. 765) calls for “going towards overcoming the limitations of conversational analysis, single-utterance based pragmatic analyses and the problems inherent in ‘speech-act’ descriptions of discourse, and moving towards a model of discourse-organization with greater predictive and explanatory power”. The social media boom which we witness nowadays is perhaps an offshoot of what Thomas (1985, p. 765) referred to three decades ago as “overcoming the limitations of conversational analysis” (cf. Lunt & Livingstone, 2001).

By adopting Halliday’s (1978) functional linguistic approach, Fairclough (1989, p. 265) argues that “language functions as a social semiotic. It symbolizes the social system”. For him, “discourse is described as a social practice by which texts are produced and interpreted through cognitive and cultural knowledge, which is termed “member resources”: the knowledge necessary to interpret the meanings of utterances (phonology, grammar, vocabulary, semantics, pragmatics), and the local

coherence of the text” (ibid, p. 265). It is this relationship between the linguistic system and social structure that empowers language (cf. Fairclough, 1995). However, for Schneider et al. (2014, p. 1) “discourse is language as it occurs, in any form or context, beyond the speech act. It may be written or spoken, monological or dialogical, but there is always a communicative aim or purpose”.

The positive effect of social media on language was stressed by Crystal (2006, p. 2) who described the worldwide web as a source of enrichment, with a new set of communicative dimensions. But while Crystal (2010, p. 14) recognizes the importance of the changes caused by the Internet, he is uncertain about the long-term impact of this phenomenon and whether it is a transient one or permanent. The same doubts were raised by Ling (2010, p. 277) who believes that the heavy use of texting is a “life-phase phenomenon and not a cohort one”.

Finally, a key factor in determining power structure is the control of media which is often responsible for the dissemination of information and consequently shaping public opinion (cf. Leaning, 2009). But social media has two discrete effects on the written word, namely brevity, and prevalence of abbreviations, which have been credited with their visible impact.

To recap, the dichotomy and rift between proponents of digital technology and language purists is far from being resolved, and the row will continue before research can prove otherwise. Upon analyzing the corpus of data compiled in this piece of research, we hope that the findings can contribute to a better understanding of the controversy between proponents of the two views. The question is: can social media create an alternative source of power which supports the creation of ideologies, cultural attitudes, and political views. Has the sharing of social media memes done the work more efficiently than the most linguistically eloquent discourse?

3. Corpus

The data for this study consisted of a corpus of 2000 items, of approximately 145 characters each, representing tweets, text messages, Facebook posts and WhatsApp chats. The subject material varied to include political, social, cultural, human rights issues, presidential campaigns, etc., all of which were recorded in English. The data, which were collected from a sample of 600 users, represented different age groups, social classes, genders, professions (including politicians, journalists, businesspersons, celebrities, etc.). The grouping of the sample according to age group and gender is given in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Sample Distribution

Age	Number	Gender	
		M	F
15-30	200	120	80
30-50	200	120	80
50-70	150	100	50
70-80	050	040	10
Total	600	380	220

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Data Analysis

Upon analyzing this large and diversified corpus of data, the findings showed that the written language, which has traditionally been described as deliberate, careful, and well thought out, has recently been largely influenced by speech which is instantaneous and less pre-meditated. A major source of concern was to investigate the notion that social media may be creating its own language with its own grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatics.

The analysis was basically based on the descriptive grammar approach, which describes language as it is used, unlike the purist prescriptive approach which is concerned with judging accuracy and correctness on the basis of how a language should and not only how it is used (<http://www.amyrey.web.unc.edu/classes/ling-101-online/tutorials/understanding-prescriptive-vs-descriptive-grammar/>).

In other words, prescriptive grammar establishes the rules of correct and incorrect usage (dictionary.com). It is noteworthy, however, that adopting the descriptive approach does not necessarily suggest ignoring totally or doing away with the basic rules of standard usage which draw the line between correct and incorrect language usage. (https://www.2.leeward.hawaii.edu/hurley/Ling102web/mod1_popideas/mod1.8_descvsprescrip.htm).

