SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE: LINGUISTIC STUDY OF FACEBOOK AMONG A SELECTED GROUP OF KENYAN INTERNET USERS

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ABSTRACT

With over 1.71 billion active users worldwide, Facebook (FB) has permeated the lives of millions of people and the way they relate to one another and share information. This research recognizes the utility of FB as a novel tool to examine and interpret linguistic features for a selected group of Kenyan FB users. The study also evaluated and interpreted how the participants presented their identities on FB and explored the motivations for their use of FB. The study uses Herring's (2004) Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) theoretical framework. The research design used was both qualitative and quantitative. Purposive sampling procedure was used to arrive at eight FB friends in the 22-35 age bracket. This is the age that was found to use FB most in Kenya. The first data set for the study consisted of profile information and FB posts (written and visual) of the eight which was collected at two scheduled times in a day: three times a week for three months. This ensured that the corpus of interactions had varied themes and topics of discussion. The findings showed that the language used was mostly English as opposed to Kiswahili the National language. Other languages in use included vernacular and Sheng. While Kenyan FB users used conventional internet language including non-standard English, acronyms, emoticons, lengthening practice, code switching and capitalization, the linguistic features varied in form and frequency. The group chosen presented honest and positive identities of themselves on FB. The second data set was compiled from responses of an online questionnaire filled by the group. The analysis of the questionnaire found that the motivation for use of FB was occasioned by both technological and social factors. The motivations for use included among others: entertainment, viewing one's and other peoples' walls, posting photos, updating status, marketing, education and staying connected to friends. This research adds knowledge to the field of Applied Linguistics especially, Discourse Analysis as well as Sociolinguistics especially with regards to the methodology and tools of carrying out a Computer Mediated Communications study. It bridges a knowledge gap of the linguistic features common to FB users, what identities those users present and what really motivates them to use FB. For social scientists, it offers useful insights into the unique ways in which FB shapes identities and provides the social and interactive needs of the users. Finally, the findings of the study could be used for policy formulation on