



A Qualitative Analysis of Convergence and Divergence in Mosuli Social Groups on Facebook

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Abstract

Facebook is one of the top social networking sites these days. The number of Facebook users is nearly two billion people around the world. They surf Facebook daily and spend countless hours online communicating with people. While communicating, most people try to modify their way of writing and commenting in accordance with the different sorts of people whom they are interacting with. Sometimes, users increase or decrease the social distance during interactions. The current study intends to investigate the adjustments and strategies that Facebook users make and follow while commenting in Mosuli social groups. The model adopted and by which data are analyzed is the Communication accommodation theory. The data are a corpus of (17899) words. The results of the study show that there are numerous purposes for converging and diverging. Moreover, divergence is very probable to happen since anonymity gives commenters freedom to express their ideas and to be offensive sometimes thanks to the absence of nonverbal feedback and unrevealing usernames.

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تحليل نوعي للتقارب و التباعد في مجموعات التواصل الاجتماعي الموصلية في الفيسبوك

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المستخلص

يعد تطبيق فيسبوك أحد أفضل مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي هذه الأيام. يبلغ عدد مستخدمي الفيسبوك ما يقارب من ملياري شخص حول العالم. إنهم يتصفحون فيسبوك يوميًا ويقضون ساعات لا حصر لها عبر الإنترنت في التواصل مع الناس. أثناء التواصل، يحاول معظم الناس تعديل طريقتهم في الكتابة والتعليق وفقًا لأنواع مختلفة من الأشخاص الذين يتفاعلون معهم. في بعض الأحيان، يزداد المستخدمون أو يقللون المسافة الاجتماعية أثناء التفاعلات. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى التحقيق في التعديلات والاستراتيجيات التي يقوم بها مستخدمو فيسبوك ويتبعونها أثناء التعليق في مجموعات التواصل الاجتماعي. النظرية المعتمدة والذي يتم من خلاله تحليل البيانات هو نظرية التكيف

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التواصلية. تتكون البيانات من (17899) كلمة. تظهر نتائج الدراسة أن هناك العديد من الأغراض للتقارب والتباعد. علاوة على ذلك، من المحتمل جدًا حدوث الاختلاف نظرًا لأن عدم الكشف عن الهوية يمنح المعلقين حرية التعبير عن أفكارهم وأن يكونوا متسلطين في بعض الأحيان بفضل عدم وجود ردود فعل غير لفظية وأسماء مستخدمين غير مكشوفة

الكلمات المفتاحية: علم اللغة الاجتماعي، اللغة ووسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، التقارب والتباعد اللغوي

1.Introduction

These days, the majority of people devote a lot of time online surfing the Internet from one application to another and communicating through online communication more than face to face. Social networking sites (SNS henceforth) accredit users to interact with people they already know as well as with people they have never met before incessantly and ubiquitously. Moreover, since these virtual sites provide their users with more expansive communication than factual life, it is more significant and sophisticated than face-to-face communication. Nowadays Facebook is one of the world's most prominent online social networking sites "It is used primarily as a means of monitoring social ties with others, and particularly networked individuals who geographically separated". (Ellison, Stained, and Lampe,2007). Through communicating, people regulate their own personal and social identity and they adjust the differences between themselves and others. This kind of adjustment is called accommodation through which people modify their communication attitudes, they may converge to demonstrate approval, attractiveness, and solidarity. Thanks to anonymity which is one of the foremost features of computer-mediated communication (CMC henceforth) which is recognized along with the technology development, it is just like a veil of people hiding behind their smartphones and computers which encourages users of SNSs to express themselves freely far away from the restrictions, traditions, criticism, and provisions of society in face-to-face communication. Consequently, divergence may happen on many levels to reflect distinctiveness.

This study is a sociolinguistic study that adopts a qualitative method of analysis to explore the communication accommodation strategies specifically convergence, divergence, maintenance, and over-accommodation, that are adopted by Mosuli social media groups on Facebook. The researcher has created an account on Facebook exclusively in order to be part of these groups under study, to observe and collect the corpus data and get clear understanding of how members of the Mosul community act.

The foremost problem of this study is to identify how people in Mosul accommodate CMC communication, exclusively on Facebook social network site as part of the CMC communication.

This research tackles the above-mentioned research problem by attempting to answer the following research questions:

- 1.Do men and women converge or diverge from each other in Mosuli social media groups?
- 2.Does the absence of verbal communication and face-to-face interaction affect the norms of convergence and divergence?

