

A Pragmatic Analysis of the Language of Facebook Posts and Status Updates

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Abstract

This study investigates the communicative functions of Facebook posts and status updates. It depicts the formal features and the functions of digital discourse. On account of that, posts and status updates are analyzed through Searle's Speech Act framework, together with Grice's theory of cooperative maxims and implicature. The sample data comprises data from males and females in the age between 21-35 years. Ten statuses and posts with a number of randomly chosen comments are chosen for analysis and then, the data are categorized according to their semantic domain. The results of the analysis show that digital discourse has some characteristics that are classified into formal features, which are related to the form of the post, and functional manifestations, which are associated with the function of the post. Besides, it is observed that people tend to use indirect speech acts more often than using direct ones. Some of the functions of digital discourse that are derived from the data include: preaching, prayers, supplications, spreading consciousness among people, greeting, revealing constructed online identities and addressing target audience. As for the formal features, mingling verbal and pictorial elements is the most dominant and explicit digital formal feature that is extracted. Furthermore, there are some pragmatic features related to meaning, such as the various inferences that can be drawn from a very few amount of given information.

Keywords: Digital discourse; Facebook; Speech Act Theory; Cooperative maxims; Implicature; Status Updates; Posts; Social media; Identity; Multi-Modality.

ملخص

يقوم البحث على دراسة الوظائف الإتصالية للمشاركات و تحديثات الحالة على شبكة التواصل الإجتماعي (الفييس بوك) كما تبرز أهمية اللغة في التعبير عن الآراء والمشاعر من خلال المشاركات و تحديثات الحالة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف الوظائف الاتصالية للمشاركات و تحديثات الحالة على الفييس بوك ، وهي تساعد في توضيح كيفية إنشاء وتمثيل الشخصيات من خلال اللغة. تقوم الدراسة بتحليل المشاركات و تحديثات الحالة على الفييس بوك طبقاً لنظرتي سيرل و جرايس. يشتمل نموذج البيانات على الذكور و الإناث و الذين تتراوح أعمارهم ما بين ٢١-٣٥ عاماً. يتناول الجزء التحليلي ١٠ مشاركات و تحديث حالة مع عدد من التعليقات المختارة و تم تصنيفها طبقاً للنظريات المذكورة.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, everyone can witness the importance of the internet and the role it plays as a means of communication. One of the top social networking websites these days is Facebook. On this social site, users create an online profile by listing personal information and interests, link up with other users, and share updates of the information posted on a daily basis (cf. Hargittai and Hsieh, 2011). Furthermore, Language and its dynamics is an area of great interest to many scholars, especially linguists. Facebook and other platforms occupy an essential role in public discourses. Some attempts are made to associate discourse's new forms with old linguistic disciplines under the name of digital discourse. Crystal (2001) states that: linguists are inevitably inspired by the amazing medium of the internet, which deals with linguistics from its various aspects. Other way stated, it acts as an asylum for the many styles in the written language, and even presents novel ones. Thus, internet can be considered as a linguistic revolution, exactly as it is a social one (p.6).

This paper investigates communicative functions of Facebook posts and status updates. It attempts to trace the formal features and functions of digital discourse where Facebook is the medium. In order to achieve this, the paper employs tools from pragmatics represented in Searle's (1969) speech act (SA) framework, together with Grice's (1975) theory of cooperative maxims and implicature. By incorporating these approaches together, the research analyzes Facebook posts, status updates in addition to a number of randomly chosen comments. By applying these pragmatic devices, it is revealed that there are unique formal features and functions that distinguish the discourse used in the digital world.

2. Objectives

- 1- To show how language can be employed as a form of social interaction.
- 2- To explore the communicative functions that emerge from the analysis of posts, status updates and some of their comments.
- 3- To demonstrate how people attain various functions through updating their statuses or posting posts on their Facebook walls.
- 4- To test the validity of the analytical framework in analyzing digital discourse.

3. Research Questions

This paper targets to answer the following questions:

- 1- How can language be employed as a form of social interaction?
- 2- Which type of SA is used most frequently in Facebook status posts?
- 3- What are the different communicative functions that emerge from the analysis of status posts?
- 4- What are the different functions and prominent formal features manifested in the selected Facebook posts and status updates?
- 5- How can Facebook be an extension of real-life identities?

4. Scope and limitation

The study comprises theories from pragmatics and discourse analysis. It deals with posts with different semantic domains; religious and social. Political posts are one of the ubiquitous posts found on Facebook; yet being one the controversial issues, they are excluded from the selected data. Though the study analyzes posts with images that are significant for the communicative effect and meaning, multi-modality is not included in the analytical framework because it is beyond the scope of the study. However, images are not totally ignored but are dealt with according to their communicative functions. The data are not categorized according to their speech act type, because one single post can fit into more than one category.

5. Review of Literature

In the latest few years, social networking sites have evolved; some have vanished, whereas others have acquired popularity. One of the social networking websites that has recently surpassed others in use is Facebook. Some scholars have carried out research on Facebook, but most of the endeavors exerted pursued this social networking web site from a sociological aspect. This is reflected in some works such as: Radovanovic (2008) who writes few lines discussing Phatic Communication, or why the little things in social media really matter taking pokes on Facebook as an example.

Likewise, books on that issue have been published, such as: the book entitled: Always On by Baron (2008) and A networked Self by Hargittai et al. (2011). From the topics discussed in such books are self-presentation; the numerous ways people camouflage themselves on Facebook, social impact, gender/class, social network sites in the workplace, social network exploitation and some others.

Moreover, Kramer and Chung (2011) in their research describe the dimensions along which Facebook users tend to express themselves via status updates using the semi-automated text analysis approach, the Meaning Extraction Method (MEM). They examine dimensions of self-expression in all status updates from a sample of four million Facebook users from four English-speaking countries (the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia) in order to examine how these countries vary in their self-expressions. However, what is known about the linguistics of this online social networking website is not much.

Studies which discuss Facebook's linguistic aspects are very limited. The reason behind this is its unconventionality. Moreover, many genres coexist in the same social website; a thing that complicates its study (Pérez-Sabater, 2013, p.83). Yet, some linguistic studies on Facebook were conducted. Other attempts are made to associate discourse's new forms with old linguistic disciplines (Schmied, 2012, p.43). Those studies endeavor to set up an intersection between new media in general, not necessarily Facebook, and the social use of language, forming what became known as digital discourse.

Spilioti (2011) carries out a study in which the data under discussion comprises everyday exchanges of text messages among young Greek people. The aim of the study is to explore the participants' perceptions of politeness and norms of appropriateness in their use of opening and closing formulae in their messages. The findings show that the current developments in new media have opened the gates for exploring language's textual aspects in this digital medium. Furthermore, Vaisman (2011) carries out a study based on posts extracted from Israblog, Israel's greatest blog-hosting website employed mostly by teenage girls. The study is concerned with the means a community of girls called "Fakatsa" utilize linguistic repertoires and typographic styles for shaping their online gender identities.