Another point to consider in analyzing the language of social media is the fact that social media communication is basically oral in nature and cannot be classified as writing. Consequently, the analysis took into account the difference between sentences and utterances, with the understanding that the behavior of social media communication is that of utterance. However, while associating the notion of grammaticality with the abstraction of the sentence, “there is no hard and fast definition of an utterance”, says Klinge (1998), ... “presumably an utterance is any item or items of a language actually used for a communicative purpose in a specific context”. Furthermore, “An **utterance** can take sentence form, but not every sentence is an utterance” (<https://www.thoughtco.com/utterance-speech-1692576>). “In orthographic terms, an utterance is a syntactic unit that begins with a capital letter and ends in a period, question mark, or exclamation point” (<https://www.thoughtco.com/utterance-speech-1692576>).

This uncertainty about the definition of an utterance made the author subject all items of the corpus to the same standards as a benchmark with the same yard stick to determine correctness. As indicated earlier, the analysis was based on the descriptive grammar approach.

The data analysis process was robust and meticulous where each single item of the corpus of data was examined and then classified in the relevant category of: 1) sentence fragments and run-ons, 2) grammatically deviant structure, 3) wording and phraseology: lack of cohesion and coherence, 4) improper use of the mechanics of writing, 5) use of Abbreviations, acronyms, contractions and clippings, 6) introducing new words, and 7) attributing new meanings to existing words.

Interestingly, the boundaries between the above-mentioned categories are so loose and fluid as to allow

for the listing of the same tweet under more than one category. An ungrammatical item, for examples, may have poor wording, punctuation and spelling, and so on.

As Table 1 above shows, the analysis was comprehensive enough to account for data contributed by different age groups and genders. And as the results in Table 2 below will show, the analysis examined the correlation between the use of social media and the non-linguistic variables of age and gender. The analysis depicted the percentage of deviation from standard language usage detected in the contributions of each of the age and gender groups.

4.2 Results

The analysis of the available corpus of data revealed that the following categories represent the most discernable features of social media communication:

1) Most items are sentence fragments or run-on sentences:

- Chelsea winner, so happy.
- Goodnight, Yall mindgrain headache is coming back!
- I love to write stories I would write one every day if I had the time.
- From morning until midnight no sleep.
- When I was sleeping on the roof early wake up.
- For it sounds unpleasant crazy me.
- Ohh, weeee! Gonna b crazy & helps.

2) Grammatical/syntactic rules of standard usage are often not observed:

- It don't make no sinse.
- Dedikation 4 komin next month.
- so yea we gonna be shooting dat supa dupa soon.
- I travelling tomorrow to attending my friend's wedding, invited me.
- Did I mention that u get 2 bring a friend w/u 2 meet me in Rio?! Ohh weeee! Gonna b crazy & helps.
- Everybody gets up when "Party-Beyonc é" comes on... even when they KNOW they ain't bad & THEIR friends AIN'T bad EITHER.

Comment: The use of "ain't" is largely disapproved as non-standard, although the use of the word is picking up in American English. For non-native speakers, especially students, it might become part of their linguistic repertoire, and thus deem it acceptable.

- you must stop acting like you single.
- I think my gramma got die of beaties.
- If ur a woman & uv recently married/divorced since u registered, please go to <http://www.GottaVote.Org> 2 make sure ur not turned away this Nov.
- Can't figure out how some people passed english class and graduated high school.
- Just landed in london & guess what??? its rainy... no sun this time... but today looks like its gonna be filled with bright IDEAS.

- Why is that people always try to understand estimate my intelligents?! They should never do that!

Comment: All of the above extracts exhibit instances of non-standard usage, which varies from ungrammatical structures to poor use of the mechanics of writing, wrong lexical choices, word order, use of abbreviations, numbers, symbols, etc.

3) Wording and phraseology, lack of cohesion and coherence:

- He is an MP now, important person I think so.
- Hate when people try and sugar code it.
- West coast you ready??? Tonight's episode is intense! Tune into E!
- Like the turkey with extra mayo they're gooder than mug.
- H eating din w her new Crazy hat.
- I get why they say stress will kill you cus it sure feels like dying.
- Well internet is mad slow so now Me n Moses r Breaking out the PLayerstation Vita n im Playin Madden NFL 2013! He will never beatme! Hes a Pup.
- Wow so much birthday love I'm overwhelmed but thank you all so very much...
- Stuck m traffic gotta num 2 next exit 3 miles wow.
- I Aint got no worries their go macmaine rite their.
- Class in session, I complete you, slap a hoe wait I mean hater.