The aim of this research is to examine the accommodation strategies between men and women in Mosuli social groups' interaction on Facebook. To determine to what extent men and women adapt their linguistic behavior to other members of the community. In addition, to identify their motives to get social approval, attractiveness, and integration.

This study is expected to be of value to learners and academic professors since it has filled a gap in linguistics in general and exclusively in sociolinguistics. It has examined a corpus of Mosul social media groups on Facebook and as it is known this study is one of a kind in Iraqi universities. No one before has studied the accommodation strategies on Facebook social networking site which is providing a large-scale forum to study human behaviour, this current research fills the gap and provides insights into language in virtual communities.

The model followed in this study is the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT henceforth). It is a theoretical framework provided by Howard Giles, a professor from the University of California at

Santa Barbra, in the 1970s. This theory has developed immensely through the years. It first appeared as speech accommodation theory assuming that when people communicate with each other, they tend to modify their speech on many levels such as pitch, accent, speech rate, and grammatical change. Then, the name of the theory has amended from “speech” to “communication” and consequently comprises speech as well as body language and facial expressions.

2.Theoretical background

2.1. Computer-mediated communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC henceforth) has been defined as " the process by which people create, exchange, and perceive information using networked telecommunication systems that facilitate encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages " (December, 1996). Alas has been defined by Metz as “any communication patterns mediated through the computer” (1992, p.3). About every month new various technologies are launched by several companies in the field of computer-mediated communication in order for people to be able to interact and share information through many networked telecommunications systems. There are various types of networking technology and software such as email, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), and Instant Messaging (IM). Bodoimo believes that computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a multi- and interdisciplinary subject area that spans diverse fields such as computer science, information technology, communication studies, linguistics, education, business, and law. (2012)

2.3. Social Networking Sites:

Social Networking Sites are virtual communities such as Facebook, Twitter, a network to communicate with other users, interact with real friends and meet new people founded on many shared interests. Also, people can get enormous emotional support from their social networks such as offering advice and providing information regardless of the geographical distance, differences in time zone, or other barriers. Social Networking Sites phenomenon started in 1997 with the launch of SixDegrees.com which "allow users to create profiles, list their friends, and at the beginning of 1998 surf the friend list" (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p.214). Accordingly, SNS has been developed and spread all over the world, not merely as a medium for computer-mediated communication but as an alternative to face-to-face social interaction. As a result, social networking sites have been quickly adopted by young people worldwide especially teenagers, prompting new opportunities for self-presentation, learning a lot of new things, and constructing a great range of relationships managed by privacy.

2.4. Facebook

Facebook is a computer-mediated (CMC) instrument, an asynchronous (delay) communication tool that enables communication (one-to-one, one-to-many) and collaboration over some time through “a different time- different place” mode (Bodoimo, 2012, p.315). Nowadays Facebook is one of the most recognizable social networking sites in the world with 2.85 billion monthly active users in January 2022 worldwide. Users of Facebook can create personal pages and accounts, add their personal information, share content with other users, and accumulate hundreds of online friends some of them from their social surroundings and others they have never talked to or met face to face before. Facebook also offers the creation of groups that provide emotional support and a sense of belonging based on geographical location, profession, age, and interests. These groups are used to organize people, share information, post, and comments. Groups can be public and open to everyone or private and limited by some regulations for membership.

2.5. Review of CAT Online-related studies

Online communication almost takes the written form of messages transferred between individuals or members of a group. If the sender of the message is a very important person, the user would reply instantly. Thus, the priority of the interaction has a crucial function in the time the user takes to reply to a message can also be considered accommodative. Subsequently, accommodation online is not a new researched area. The accommodation has attracted the attention of Crystal in his book “Language and