Additionally, Lee (2011) writes a chapter which studies the practices of text-making depicted in micro-blogging; one of the newest media. The focus of his chapter is centered around Facebook status updates composed by a set of Cantonese-English bilinguals. He is mainly concerned with the emerging linguistic and orthographic features of the collected status updates. Furthermore, Ilyas and Khushi (2012), from Pakistan, carried out a study where Facebook status updates are analyzed according to their communicative functions using Searle's SA framework.

Last but not least, Abdeen (2015) conducts a research in which she investigates how joining images and texts produce influential persuasive messages. Abdeen (2018) analyzes some Egyptian presidential election campaign posters in 2012 and 2014 using the visual semiotic approach introduced by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), which depends on the metafunction principle of Halliday and Mathiessen (2004). The sample data embraces two images of two presidential candidates. Hence, these images are regarded as multi-modal texts. A multi-modal text is a text whose meaning is comprehended through an array of semiotic and textual modes. The objective of this study is to explore how these modes are utilized to have authority over the viewer towards the image. It also investigates how these modes together can influence the viewer's perception about the political candidate's personality. The results manifest how powerful the semiotic modes are in addressing the three metafunctions, i.e. ideational, interpersonal and textual. Additionally, it proves that mingling text and image helps in exposing ideologies.

6. Theoretical Framework

6.1. Introduction

The theoretical framework is eclectic, because it employs tools from pragmatics and discourse analysis, represented in Searle's SA (1969) framework, together with Grice's (1975) theory of cooperative maxims and implicature.

6.2. Speech act theory

SA is a theory in philosophy founded by Austin. Austin (1962) is the one who proposes the main terms of the theory and his teachings turns out to be the basis for his followers. Austin's ideas are refined by his follower, Searle, who believes that the main units of linguistic communication are SAs (Searle, 1969, p.16). Austin and Searle agree upon an indispensable trichotomy in the use of language. The first one is the **locution**, which is what is actually said by a speaker. The second is the **illocution**, and that is the verbal accomplishment of what is said. Finally, the last element in the three-folded components of SAs is what the hearer does in response to the utterance, and it is called **perlocution**.

The concept of "illocutionary act" grows to be strongly associated with Searle's (1969) name. Many researchers select Searle's (1969) version of these acts. It becomes a conventional method, when using topics associated with "SAs", to choose Searle's technique (Dörge, 2004, p.7). In his taxonomy, Searle (1969) categorizes SAs according to their illocutionary purpose. This paper employs Searle's (1969) classification because it is comprehensive and it suits the data selected for the analysis. According to Searle (1969), there are five categories of SAs: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations.

According to Searle (1985), assertives are statements which describe the way things are. Moreover, he believes that directives are trying to get people to do things. This may take place through: commanding, requesting, ordering, inviting, asking or suggesting (p.viii). Concerning commissives, Searle (1999) states that a commissive utterance is basically 'an expression of an intention to do something' (p.149). Regarding expressives, Searle (1985) assumes that expressives are SAs that describe the psychological state and attitudes of the speaker (p.viii). Finally, Searle's (1999) declarations depend on an illocutionary force whose mission is 'to bring about a change in the world by representing it as having been changed' (p.150).

There are other SAs that are not included in the taxonomy given beforehand, yet they are used in another study by Ilyas and Khushi (2012). The researcher uses these SAs because of their relevance to the study, and it is the need of data categorization. Those SAs include: quotations which refer to utterances that the speaker has not initially created. This could be love, motivational or life quotes. The second type is the poetic verses which express emotions of love, sorrow, happiness and joy (Ilyas and Khushi, 2012, p.502). Finally, there is a type of utterance named, "phatic" such as 'nice day!', 'how do you do?', comments about the weather, etc. Phatic utterances are almost content-less, i.e. they are utterances with very little substantive information content (Wardhaugh, 2010, p.285). It is worth noting that any further developments or attempts to improve the notions of SAT act as a remedy for defects in the theory.

6.3. Direct and Indirect SAs

Yule (1996) claims that there is an association between 'structural forms' such as imperative, declarative or interrogative and 'communicative functions' like promises, demands and requests. He furtherly illustrates saying: 'whenever there is a direct relationship between a structure and a function, we have a direct SA' (p.54-55). A direct SA (DSA) bares a similarity in its apparent form and its illocutionary force. Regarding this, Searle (1975) says that 'the simplest cases of meaning are those in which the speaker utters a sentence and means exactly and literally what he says' (p.59). Yet, most of the time what is meant is not the words that are literally spoken but the meaning that is implied. Indirectness is a conversational strategy which is used excessively. Searle (1975) has his own description concerning Indirect SA (ISA) and states that they are 'cases where one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another' (p.60). Thomas (1995) states that:

People obtain some advantage or avoid some negative consequence by employing indirectness. They may wish to avoid hurting someone else, or appearing 'pushy' or to show how clever they are (p.122).

6.4. The cooperative principle

6.4.1. Implicature

In daily conversations, most of the time the type of information conveyed goes beyond what is literally spoken. This can be depicted through the use of irony and exaggeration. Paul Grice (1975), an English philosopher, presents the phenomenon of implicature. An implicature is an utterance which conveys meaning beyond its proposition (semantic content of an utterance). Whenever implicature is used, a conclusion can be drawn from what is said, and therefore more meaning can be deduced than what is actually encoded (Tillmann, 2008, p.1). The conversational implicature is connected with certain features of discourse, namely the cooperative principle.

Levinson (1983) believes that there must be some guidelines that lead the course of conversation (p.101). Grice (1975) calls them maxims and states that they together form the cooperative principle (CP). Regarding the CP Grice (1975) proclaims: "Make your conversational contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged". This quotation summarizes the four conversational maxims which are: the maxim of quantity, which means that messages should be as informative as is needed for the current objectives of the conversation. People should neither provide too much information nor too little (Grice, 1975, p.45). Sometimes speakers want to let their audience know that they are acquainted with more details, but they do not want to bother the hearers with. Accordingly, they say something like: "**well, to cut a long story short, she didn't get home till two**". In this case, the speakers observe the maxim of quantity. (Cutting, 2002, p.34).

Then, the maxim of quality means that speakers are expected not to say anything they believe to be false or anything for which they lack evidence for (Grice, 1975, p.46). Some expressions are used by speakers to demonstrate that they just say what they believe to be valid, yet they lack adequate proof for. For example:

A: I'll ring you tomorrow afternoon then.

B: Erm, I shall be there **as far as I know**, and in the meantime have a word with Mum and Dad if they're free. Right, bye-bye then sweetheart.

A: Bye-Bye, bye.

When B uses the expression ‘as far as I know’, she gives an indication that she’s not sure if this is true, so as to defend herself from being accused with not telling the truth if A rings up and finds that B is not there. She wants to make it clear that she is uncertain. Most hearers anticipate that speakers will speak the truth and in turn most speakers are familiar with that (Cutting, 2002, p.35).

