

## **FLOUTING IMPLICATURE IN LANGUAGE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USERS: A STUDY OF FACEBOOK AND WHATSAPP CHATS**

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### **Abstract**

*Social media will always be violated and flouted during conversations. Hence, the title of this work: Flouting implicature in language use of social media users: a study of Facebook and WhatsApp Chats. This flouting comes up once there is communication gap in the conversations. The data of this article were sieved from the chats of language users on Facebook and WhatsApp. These data were analysed using Grice's cooperative principle, direct observation of the users considering that the research employed the theory of ethnomethodology of communication. Descriptive analysis was used to analyse the language use of users in those selected social media. The study finds that there is flouting implicature in language use by the users, resulting in an unintended misinformation as the readers are unable to guess the exact intentions of the writer. Some posts on these spheres lack truthfulness in them. There is tendency of not being perspicuous in the posts. The work concluded that managing the language in it goes a long way in making the conversation more understandable. It also solved the situation of flouting during interactions.*

**Keywords:** Social media, Flouting, Implicature, Facebook, WhatsApp, Communication

### **Introduction**

Social media has existed over the years in Nigeria as well as in the international arena with its features in various ways; emerging as trends of neo-nomenclature of social network services. Various works have evolved in the past using the issues of *Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)* as a guide in their various researches. English has been the main corpus language in this environment especially considering the area of this research. Thomas Creswell states that English usage is

concerned with the choices they make from among the many alternative ways of expression made available by the grammar and the vocabulary of English (209).

So in social media, without language there will be no communication and interaction in such environment and context. Language has been the real vehicle in achieving most of its feat and all the success in social media is via the language use in communication. Taiwo Abioye's motive in having an effective communication has this to say, "Communication is the thread that runs through and which knits together individuals in a society, and even societies and nations" (706). Ingraham made a remark in 1903 concerning the uses of language which was summarised in eight points as cited in Quirk (1968) and qtd in Wale Osisanwo, (2) as in the followings:

- to direct superfluous nervous energy;
- to direct motion in others, both men and animals;
- to communicate ideas;
- as a means of expression; for the purpose of record;
- to set matter in motion (as in charms and incantation)
- as an instrument of thinking;
- to give delight merely as sound.

He also has this to say on the uses of language, "If these are the uses of language, discourse analysis and pragmatics have a great deal to account for in terms of human behaviour and language use" (2).

S. R. Uppsala has this in mind when he relates his views about language as he states:

It is often said that the vocabulary of a language is an inventory of the items a culture talks about and has categorised in order to make sense of the world. However, language is not simply a reflection of some external 'objective' reality which gets carved up in different ways in different languages. Language helps us to make sense of the world. By classifying things, we impose a structure on the social world, and language helps us to construct a model of it. (25)

Pushpinder Syal and D.V. Jindal while in their outcome of what pragmatics and its related field are all about, it is based on utterance by linguists at the various levels of linguistic expressions. They state that pragmatics is seen by linguists as an independent level of language analysis, as its concentration is on the utterance. The same way phonology is to sound, syntax unto sentence and semantics which focus on both the words and sentences. The possible link between pragmatics and semantics has its concern on meaning and pragmatics attempts to relate meaning to context of utterance, which views action of the language as performed by the speaker. So on the part of the hearer, a hearer hears the utterance from the speaker and also makes the decision of decoding utterance either to be a question, statement or request. There is a definite inclusion of some intended effect on the hearer towards the meaning.

### **Social Media and Users**

Currently at this twenty first century and in the late twentieth century much attention has been diverted to the area of social media and the users with the way they use words and sentences within the social media community. There are various types of them: the supposed least of them is the SMS while the most widely used for interaction is Facebook with a convergence of billions of users worldwide. These social media platforms make life easier and their accessibility more accommodating and convenient. It has made chains of interaction more lucrative and interesting, depending on the sophisticated phone accessory one uses. Facebook has continued, to a large extent, with great improvement in making the network attractive since its official inception in 2004 till date to her users in comparison to other social media platform in trend.