Internet” in which he enunciated that in chat groups and the virtual world members accommodate each other in order they gradually develop " a shared linguistic character -which is equivalent to that of a dialect or accent ", although they come from various backgrounds and have different writing styles (2001, p.147). Nevertheless, as suggested by Scissors, Gill, Geraphy, and Gergle (2009) in their work they explored how online communication happens in a text-based environment and for this reason many of the interpersonal hints through which similarity is established are no longer available. That is why CAT developed and attracted the attention of computer-mediated communication (CMC henceforth) scholars. Vatamanescu and Pana (2010) underlie the importance of communication accommodation when interacting with people from different places, with different cultural patterns, backgrounds, and mentalities. Likewise, to discuss identity issues and attitudes. The research also intends to be a preliminary study and the first step to more complex studies in the future concerning the process of self-definition in virtual communities. While Mizil, Gamon, and Dumais (2011) in their research they investigated Twitter Users’ Convergence to each other’s interaction behavior and found the strength of communication theory on a large scale of empirical analysis. The work of Riordan, Markman, and Stewart (2013) has also studied the Communication Accommodation in Instant Messaging and they concluded that interlocutors have a general tendency to convergence in the length and duration of individuals’ contributions. The results also show that the context of messages exchanged produces different levels of convergence. Sabater (2017) in her research identified to what extent female and male participants in online support groups adapt their linguistic behavior to other members in their craving to get attraction and social approval. The study investigated linguistic accommodation at the structural level. The results show that women converge more to the structure of the forum than men. In addition, there exist cross-cultural differences in accommodation. The participants writing in Spanish, both men and women, converge more overtly in their use of structural elements than those writing in English. Concerning Facebook communication, the research of Tsoumou work in (2019) examined patterns of communication accommodation in Facebook interaction among Congolese Users. The study shows the two main concepts of CAT, scilicet convergence and divergence are observed as the main communicative strategies employed by Congolese Facebook users although there is no one-to- one correlation between the incidences of code-switching in Facebook updates and comments. Researchers such as Fox et al. (2007) suggest that more research on CAT and online varieties is needed to understand how, when, and why.

3. Methodology

This part of the study is concerned with illustrating the approaches used to accomplish a comprehensive qualitative analysis.

3.1. Content Analysis

The appropriate type of analysis in the present study is content analysis. Content analysis can be defined as a systemic research technique and one of the most fundamental research methods in the social sciences, it is used for analyzing and interpreting data within a particular context and in addition to different types of qualitative information such as textbooks, articles, websites, posts, journals, documents, videos, open-ended questionnaires, marketing, advertisements, media studies, and political speeches.

3.2. Population and sample of the study

The population represents a complete set or the whole group of people, objects, items, countries, and organizations that the researcher yearns to get down conclusions about. In the current study, the population is Mosuli-speaking people - that is, men and women, from different age groups which the researcher will make a sample. A sample is a group of individuals who participate in a study and are taken from a larger population of measurement for the goals of deep analysis of a phenomenon or problem. The data in this research consist of posts, comments, and replies collected from three Mosuli social networking groups on Facebook. The researcher particularly has chosen these groups because they represent types of Mosuli community, they are very well-known among the people in Mosul and contain a large number of members

reaching more than 10,000 members for each group besides they have a great amount of interaction between members. Then the data taken from these groups were classified and arranged into an Excel file separately. The data were collected within a period of 9 months, from October 2020 to June 2021.

3.4. Data analysis and discussion of results

1) Old Mosuli Shenanigans

This group is a private group and has 113,000 members. They usually talk about a lot of things like the weather, Mosul City news, food, social problems, and even jokes. The group is defined as “a gathering of the whole Mosuli community and to every Mosuli person in order to talk about the news of Iraq in general and the news of Mosul in particular”.

Example:

<p>ح: أ: نيس تجغ بالطول ونيس تجغ بالعغض H A: nis tujigh bialtuwl wanis tujighu bialeaghd H A: Some People drag along and some people drag across</p>		
Comments	Replies	Replies within replies
<p>1) ب: أ: أهل تكريت يقولون نيس B A: 'ahl tikrit yaqulun nis B A: People of Tikrit say nis</p>	<p>ح: أهأاا H: 'ahaaa H: aha</p>	
<p>2) أ: ص: أيببيع شنو هذا ما فهمت كلشي A S: 'ayyie shanu hadha kilshi ma fahimt A S: Yuck what is this, I can't understand anything</p>	<p>ح: انتبه على ألفاظك H: 'antabih ealaa 'alfazik H: Watch your language</p>	<p>أ: أدري كلام ما يتلفظ هههههه A: 'adri kalam ma yanlafiz hahahihahah A: Unpronounceable words hahahahah</p>
<p>3) ع: أعغف مصلاويين بس ما لهدرجة أتجغ اشنو هاي O k: 'aeghaf maslawiyn bas ma lihadrajat 'atajigh 'ashnu hay O K: I know Mosuli people but not like this, what does drag means?</p>	<p>ح: ووي H: wwy H: ooh</p>	<p>ع: هههههههههه O: hahahahaha O: hahahahahah</p>
		<p>ح: دومك H: dumuk H: Always</p>