Next, the maxim of relation, which means being relevant (Grice, 1975, p.46). Some people like to show the relevance of their comment to the discourse, through the use of expressions like: ‘**just going back to your point**’ (Cutting, 2002, p.35). The last maxim is the manner maxim, which means that speakers should give information in a clear and an orderly way in order to facilitate interpretation without confusing their partners. Thus, ambiguity and obscurity are not preferable (Grice, 1975, p.46). Speakers may use expressions such as "**just to clarify one point**" in order to observe the maxim of manner by making themselves clear. (Cutting, 2002, p.35).

6.4.1.1. Non-observances

Speakers and hearers are aware of these maxims, and because of their necessity they do not explicitly recognize their existence. However, in daily conversations, people sometimes fail to observe maxims (Grice, 1975, p.48). Grice (1975) believes that: "A participant in a talk exchange may fail to fulfill a maxim in various ways" (p.49). Maxim failures include: flouting, violating, opting out and clashing.

When flouting a maxim, the speaker presupposes that the hearer understands the implied meaning behind the utterance, not relying on its literal meaning. In other words, the speaker does not intend to mislead the hearer. According to Thomas (1995), "A S (speaker) blatantly fails to observe a maxim, not with any intention of deceiving or misleading, but because the S (speaker) wishes to prompt the H (hearer) to look for a meaning which is different from, or in addition to, the expressed meaning" (p.65).

Contrary to flouting, when a speaker violates a maxim, s/he aims to deceive the hearer. The utterer speaks the truth, but the implication of his utterance is false (Thomas, 1995, p. 72). Opting out a maxim means that the speaker does not want to cooperate or communicate more information than what s/he already has. S/He does not observe the maxim, and overtly expresses his/her reluctance to do so. The last way of maxim non-

observance is infringing a maxim. When an interlocutor infringes a maxim, s/he mistakenly deceives or does not succeed to fulfill the maxim. The interlocutor does this without an intention of evoking an implicature. Infringing can happen when the speaker is unaware of the culture, or does not speak the language well (Thomas, 1995, p. 74).

6.5. Role of Context

SA theory gives regard to the context in which an utterance is made in order to interpret it properly. In this regard, Geis (1995) says that "context plays a critical role in utterance interpretation" (p.21). Cutting (2002) classifies context into two types; situational and background knowledge context. The current study employs Cutting's (2002) approach towards the second type of context, which is the background knowledge context, as it suits the data analysis. This type of context is classified into cultural and interpersonal. The cultural background context deals with the speakers' knowledge about the world. Sperber & Wilson (1995) believe that if the discourse participants belong to the same group, they ought to share reciprocal knowledge concerning almost everything commonly acknowledged by the group associates (p.16). The second type, namely the "interpersonal", is the knowledge attained via former verbal interactions or shared activities and experiences. It also comprises private personal knowledge about the speaker (Cutting, 2002, p.6).

7.0. Intertextuality

The concept of intertextuality shows the relationship between two texts, whether these texts are from the past or even contemporary ones. The term is initially coined by Kristeva (1980) in *Word, Dialogue and Novel*. She defines this term as: "an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings" (p.65). Expanding Bakhtin's (1981) ideas on "dialoguicity" she claims that: "each word (text) is an inter section of other words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read" (p.66). Intertextuality is a significant way in discourse that reveals ideologies. Bakhtin (1981) believes that all texts contain a kind of intertextuality. He also says that all that we say and write are borrowed words and ideas of other people. When those words and ideas are appropriated by someone and used in his utterances and texts, he arrives at expressing the way he thinks about those words and ideas (Jones, 2012, p.17).

8.0. Methodology

The analytical model is applied to the selected data. The research points out the maxims that are being observed and those which are not. Accordingly, it states the conversational implicature that results from the maxims' non-observance. Moreover, the research tries to find clues for context identification, besides intertextuality, if used. It attempts to discover if there are any formal features or functions that uniquely identify digital discourse. Finally, this paper tries to extract from the interlocutors' writings and comments, traits and qualities that may shape their camouflaged personalities and construct their online identities.

8.1. Data collection

Status updates and posts selected for analysis in this study are chosen from accounts of people on Facebook after taking their consent. Some are relatives and close friends of the researcher, whereas others are people whom the researcher is interested in what they write and post. Names of some status updaters are left anonymous for privacy's sake, others are mentioned by the name of their Facebook accounts after taking their permission.

For this study, the sample comprises both males and females of the age between 21-35 years. This age in particular is chosen because it is commonly known that people in that age are the most active Facebook users. A total of 10 statuses and posts with a number of randomly chosen comments are collected. Then, the data are categorized according to the devised coding, using the categorization of SAs made by Searle in addition to, Grice's theory of conversational maxims and implicature. As the Facebook's version used in Egypt is in Arabic and English, it is detected that many people prefer to use English in writing status posts, whereas others prefer to use their mother tongue. Thus, posts in English and Arabic are analyzed.

The posts and statuses analyzed are sorted in terms of their semantic domains. There is a wide variation in the domains of posts and statuses that are circulated among Facebook users. Some of them are religious, others are political, in addition, there are miscellaneous assortments of other social ones. The researcher investigates some religious and social posts with their different semantic sub- domains. These include: children and parenting, comics, dictums, greetings and personal posts. There is also a noticeable room for political posts on Facebook; yet being one of the hot and controversial issues, the researcher excludes them from the selected data. A special attention is paid to the formal features of posts; their form, their shape and structure.

For example, some posts contain texts only of various types, others include a text and an image, and others contain intertextuality.

The qualitative method is used in order to collect and categorize the data then, to identify the communicative functions of Facebook posts and statuses and consequently to interpret them.

9.0. Analysis and Discussion

9.1. Religious posts

Religion is one of the common topics discussed on Facebook. However, the researcher avoids choosing lengthy posts which discuss religious issues that may bring about flaming debates and arguments. The religious posts selected for analysis only involve things like: preaching, prayers and supplications.

Example (1)



Figure (1)

Here, the speaker shares a post which comprises a hadith that says, the messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: " Whenever a Muslim supplicates for his (Muslim) brother in his absence, the angels say: 'May the same be for you too' (Al-Nawawi et al., 1998). Quotations refer to utterances that the speaker has not initially created. Thus, the hadith

mentioned in this post is a quotation, as it is said by the prophet and not primarily produced by Dalia.

The quotation has a *direct assertive* (declarative) speech act, as the prophet is explaining the consequences that take place, when a Muslim makes supplication for good for his brother in his absence. He states that the angel appointed for this particular task recites him the same thing with what he prays for his brother. The prophet is communicating here something that God made him know, thus it is an *assertive*. Yet it can be an *indirect directive*. When the prophet states the sanction of those who pray for their brothers in their absence, this ought to urge Muslims to pray for one another.