4) Improper use of the mechanics of writing: no consolidation of the rules of punctuation, spelling, capitalization, etc.:

- wanna do somfin bt dnt kno exactli wat it is "Just herd NYC power went out?!?! Is that true".
- the seizure salad from mcdonalds is so good.
- john and christine visiting next week, ... high school friends.
- persistent cough unable to eat diarrhea (A comma is needed between the words "eat" and "diarrhea") forgetfulness headache chest pressure fever fever102.
- After 60 years, there back.
- We except outside prescriptions.
- I ware three pears of socks per day.

5) Abbreviations, acronyms, contractions, and clippings are heavily used:

- CUI8r = see you later; LMK = let me know; BTW = by the way.
- After i drop my grandma OFF AT wOrk @10 I'M goING to bed. I'm too old to be up pasT 11pm #badgrammar.
- Something i snap at ppl or twitter bcuz im insecure.
- "Sometimes u can't believe ya the people we knw".
- "Fa da luv of da money".
- "They say when u have alotta indigestion while pregnant that means ur baby has alotta Hair".

- “Ppl who try 2 piggy bak on ur success R what I like to call leeches! So unimaginative in Their lonely depressin lives they try 2 mess up urs”.
- “U guys no its Mon. Night so u should already no what I want! Don’t miss FH tonight on VH1 at 9 est! I believe u will really laugh 2nite”.

6) New words have been introduced:

- Selfie
- Tweet
- Inbox
- hashtag
- Unlike: withdraw one’s liking or approval
- Unfriend: remove (someone) from a list of friends or contacts on a social media networking website
- Derp: meaningless or stupid speech
- Dude food: junk food (especially junk food appealing to men)

7) New meanings have been attributed to some existing words:

“‘Like’ and ‘viral’ are popular examples of words that have had their meaning re-appropriated by social media” (Kimanuka, 2015, p. 3).

The close and robust analysis of the data revealed that the concern over the possibility of the social media to be creating its own language was ill-founded. Deviations from the norms of standard usage, as shown in the above extractions, may not necessarily be blamed on the negative impact of social media on language. Instead, it may be attributed to the individual user’s poor command of English in general, where they render texts which are void of elevated style, lexical adequacy, grammaticality, well-formedness, coherence, connectives, etc. The danger and the adverse effects of the above may arise when other users—with a poor command of the English language—are unable to differentiate between correct and incorrect and/or formal and informal usage. In this case, the latter group of linguistically disadvantaged users may start modeling these faulty examples of tweets and text messages indiscriminately. Needless to say that such a distinction between formal and informal use of language is crucial since social media largely falls on the latter.

To elaborate, the question of distinction between formality and informality is associated with the notion of context, which normally determines the choice of one style than the other. And since the social media language is associated largely with the informal style, we are most likely to encounter high frequency of this type of use, where adherence to the conditions of grammaticality, mechanics of writing, etc. is at its lowest level.

Another level of data analysis investigated the correlation between the use of social media and the non-linguistic variables of age and gender. In addition, the analysis depicted the percentage of deviation from standard language usage detected in the contributions of each of the age and gender groups. This included (1) incorrect grammatical structures, (2) mechanics of writing, including: spelling,

punctuation, use of symbols, combinations of letters and numbers, abbreviations, clippings, contractions, etc. A summary of the results is given in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Deviations per Age, Gender and Type

Age	Percentage of deviation (%)	Gender		Type	
		M	F	Structure	Mechanics
15-30	42%	72%	28%	38%	62%
30-50	32%	63%	37%	48%	52%
50-70	16%	55%	45%	72%	28%
70-80	10%	51%	49%	89%	11%

As Table 2 shows, there was a positive correlation between the percentage deviations and age. The younger generation recorded the highest percentage of deviations with 42%, and with only 10% for the elderly. This is indicative of the massive influence of digital technology on teenagers and the younger generation compared to the other two age groups. As for gender, the data show that, in all age groups, males were prone to have more deviations than females. As for the distribution of deviations according to type, higher percentages were recorded in the mechanics of writing for the two younger groups (of males and females) combined. And whereas 62% and 52% of the deviations in the mechanics of writing were made by the two younger age groups of 15-30 and 30-50, respectively, the older groups showed only 28% and 11% in the same category. These findings lend support to the thesis that the bulk of the emerging changes in the language of social media are not largely structure oriented. In reality, they are a reflection of a global trend triggered by the younger generation's drive to adopt a faster pace in coping with innovations in communication technology through brevity, economy, and speed.