This post is about a saying in the Mosul dialect which means Some People drag along and some people drag across. This saying is used when people do not agree about something. The author of this post is a female and the post is written in a pure Mosul Arabic dialect. The post consists of 20 comments. Within the CAT domain, comment (2), A comments” yuck what is this, I can’t understand anything” (3), O comments” I know Mosul people but not like this, what does drag mean?” both of these comments are by males, and all are divergence which is a tactic used to adjust one's communicative behavior to be distinguishable from others. Generally, the motive behind divergence is a desire to feel the uniqueness and to support group identity. But the motive here behind these comments is offensive, commenters not only do not understand the Mosul dialect but they tried to make fun of it and that is why most of the comments

are very rude, impolite and exhibit untasteful behavior. While comment no. (1), B comment “people of Tikrit say nis” this comment is by a male and it is a convergence, the commenter here understands the post fully and comments answering to the post, he converged using the same dialect. The motive lying behind the convergence here is affective motives to strengthen in-group membership, to reflect solidarity, and to signal they belong to the exact social group.

The writer of the post seems to be shocked by the offensive and exaggerated behaviors of those who comment. She tries to defend the post and any commentator who tries to belittle the Mosuli dialect. In addition to explaining and clarifying the incomprehensible words in the post, she diverged to several comments. Comment no. (2) is a divergence the post writer warns the commenter by commenting “watch your language” because he uses rude words and she wants to maintain a social distance.

Concerning comments within comments, comment no. (.3) , the commenter diverged in his comment but the publisher of the post converged with him by being very kind and this encouraged him to over accommodate, over accommodation, is a strategy of overdoing the adjustment of speech style, it is unreal and exaggerated behavior. As a result, this makes the post writer diverge and chastised the commenter. All other comments within comments are all convergence, the post writer converged and accommodate all the comments using a spontaneous and respectful attitude.

4. Findings

The results show that males converge and diverge more than females because it seems that males communicate more in social groups without any restrictions and frequently the administrators of these groups are males. Therefore, they post more and create interaction in the group. Even with replies within replies, comments by males are more than females. In addition, from the data collected, it is clear that females comment more and interact more with posts that have content about marriage, food, cooking, and personal matters. But when the post content is a fact, a saying, or a wisdom, all the comments seem to be a convergence rather than divergence.

As for the content, it appears through the analysis that it is the strongest and most important factor in online communication, and this is the contribution of this study, especially in the absence of nonverbal and Para verbal cues such as voice, pitch, and facial expressions. The content is what attracts and provokes the user whether to converge or diverge. This can be noticed when a male, for example, publishes a post about females, such as marriage and polygamy, in such a case the post provokes females and they will comment and diverge because they do not agree with the content and ideas mentioned in this post.

The absence of verbal communication and face-to-face interaction affects the norms and other aspects of accommodation vastly because in online communication a lot of factors are absent such as facial expressions, body postures, voice, pitch, and eye gaze which can communicate a huge amount of information and regulate the interaction. Since all these factors are not available, in addition to anonymity which gives users of the online platform privacy and freedom to express themselves freely without any type of restrictions. Consequently, in online communication context and content have a great impact on accommodation.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

1)There is a convergence between males and females in the Mosuli social groups on Facebook. The motive behind their adjustment is to communicate and interact with other members of the group as well as to achieve and mark integration. Moreover, there is a divergence between males and females because sometimes they do not agree on certain opinions and understandings and that is why divergence happens to indicate distinction and uniqueness. In other words, there is both convergence and divergence between males and females, depending mostly on motive and agreement.

2)The content of the posts is the strongest and most effective factor in accommodation in online communication. The content provokes the user of Facebook to comment, converge, or diverge, by way of

illustration females diverge to posts such as polygamy and marriage because they do not agree with such ideas, but converge to posts about cooking and food because such content attracts them greatly.

3) As for divergence, it is very likely to happen for many reasons. Most importantly, is anonymity which gives commenters freedom to express their ideas, to be offensive sometimes thanks to the absence of nonverbal feedback in face-to-face interaction such as age, facial expression, voice, body postures as well as social position. In addition, the Para verbal absence such as tone of voice, pitch, and emphasis on some words and phrases.

On the basis of these conclusions, the following recommendations have been forwarded:

Facebook is the most famous and most used SNSs and this gives the privilege to examine it not only through sociolinguistics lens but to investigate it through other branches of linguistics such as discourse analysis, pragmatics, and applied linguistics. A number of possibilities for further studies are possible, other SNSs are possible such as Twitter and Instagram.

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