In other words, the prophet is asking his followers to pray for their Muslim brothers. He stimulates them through mentioning the benefits of the *directive* he issues, in order to get the required *perlocutionary effect*. This *perlocutionary effect* is embodied in the supplications (a function of digital discourse) that Muslim brothers make for one another, conforming to the teachings of the prophet. Undoubtedly, this would spread love and mercy among the Muslim community. Through Dalia's sharing of this post, she is imposing an image of a devoted Muslim who wants to take back her addressees to the prophet's teachings.

Perhaps, she feels that Muslims are in need to love one another, so she rings a bell for those around her by giving them the clue of retrieving this love. Possibly, she tries to stimulate her addressees to pray for one another, reminding them that they will be paid back for this. May be she herself is in need of the prayers of her sisters, yet she asks for them implicitly, through sharing what the prophet has asked us to do. This hadith can be an example of *intertextuality*, as it is a quotation. The verbal utterance (Hadith) in this post (intertextuality) is accompanied by a picture of praying hands which aid in meaning, an extracted formal feature of digital discourse.

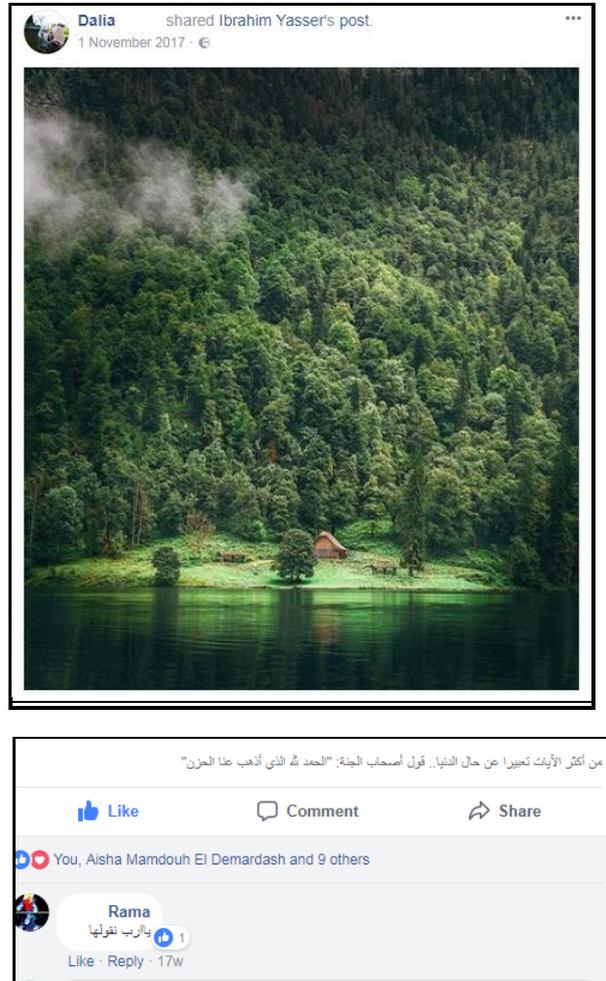
Example (2)

Figure (2)

In this post, an image accompanies the written words: "one of the most expressive verses that reflects the status of life, is when the people in paradise say: "all the praises and thanks be to Allah, Who has removed from us (all) grief" (Hilālī et al, 2011, Fatir: 34, p.517). The speaker shares a *locution* initially uttered by Ibrahim, thus it is a *quotation*. Moreover, the utterance is a declarative, thus it can be a *direct assertive* speech act, as it describes the reality of life. Ibrahim *flouts the maxim of quality* by using a metaphor. He compares life to sorrow and grief, and people of heaven would thank Allah for allowing them to leave it and bestowing them with paradise instead. This shows that Ibrahim's utterance can be an *indirect expressive* speech act, as it reflects his

feelings towards this life to which he feels distressed due to its many sorrows and troubles. *Flouting the maxim of quality* here gives rise to the *conversational implicature* that the real solace and comfort would only be in paradise. Dalia, who shares the post, and Ibrahim, who writes it, maybe are facing some problems. Accordingly, they are trying to make themselves stronger through the remembrance of the existence of paradise. When they hopefully enter paradise, all their sufferings and breakdowns that used to perturb them will be taken off. The role of intertextuality here is apparent in revealing something about its users' ideology.

Otherwise, the reason behind sharing such a post is not necessarily personal, but could be motivational or didactic. This shows that Dalia and Ibrahim like to appear as realistic people, who aim to show people the true face of life. Their utterance implies that life is not easy, and people will constantly face dilemmas and disturbances. Yet, they want their addressees to have hope by remembering that the earthly life is not the ending, but they can make it their perfect beginning. Through conforming to God's teachings, they will enter paradise with his mercy. For when they see it, they will feel that all their problems and worries have faded, as if they have never existed before. The role of intertextuality, that is embodied through extracting words from the holy Qur'an here, is apparent in revealing something about its users' ideology.

Accordingly, the post's utterance can be considered as an *indirect directive*. Ibrahim and Dalia could be implicitly asking people to have hope, obey God and have patience to withstand hardships, in order to deserve his paradise, the place where they will forget about all their pains and discontents. "All the praises and thanks be to Allah, Who has removed from us (all) grief", mentioning this verse displays Ibrahim's quoting from the Quran. Thus, *intertextuality* is employed here, a formal feature of digital discourse. Additionally, he is establishing a relationship between the Quran's text and the image he chooses, which is another formal feature of digital discourse derived from the analyzed data. In other words, pictures within posts are sometimes used to support the intended meaning.

There is a comment written by Rama in which she says: "I hope we would say it". The writer here *flouts the maxim of quantity* by saying too little. She depends on the *cultural background knowledge* she shares with her addressees that would enable them to interpret what she means. She means that she wishes to be among the ones who say: "All the praises

and thanks be to Allah, Who has removed from us (all) grief". This implicates that she hopes to be blessed with the company of people in paradise. Finally, the writer of the post and the one who shares it seem to impose the image of religious people who know well the reality of this life. They understand the message that it is just a transitional stage to immortality in the hereafter that they have to work for. Moreover, they share this message among the ones they know in conformity with the verse which says: "you are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah" (Saheeh International, 2012, Ali-'Imran: 110, p.57).

9.1.1. Findings

The analyzed religious posts deal with preaching, prayers and supplications; some of the extracted functions of digital discourse. Most of them begin with descriptions of rituals or creeds, excellence of virtues (assertives) that trigger the audience and prepare them for the coming directive. Consequently, the addressees adhere to what has been said and achieve the desired perlocutionary effect. This is attained by complying with the orders that they were asked to follow, or abiding by the pieces of advice they were expected to act accordingly.

9.2. Social

The fact that the Facebook is primarily a social networking website makes posts of the social type occupy a great capacity of this platform. These social posts are various and diverse. For that reason, the researcher resorts to classifying them into subsections. Such posts deal with things related to children and parenting and comics, among many others.