5. Discussion

The results of this piece of research have unquestionably shown that the effects of social media are remarkably visible. Digital technology, the storehouse and supplier of social media, has impacted all walks of modern life, and language is no exception. Social media manifestations, represented in texting, tweets, chatting, etc. have introduced an unorthodox discourse type which is in contradistinction with the rules of standard usage. Ungrammatical structures, neologisms in vocabulary (combination of letters and numbers), non-compliance with the rules of punctuation and spelling, are but a few examples of the myriad of changes affecting language.

According to Verheijen and Stoop (2016, p. 256), "textism types include "initialisms, contractions, clipping, phonetic spelling, shortening, etc.". Such social media features are inconsistent with the standards of formal discourse marked with elaborate and elevated style and usage. Similarly, Gruber and Redeker (2014, p. 1) argue that "over the past four decades, discourse coherence has been studied from linguistic, psycholinguistic, computational, and applied perspectives". Traditionally then, the power of discourse had been judged on purely linguistic criteria of structural adequacy, semantic relevance, and

mechanics of writing.

Along the same lines, Holtgraves and Lasky (1999, p. 1) report that “the effects of linguistic power on persuasion are mediated by its effects on perceptions of the speaker and the message arguments. A speaker conveying a message in a powerless style is perceived more negatively than a speaker’s message expressed in a powerful style”. It is linguistic power then which has until recently prevailed, as expressed by Ng and Bradac (1993, p. 1) “people use language to generate influence and control”. In other words, the power of language residence in the degree of conformity and adherence to the rules of linguistic usage.

This lends support to the thesis that texting, chatting, and tweets are posing threat to the written word. In other words, the manifestations of social media may, on the long run, lead to the deterioration of language, and therefore speculations about the future of written English may be a valid concern. Nevertheless, such concerns have been dismissed when counter arguments have been leveled to reduce the magnitude of such concerns. According to Kimanuka (2015, p. 3), you could argue that this is a lazy form of writing, but social media is not a process of creative writing, at least not in the traditional sense, it is a fast and convenient way of interacting with an audience. A staunch supporter of this argument is Sharma (2015, pp. 534-535) who emphasizes that “media has a profound effect on education... and the impact of media on people, language and education is very much in the positive and progressive direction”. In this case, texting will not endanger teenage writing but it will improve literacy since its positives outweigh its negatives (cf. McWhorter, 2013).

Further support to this growing trend comes from Tenore (2013, p. 1) who argues that “it’s easy to assume that new forms of technology have dumbed down the English language. Text messaging has reduced phrases to letters (CU L8r) and tweets have so many abbreviations and hashtags they’re barely legible”. However, Tenore (2013, p. 1) hastens to say that “here are five ways that social media is having a positive effect on writing and the English language: increases awareness of mistakes; differentiates writers; spotlights short writing; reminds us that change is constant, and creates new words, meanings”.

Consequently, while acknowledging the concerns over the diminishing and retreating role of language as a source of power in the traditional sense, we must recognize that the power of the social media is here to stay and its influence in affecting language users worldwide is irreversible. Texting is not killing the English language, but on the contrary, social media blogs with their dynamic pragmatics have significantly influenced the power of language.

This thesis, to which the present piece of research largely subscribes, unveils the growing tendency towards recognizing the role of social media in enriching the English language. This is with the understanding that the rules of English grammar and writing have been violated and compromised, one way or another. Such recognition is a testimony to the concessions which the standard language has gradually been making to accommodate the sociolinguistic and cross-cultural changes brought by innovations in digital technology. Kimanuka (2015, pp. 2-3) comes close to this argument by saying:

Who says you must have full sentences or paragraphs of text to make an impact or to drive people to action. The need for fewer sentences has pushed for many short forms that we find ourselves using in our daily communication: *BTW-By the way*, *IDK-I don't know*, *LMK-Let me know*, *LOL-Laughing out loud*, *OMG-Oh my God*, are just but a few acronyms we have found ourselves typing from our varied gadgets. These demonstrate how social media speeds things up by lessening the need to write longer phrases and reduces space (pp. 2-3).