9.2.1. Children and parenting

Example (3)

Figure (3)

One of the prominent formal features of digital discourse that is extracted from the data analyzed is the pictures that accompany verbal utterances to support and aid the meaning intended to be conveyed. Accordingly, the writer of this post supports the image she shares with the *locution*: "Imagination died and simplicity has been lost". This declarative paints the scene of a toddler, sitting in his room, leaving a pile of accumulated toys and just watching his tablet. In terms of *SAs*, it can be a *direct assertive*, as it describes what can be seen in the photo. The speaker *flouts the maxim of manner* by being unintelligible, she does not explain her words but gives a chance for her addressees to come up with the meaning she intends to communicate. This gives rise to the *conversational implicature* of a problem that is prevalent nowadays.

Children, who are the natural spring of innocence and creativity, has left their toys and friends and has become addicted to looking at the screens of smart phones and tablets. This wastes their childhood, kills their creativity and renders them a complicated life full of stress, away from simplicity. In view of that, the speaker's utterance can work as an *indirect directive*. She uses *indirectness* to give a piece of advice for whoever is with the responsibility of having young kids under his/her

custody. It is as if she wants to tell them: "Stop leaving your children to what destroys their infancy, save them opportunities that blast their innocence and creativity".

Perhaps, Asmaa has seen some parents who leave their children in front of cartoon or game screens just to make them eat food, or even to stay free. Being aware of the negative effects of being subjected to electronics for long hours on daily basis, she decides to address those parents. Her only wish can be: spreading awareness of the dangers those parents unconsciously subject their children to. She *flouts the maxim of quantity* by saying a few words that generate so many implied meanings. She covertly tells parents that electronics addiction, slowly but surely, will subject their children to future social problems. They will lose their grind in playing with toys or even kids of their age. Moreover, they will be transformed into passive recipients instead of being proactive creators.

Consequently, she finds it necessary to advise those parents. She wants them to take their children to times, when their peak of enjoyment has been playing with their toys. Through this post, Asmaa imposes her character to be the type who cares for the wellbeing of children. She introduces herself as an active kind of person; who notices a phenomenon, and is aware of its consequences. This instigates her to spread consciousness among others. Projecting an online personality that enjoys the trait of eloquence, she uses a few words to convey so many meanings.

9.2.1.1. Findings

It can be deduced that posts that deal with children and parenting aim at spreading consciousness among people; a generated function of digital discourse. Such posts deal with positive parenting, mental health and ways that parents can employ to help their children grow into healthy and productive adults.

9.2.2. Comics

One way of expressing ideas through images, often merged with texts is comics. The ideas conveyed can be discussing deep issues, yet are displayed in a comic way, possibly to lessen their seriousness. One of the most common forms of illustration used in comics is cartooning. This type of posts is frequently shared on Facebook.

Example (4)

Figure (4)

Here, Doaa shares a post from a page named Mother's mall. The post comprises two photos, the first one with a woman uttering the *locution*: "When will you have more kids?" The utterance is an interrogative, so it can be a *direct directive*. The *perlocutionary* effect is: splashing water from the hose on the speaker. An expected non-verbal response from a mother depicted in the character of a man who delights in all things wicked, named Mr. Gru. The writer of this post depends mainly on the *cultural background knowledge* of his audience with the protagonist of a cartoon entitled as *Despicable me*. This post is a reduplication of a story that happens on a regular basis. A mother may have a toddler or even a baby, and she finds herself subjected to comments and the sort of questions found in the photo. That is why a post like this may touch almost every mother having a baby like the one crying in the picture beforehand. This situation may have already happened for Doaa, the one who shares the post, or she may even have shared it only for the sake of comically warning people around her from

addressing a question like this to her. Doaa adds a comment of her own, she utters the *locution*: "This is me soon, but it's not impossible that I may not only splash them with water, but also blaze them with fire ".

Categorizing utterances in respect to SAs is not an easy task, as overlaps often occur; a single utterance can fit in more than one category (Kaburise, 2005, p.241). The speaker's utterance may be considered as a *direct assertive* in the sense that she is describing a situation. Yet, it can also be regarded as an *expressive* as she is expressing her and most mothers' attitude when they are encountered by people asking a question like "When will you have more kids?" The analogy drawn by the post composer is a suitable one. Choosing the apparently supervillain Gru to portray the mother who has a baby and is asked about the time of her having the next one is perfectly fitting. Only mothers in such a situation would be the ones capable of feeling and perceiving the excellency of such a comparison. For the response of a mum of those, when asked such a question, would resemble Gru's wicked and vile acts. It is worth mentioning that Doaa uses smiling emojis to lessen the seriousness of her warning.

Concerning the *maxims of conversation*, it seems that Doaa *flouts the maxim of quantity* by giving more information than the current situation requires. She does not only provide her comment concerning the post without being asked, but she talks also about what she may do if she is subjected to the question: "When will you have more kids?" By *flouting the quantity maxim*, Doaa intends to emphasize that she is not ready to be asked such a question. Moreover, the *quality maxim is flouted* through the use of exaggeration. Doaa's threat that she will blaze the one who asks her such a question with fire is completely exaggerated. Yet, she knows that her addressees will recognize the exaggeration, and by this, the *quality maxim is flouted*. This *maxim flouting* implies Doaa's warning, and that any person ought to think twice before asking her such a question.

According to Doaa's personality, she presents herself to be not that easy type of character. This can be drawn from her warning, that she would blaze the ones who would ask her about the time she would have her next kid. Moreover, her portrayal through the tough Gru's character shows that she wants to construct an online image about herself, that she is not the sort of character one can mess up with. Yet she uses smiling emojis in conformity with societal norms that do not provide human beings with the space of giving vent to their feelings of warning and

anger. Doaa's employment of pictures within the post, emojis and her trial of drawing a specific image of herself to appear with, not necessarily in compliance with her real character, explicitly portray some eminent derived formal features and functions of digital discourse.

Example (5)



Figure (5)

This post includes an image that is divided into two pictures; one of a closed box of Mackintosh's, the other shows the box when opened, where it contains veggies and not chocolate. The *locution* placed beneath the pictures is: "when you are outwardly happy, yet inside you are sad". The utterance here expresses the state that may befall someone (declarative), hence it is *expressive*. Asmaa, the one who shares the post, *flouts the maxim of quality* through her use of metaphor. She compares the feelings one may encounter when finding a box of Mackintosh's; yet discovering that it contains veggies instead of chocolate, to someone who is laughing from the outside, not the inside. This *maxim flouting* allows the audience to feel the disappointment that one may face when being subjected to a similar situation.

Basma in the first comment laughs about the analogy and says that it is so expressive. This shows that Asmaa has really succeeded to transmit the feelings she wishes to convey. Then, Toqa *flouts the maxim of quantity* by repeating something identical to what has been previously said. She utters the (declarative) *expressive*: "If I have seen such a box, I would fly out of happiness yet by the time I open it and see what is

inside, I will be depressed". This *maxim flouting*, highlights that this post is really expressive, and that those feelings would be felt by anyone who is exposed to such a situation, as Asmaa tells Toqa: "Not only you, but everyone will feel the same".

It seems that Basma remembers something and subsequently adds: "it is exactly like when you find the box of biscuits with sewing tools inside". Basma, here, *flouts the maxim of relation and manner* by making a seemingly obscure and unrelated equivalence. Yet, she depends on the shared *cultural background knowledge context* of her participants that would make her utterance clear and relevant. It is common among mothers to make use of the finished chocolate or ice cream boxes, especially for sewing tools. Evidently, a post like this reaches many persons, because each one has probably passed by a similar situation. Being one of the features of digital discourse, the post includes pictures that reinforce the communicated meaning.

Example (6)



Figure (6)

Omnia shares a post which consists of a picture together with some words written below. As seen, the photo depicts a brood of chicken with a skinned featherless one, underneath is the *locution*: "your graduate studies are your guaranteed path to distinguishing yourself from others". The utterance here can serve as (a declarative) an *assertive*, as it transfers some kind of information by telling or describing something.

Omnia in this post wants to say that I agree that graduate studies grant you a special stature among others, yet it will take a lot from your time, health and peace of mind. She *flouts the maxim of relation*, by associating an apparently irrelevant picture to her uttered words. This gives rise to a *conversational implicature*, seeing a chicken that is distinguished from others in being pitiful, featherless and miserable. This picture leaves the audience to contemplate about the state a graduate studies student is in.

Moreover, she *flouts the maxim of quality* by her use of irony. Claiming that graduate studies are the one's guaranteed path to distinguishing themselves from others generates feelings of honor and satisfaction to the audience, instigating them to wish to be one of those whom she is talking about. However, the unappealing photo of the pathetic chicken which is eminent and distinctive from others, yet stripped of its feathers, might stimulate among the audience different feelings. This contradiction between the pictorial representation and the verbal SA, is one of the extracted features of digital discourse.

The photo illustrates that, in order to reach an exceptional position, you may be obliged to get plundered of all your comforts. Sharing this post, probably, indicates that Omnia is a postgraduate student. She stamps a crying emoji above the post, signaling the massive amount of the effort she exerts. It seems that Omnia has not finished her thesis yet. This can be interpreted from the fact that she sees only the negative side of her experience.

She is now suffering the exhaustion of perhaps consecutive sleepless nights, mental strain and psychological tension. Accordingly, she is not thinking about the happiness, satisfaction and sense of achievement she will be in after she finishes her MA or PHD or whatever she is doing right now. By the time she reaches the end of her journey, she might not forget about those hard times, or instead, the remembrance of such weary days would arouse in her feelings of gratitude to her perseverance after God, who granted her the place she now occupies. As

the post reflects the psychological state of its sharer, it can be considered as an *indirect expressive*.

9.2.2.1. Findings

It can be concluded that comic posts sometimes use wit and humor, while in reality they are dealing with serious issues wearing the indirectness disguise. Smiling emojis can be utilized as a strategy to reduce the seriousness of a situation. Sometimes, there is contradiction between the verbal utterance and the accompanying picture, which is an extracted feature of digital discourse.

9.2.3. Personal

One of the major extensively used posts on Facebook is that of the personal type. Personal Facebook pages have turned out to be the comfort zone to many. Some people get relieved through publicizing what they feel in quest for support. Others are delighted by sharing their daily plans and achievements with their network friends. Sometimes, these apparently phatic posts actually have multiple, and, at times, complex communicative purposes. Moreover, this type of posts can be a way of revealing people's ideologies and identities they wish to construct online, through the exhibition of their beliefs and assumptions they have about things.

Example (7)

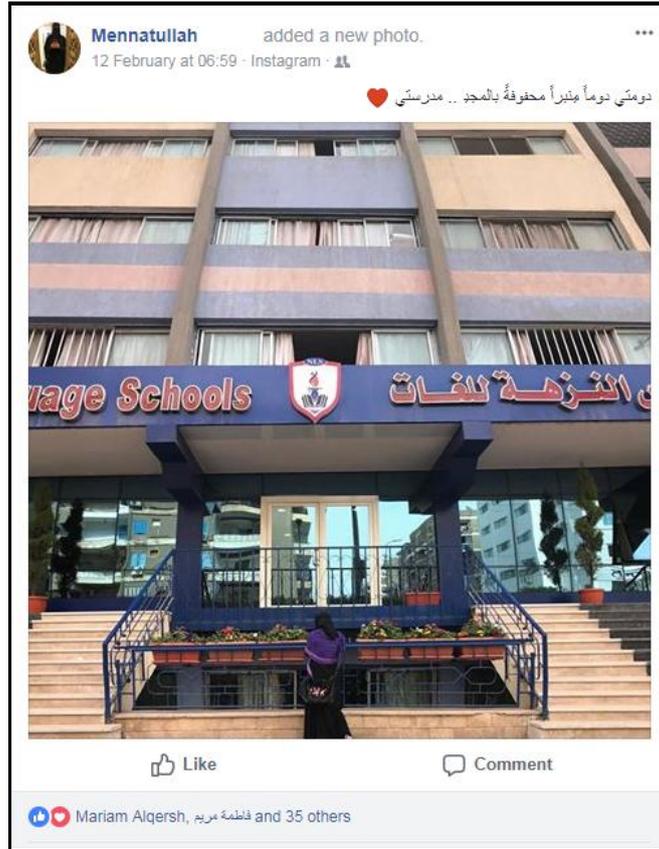


Figure (7)



The post, here, comprises a status written by Mennatulla and a picture of a school building. The school is called El-Nozha as engraved

upon its frontage. Mennatulla utters the *locution*: "May you always stay a minaret for glory, my school". Her declarative statement can be regarded as an *expressive speech act*, as she prays for her school and expresses her feelings towards it. Mennatulla's words together with the heart at the end of her status, reveal her deep love for her school. Menna, in the first comment, *flouts the maxim of quantity and relation*. She asks Mennatulla if she means El-Nozha that is in front of Al-Farouq. The repetition of the school's name "El-Nozha" implies Menna's eagerness to know if Mennatulla means the school that is in front of Al-Farouq. It seems that she is also astonished if this would be the case.

Menna, here, depends on the *cultural background knowledge* that she shares with Mennatulla, knowing that she knows that Al-Farouq is another school located in front of El-Nozha. To her question Mennatulla says: yes, and in turn, Menna says: "We were neighbours, then". Menna, here, *flouts the maxim of quality* through her use of metaphor. This may introduce some information such as:

- 1- Menna's past tense usage explains the reason behind Mennatulla's nostalgia. It can be inferred that they have graduated since a period of time.
- 2- The analogy that Menna makes, saying that they were neighbours then, implies that Menna was at Al-Farouq school. Next, Rawda asks: "when did you join it?" She adds a laughing emoji. Rawda, here, *flouts the maxim of relation*. As a result of this *maxim flouting*, the audience can anticipate that Rawda shares some *personal background knowledge* with Mennatulla.