6. The Future of English

Weiß and Schwietering (2015) believe that there is a mutual relationship between language and power. This reciprocal relationship does not necessarily make language in the servitude of power, since a person's command of language is also a source of power. In the case of English, which has historically and traditionally been endowed and associated with power for a number of reasons, it symbolizes cultural identity and dominance (http://www.goethe.de/lhr/prj/mac/pro/literatur_zum_thema_mds.pdf). According to Crystal (2000, p. 7):

Mixed languages are certainly on the increase as we travel the English-speaking world... It is quite wrong to think of the "future of world English" as if it was simply going to be a more widely used version of British English, or of American English. These varieties will stay, of course, but they will be supplemented by other varieties.

In his book the *Future of English*, Graddol (2000, p. 63) argues that:

The indications are that English will enjoy a special position in the multilingual society of the 21st century: it will be the only language to appear in the language mix in every part of the world. This, however, does not call for an unproblematic celebration by native speakers of English... the more significant fact may be that, unlike the majority of present-day native English speakers, the elite will also speak at least one other language—probably more fluently and with greater cultural loyalty.

The book concludes by saying that the future of English is more complex and less predictable than has usually been assumed.

It should be emphasized, however, that throughout its history and as far back as Old English, through Middle English, Early Modern English, and up to Modern English, the English language has undergone phases, waves, and upheavals of change in the form of simplification, leveling, clipping, shortening, and new words from old, but in all such cases it survived. From a linguistic point of view, a language like English—which is characterized by flexible stability, historicity, and autonomy—is inherently flexible enough to adapt and accommodate all emerging changes.

7. Conclusion

From a purely linguistic perspective, this piece of research has succinctly shown that the power of the English language has lately been relatively compromised and dominated by social media platforms. Admittedly, however, social media has contributed to the development of language by making it ever

evolving through creating new words and introducing new meanings. This came about as a result of interaction with technology, which is apt to bring more potential changes in the English language. According Jasilek (2013, p. 1), “what was once considered slang has now become accepted as official” (<http://www.blog.lspr-education.com/socialmedia/the-effect-of-social-media-on-language/>). In addition, the character constraints of 140 on Twitter, made users be more succinct and to the point (cf. <http://www.linguagreca.com/blog/2014/8/how-social-media-is-changing-language/>; <http://www.blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2014/06/social-media-changing-language/>).

The results of the study suggest that social media platforms have been gaining grounds by attracting billions of users. This in itself would not call for concerns had it not been associated with negative effects on the power of the English language which has historically been derived from a strict adherence to the prescribed rules of syntactic, semantic, lexical, and phonological usage. Needless to remind that the accuracy and grammaticality judgments in this study are mainly based on the descriptive grammar approach of pragmatics and language in use.

The fact that people across the globe are relying heavily on social media platforms, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Google, etc. for communication and information exchange, casts doubts on the ability of the standard language to regain momentum and zest. However, a word of caution should be given as far as the role of social media in dominating all types of discourse: political, scientific, technical and diplomatic. In essence, social media has originally been used as a medium of communicating social, and informal tweets or messages among family and friends. And when the norms and features of social media are transferred to the formal discourse genres, i.e., scientific, technical or diplomatic, it makes it informal and superficial. According to Hernández-Guerra (2013, p. 59), “political discourse has its own vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and intertextuality, with its formality, wording, expressive values, cohesion, allusion, quotations and reference”. Consequently, although the power of the formal language has been slightly compromised, it is still premature and inappropriate to conclude that the power of English has been overshadowed and dethroned by the influence of social media.

To conclude, the question of determining the power of language within the context of social media influence remains unresolved. The intricate relationship between language use and context (formal vs. informal), the distinction between sentence and utterance, invoking critical discourse analysis which views language as a form of social practice, etc., cast doubts on whether or not the power of language can be solely based on grammaticality or lack of it. Apparently, language use and pragmatics are key factors in determining the power of language of which grammaticality and meaning are key elements to contend with. And since social media is not just an English language phenomenon but cuts across all languages, further comparative research is still needed on the effect of social media communication on other world languages.

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