It seems that Mennatulla has not been only to one school, and this is what Rawda has been trying to allude to. Salma's comment, then, comes to put an end to the doubts triggered by Rawda. She says that El-Nozha is one of five thousand schools Mennatulla has gone to. Thus, she *flouts the maxim of quality* by her use of hyperbole. She knows that the hearers would probably deduce that it is an exaggerated way of showing that Mennatulla moved between many schools. This also shows that Rawda, Salma and Mennatulla share some *personal background knowledge* context. This is revealed through their knowledge that Mennatulla has not settled for one school only. Mennatulla tells them: "but El-Nozha is the closest to my heart". Her utterance only comes to strengthen the idea of her profound passion towards that school.

Finally, Mohamed comments: "Domety or Obour land?". Mohamed, here, *flouts the maxim of manner*. His utterance looks incomprehensible. The point is that Mohamed uses the Arabic word for "always" employed by Mennatulla, which means "Domety". "Domety" and "Obour land" are company names for white cheese in Egypt. Menna's comment about Mohamed's words is restricted to disappointed emojis. This implies that she understands the joke, but does not like it. Mohamed imposes himself as the type of character who likes jesting. Yet, the joke he makes is culture-bound. For that reason, it is this cultural context that makes the humor of people coming from one country incomprehensible to the humor of people from another country, and the humor of one generation inconceivable by another (Cutting, 2002, p.6). Menna employs some features of digital discourse, such as the use of emojis and the employment of pictures within the post for the reinforcement of the meaning communicated.

Example (8)



Figure (8)

Here, the speaker shares a photo in addition to a comment which says: "I am totally shocked and speechless". Above the picture, Maye writes a comment saying that this is how she looks when she sees the tasks and duties she has, not knowing how or when she can finish all of them. Thus, her utterance is (a declarative) an *expressive speech act*. Here, Mai relies on the *cultural background knowledge* of her audience, who know that the words inscribed in the picture refer to an Egyptian song.

Hence, the post comprises a well-known phenomenon in conversation named *intertextuality*. The term is initially used by Kristeva (1980) in 'Word, Dialogue and Novel'. Her beliefs concerning the concept are built on Bakhtinian (1981) notion which states that: each utterance is interdependent and interrelated with what has been said previously. Thus, her use of "*intertextuality*" shows her conviction that any text is reasonably made up of other texts (Fägersten, 2012, p.81).

The phenomenon, here, is depicted through the process of repeating and quoting the words of an Egyptian singer and connecting it with Maye's state and feelings, which aid in disclosing something about

Maye's ideology. Maye's use of *intertextuality* is very convenient to the message she wants to convey. The picture of the baby shocked girl perfectly reveals the state Mai is in. It portrays how she is stuck in many issues that she has to do yet, in a funny way. This reflects the way Maye wants to be perceived online. It makes her audience think of her as a comical person who tries to take things easily. After the status that Maye has written, she uses the emoji of a baby boy and a woman slapping her face (a feature of digital discourse, mingling pictorial images with verbal utterances), which may give the implication that she is a married lady with house chores, and has a baby who hinders her from carrying out the responsibilities she has.

A post like this, made up of a simple picture with few words and some emojis, shows how using linguistic tools can aid in drawing many implications and inferences. This can be regarded as a noticed feature of digital discourse, and that many interpretations can be extracted from very few amount of given information.

9.2.3.1. Findings

Based on linguistic analysis it can be concluded that personal posts demonstrate that implicit information can be extracted from the apparently "phatic" or content-less posts using tools from pragmatics. This embedded information can be exemplified in revealing people's ideas and beliefs that form the identities they want to appear with online, which is a generated function of digital discourse. Moreover, using linguistic tools opens the gates to many implications and inferences that can be elicited from this type of posts, which is a general feature of pragmatics.

9.2.4. Greetings

This kind of posts includes: engagement, marriage and birthday greetings, as well as congratulations for accomplishments and success.

Example (9)



Figure (9)

Afrah posts on Sarah's wall a bunch of flowers, and utters the *locution* (exclamatory): "my lovely Sarah, congratulations for your success, waiting for your doctorate degree". The elucidation of the words with the accompanying picture is one of the formal features of digital discourse. Afrah's utterance can be an *expressive* speech act, for she is expressing her feelings of happiness towards Sarah's success and wishing for her more future achievements. Afrah *flouts the maxim of manner* by being unclear. She does not mention what is the thing that Sarah succeeds in. It seems that she depends on the *personal background knowledge* that they share together, which makes her feel that mentioning the occasion of Sarah's success needless. Sarah in turn comments saying: "May Allah bless you Aunt, thank you". Sarah's utterance (exclamation) can be an *expressive*, as it reflects her feelings of gratitude towards Afrah's encouraging words.

It can be interpreted that Afrah is older than Sarah. In other words, there seem to be a difference in age between them. This can be deduced from Sarah's referring to Afrah as "aunt". From this post, one can deduce that Afrah wants to show herself as being a motivational kind of person. Although she has the option of calling Sarah and talking to her privately, she rather chooses to congratulate her publicly. Perhaps she intends to pave the way for others to do the same, and cheer Sarah with more

supporting comments. Undoubtedly, anyone would feel stimulated when he is valued for an accomplishment he has done, after a long path of exerted efforts. He will feel that he has the vigor that would push him towards more achievements. This might have been Afrah's intention of congratulating Sarah on Facebook, a thing which shows that Sarah is someone who is precious to her indeed.

9.2.4.1. Findings

Being a frequent Facebook user, the researcher noticed that this type of posts occupies a large capacity of the Facebook walls. People consider it easier and better to greet someone through specializing a post for him/her publicly, instead of calling the greeted person via phone, it has become almost a trend.

9.2.5. Dictums

Dictums are short statements that communicate a general truth, principle or something that someone believes in. Posts with dictums are commonly found on Facebook, usually attributed to a famous actor or a religious preacher.

Example (10)

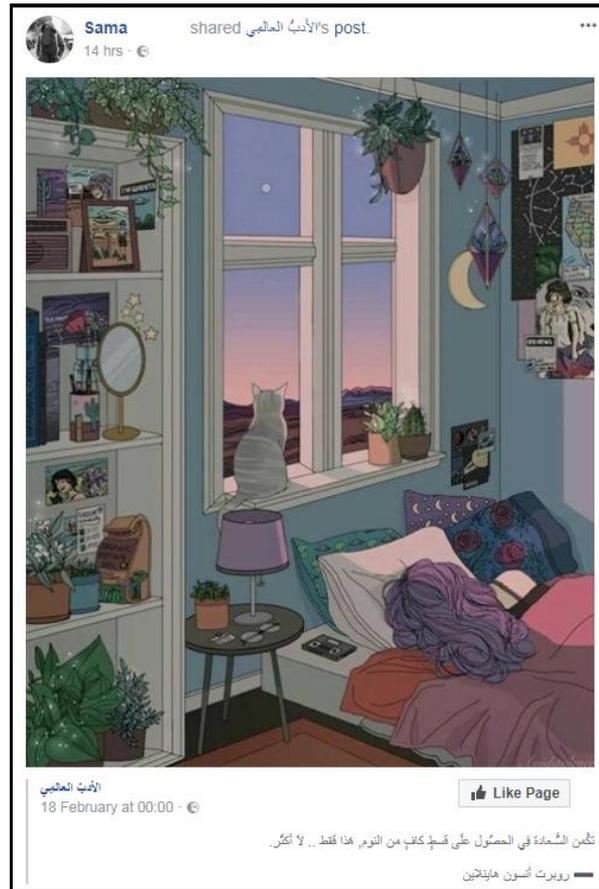


Figure (10)



This post consists of a photo with some words written under it: "Happiness only dwells in having enough hours of sleep, not more" Robert Aniston. These words written under the picture are (declarative). They are not uttered by Sama, the one who shares the post, but by someone called Robert Aniston. In terms of SAs, when utterances are not initially created by the speaker, they are regarded as a *quotation* (Ilyas and Khushi, 2012, p.502). Quotation is not one of the types of SAs in Searle's categorization, but it is used in a previous research. Similarly, they are employed here because they are needed for data categorization. The photo that accompanies the

quotation is very warm and cozy. When Sama posts such a thing, it shows that she somehow believes or agrees with the quote's writer.

Perhaps, it touches something that already happens with her, which is that she feels only happy, the time she sleeps enough. Regarding that, Alaa chooses only crying emojis to express her opinion. This may be considered as *flouting the maxim* of manner, for why is she crying after seeing such a soothing photo? The answer is that she wants her audience to deduce something. May be she is deprived from sleeping the way or the hours she needs. She thinks that the non-verbal emojis of crying would speak louder than any words she may have said. Lamiaa tells her: "same boat, let's share our sorrow together". It can be seen that Lamiaa interpreted the meaning behind Alaa's non-verbal comment. She *flouts the maxim of quantity* in order to give an implication that she has the same problem, as if she wants to tell Alaa, "same here, don't worry I am also suffering from lack of sleep".

Alaa disappointedly answers: "we are in a tough situation". Alaa, here, *flouts the maxim of manner*. The interaction between Alaa and Lamiaa sounds ambiguous, as it depends upon *personal background knowledge*. They both know well the reasons behind the other's sleeping scarcity, leaving the audience just to contemplate about the causes. May be they have exams or perhaps they have newly born babies who prevent them from enjoying enough hours of sleep. They are the only ones who share the actual reasons of their problem. Whatever their interpretations are, it is undeniable that the lighting, the girl's sleeping and the cat's watching, all help in portraying the serenity of such a photo. This surely would trigger feelings of sorrow about one's self if he/she is unable to enjoy the peacefulness and tranquility of sufficient sleeping hours for any reasons. The picture painting the post that supports the communicated meaning, together with the use of emojis that contradict the verbal utterance are some extracted features of digital discourse.

9.2.5.1. Findings

This type of posts is usually circulated with a hidden indirect intention of revealing something about the one who posts it. Sometimes, its purpose is didactic for all the audience in general, at other times it can

be targeted to address a specific hearer or group of hearers, which is a generated function of digital discourse.

10.0. Results and Findings

In the course of this paper, Facebook language proves that it can be employed as a form of social interaction. **First**, the analysis exhibits that social media users utilize language to achieve various functions. It has become a way to record their daily events, activities and experiences. Yet, everyone differs in his/her way of expression; some use jokes or quotations, others use their own words for expressing their feelings.

Second, analyzing the data through Searle's SA framework indicates that assertives are the most frequently type of SA used in Facebook posts and status updates. This happens when the post or status is literally perceived as a mere description or assertion of something. This is ubiquitous on social media. People tend to express what they know or believe to be the case. Accordingly, most of the statuses and posted posts are ascribed to the category of assertives. Yet, it is observed that people tend to use indirect SAs more often than using direct ones. In other words, most of the time what is meant is not only the words that are literally spoken but the meaning that is implied. People resort to this conversational strategy, namely, indirectness. Consequently, those apparently assertive posts can be indirect expressives or directives. The posts' genuine objectives can be attempts of getting people to do something. This may take place through indirect commanding or requesting. **Third**, such results disclose the fact that these pragmatic tools perfectly fit to aid in the emergence of different communicative functions from Facebook statuses and posts such as: describing, asserting, expressing, commanding and requesting.

Fourth, by employing research methods from pragmatics such as Searle's SA framework, together with Grice's theory of cooperative maxims and implicature, the current study uncovers some of the formal features and functions of digital discourse. Social platforms such as Facebook are treated nowadays as people's best friends, with whom they share their daily routines and activities, their outlet of feelings and emotions, their religious pulpits from which they preach orations and morals, and their political circles where they reveal their political backgrounds and views, and run their dogmatic debates.

Interpretations based on linguistic evidence generate some functions of digital discourse. These functions are exemplified through

religious and social posts. The religious posts usually begin with assertives which describe rituals or creeds, and then end with issuing a directive to the addressees in an attempt to make them fulfill the desired perlocutionary effect. These posts, regularly, are circulated to advise or request the audience to comply with the teachings they tend to proffer. Such posts take the form of prayers, supplications and preaching. Another function derived from the analyzed data is identity construction. People tend to impose online images for themselves, not necessarily resembling their real selves. The audience infer the type of identity or personality that the post sharer or status writer wishes to appear through implicature and virtual guessing. Those identities and personalities are electronically constructed as produced by their originators, not as perceived by their audience. The last function is intending to address targeted audience.

Concerning the formal manifestations, the shape or the form of the posts, mingling verbal and pictorial elements is the most dominant and explicit formal digital discourse feature that is extracted from the data analyzed. Most posts contain pictures and emojis that accompany the written words to aid and support the meaning wished to be conveyed.

Finally, several previous studies handle SA theory, Grice's principle of cooperative maxims and implicature. Others explore issues dealing with the language used in social media networking websites. The findings of some studies correlate this one in the way they display language as being multidimensional, in the sense that they show how SAs can achieve various functions. Yet, this paper comprises many topics, where the researcher integrates theories and ideas that others have worked on each solely. In this study, the communicative functions of Facebook posts and status updates with a number of randomly chosen comments are analyzed using Searle's SA framework, together with Grice's theory of cooperative maxims and implicature. By incorporating these approaches, the aforementioned distinct formal features and functions of digital discourse have come to light.

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