In fact, Facebook chat will be the major discourse in analysing a greater part of this work because it is more accommodating, more friendly, highly accessible and affordable to her users. There is also an upgrade from the provider to suit current trends in research and current happenings in the world. The languages inherent are well exhibited to show various concepts and enrichment in the communication of the language use among its users. Its language use is more accessible compared to other social networks; such as: WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Telegram, Snapchat and other minor ones: Wechat, Skype, Badoo, Eskimi, Telegram, Snaptu and Messenger. Various concepts in pragmatics are always seen in the language

application there. People manipulate words and do a lot of things with words on Facebook.

Another dimension of social media that will guide this work will be WhatsApp network which is like a rallying point of convergence in its usage. A thorough and closer study of it shows that people converge to interact and manipulate words and sentences. Considering what they have in mind and the way others interpret what another person posts in a given comment. At times, replies from various personalities vary because of approach and how people see things in such environment, especially in the group chat of such social media. The idea of one making a comment in a post and the various views of readers in their replies towards the comment is one of great concern to this work.

Recently, the WhatsApp platform has upgraded to a greater extent. Especially, in accommodating a chunk of the social media community, all coming together to exchange ideas and linguistic norms. It is in the form of group chat for a particular set of people with a common goal, idea and belief with language being of vital use in the day to day interaction of the group. The researcher also belongs to these various groups under study. Note that each of the groups possess definite rules and norms that guide them. It is quite observable that the users of these chat rooms continue to violate these rules and norms. It sometimes leads to upholding of the principles of pragmatics without having the real knowledge of what they are doing during these violations. Jacob L. Mey is of the view that, "Text editors, for instance, will tell you that a sentence is ill formed or too long, or that a particular concept has not been properly introduced yet" (10). On those who also make use of these assets, he further directs that:

One could say that a truly 'computer literate' person is one who composes his or her literary production directly on the computer, without any interference except from the interface itself. This is a bit like composing directly on the piano, except that the keyboard there normally does not retain what has been played on it. In contrast, the conserving function of the computer is precisely what enables writers to enter into a totally new relationship with their tool. (11)

The height of flouting in conversation always arrive at the peak of breaching the communication gap in interactions. So the conversation can go weird once the two parties fail to understand the maxims needed to follow in their discussion as well as the intentions of a given post needed to be understood in other to avoid flouting the implicature. but in the course of conversation there is room for such ruptures. A.K. Greenall in his assertion on flouting states, "A seeming breach will trigger a reasoning process whereby the hearer will try to come up with a meaning for the

utterance that turns it into an act of observing the given maxim(s) (an implicature)" (570). It is like a situation of critical literary analysis were the analysts give diverse opinion about a work even beyond the originator's imagination.

Although one needs to be cooperative in the speech and in conversation, so that one needs not to flout implicature in the course of reply on a given conversation. Much observations have been noticed especially using Facebook's reactionary icons to flout implicatures, in some posts. For example, someone posted about a death on social media which requires a sad icon but you see people flouting the message with the like icon. Note that currently Facebook has added extra five reactionary icons instead of the usual single like icon.

### **Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

The theoretical framework of this work uses *the ethnography of communication theory*; since this work has its concepts on social media, it will be nice if the idea of ethnography of speaking will be employed in the work. The idea comes up that social media is a kind of speech community which has its divergent direction and view especially on how people handle utterances in such area, which at the end sometimes, results in flouting the conversation. This theory in line with the ethnography of research is a situation where the researcher determines to thoroughly and analytically observe the activities and happenings in any given speech community by the actions of engrossing oneself in most of the activities going on there in order to record, to document, to certify and to ascertain the veracity of range of data to be collected for analysis. Lillis in support, states that:

In this methodology both 'etic' and 'emic' approaches are considered important and complementary; the etic approach refers to observation from the outside as it were, that is, the researcher seeks to observe in detail the communicative activities - or speech events - of participants in a community; the emic involves exploring such events, from the inside, to determine how participants make sense of and understand such events and interactions. Ethnographers emphasize the importance of emic accounts to any theory of language; for example, only an emic perspective would enable a researcher to understand that a clap of thunder may in some cultural contexts be considered to be a communicative act ..., or that certain types of communication are permitted to men in some

contexts while proscribed in others, such as the disciplining of children .... (94-5)

The researcher has been in this community, monitoring what happens there and so it is an added advantage to boost this work in general. Hymes was the first initiator of this theory and states that in such situation communication needs to be studied on the grounds of people's speech and how effective their communication is in such environment. To ascertain this, he postulates eight ideas on the speech event to make up the ethnomethodology in conversation by using the word SPEAKING as an acronym to represent diverse meanings in communication. They stand for the followings:

- S - Setting or Scene      the time, place, physical circumstance or the event
- P - Participants      the speaker, listener (the audience)
- E - Ends      the goals and outcome the conventional discourse
- A - Acts      utterance involved: command, request etc.
- K - Keys      tone and manner through verbal or and non-verbal means
- I - Instrumentalities      the language in question for the communication
- N - Norms      rules of speeches and their interpretations
- G - Genres      language use in some special speech: sermon, interview, editorial.

The ethnomethodology of communication was applied using the cooperative principle generated by Grice. The cooperative principle was used because of its solution to ameliorate the flouting implicature and its application in the observation of data will definitely salvage the situation in violating communication misinterpretation. Leech, states thus

QUANTITY: Give the right amount of information: *ie*

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required.
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

QUALITY: Try to make your contribution one that is true: *ie*

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

RELATION: Be relevant.

MANNER: Be perspicuous: *ie*

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief. (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
4. Be orderly.

The data of this work were sourced from the two established social media platforms enumerated earlier, taking into consideration, the various uniqueness that produced the positive result required for this research. Also, the work made a descriptive analysis of the roles played in some linguistic contexts. With the aid of research question formulated for this work it was definitely the major guide in the descriptive analysis of the data selected for this work. The posts were randomly selected especially those that fit the article.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis of the Data Collected**

**In what ways do the users of Social Media Flout or Violate the maxims in their comments?**

In a WhatsApp group, a member on 2nd September 2018 posted the picture of the immediate past Senate President Bukola Saraki and wrote, "Behold your next president who will favour Biafrans: Saraki is the man" these conversations followed up:

Reply1: How do you know this

Reply 2: It's clear (replying Reply 1)

Reply 3: Be careful with political issues, do not take decisions in a haste (tagging the post)

Reply 4: Who's your candidate? (tagging Reply 3)

Reply 5: God knows am only human

Reply 6: Handshake (emoji) (tagging Reply 3)

Reply 7: There we go again (tagging Reply 5)

Looking at the above conversation one may observe the flouts and violations in them. It is pertinent to note that the maxim of truth, that is the quality aspects of the post was that of total falsehood. The said post emanated during the 2019 Nigerian General Elections, and the poster was sure that Saraki will flag off the presidential ticket of one of the political parties or possibly one of the two major leading political parties and that his major manifesto would be to remember firstly, the Biafrans. At the end, the propositions all failed the test of being truthful. The reply 2 also flouted the truth's maxim by stating that it's clear for lacking evidence on the information or the question reply 1 posed.

On violating the maxim of quantity, the reply refused to give direct information on the post, since he knew they were false but furthered with the question of reply 1 "How do you know this" his reply 3 also exemplifies that, because it violates the quantity's maxim: which requires making one's contribution informative as required in a given conversation. That's one being careful with political issues and to avoid hasty conclusions about political statements. The contribution made the poster to initiate that of reply 4: Who's your candidate?

Furthermore, in the exchange the maxim of manner was flouted by the answer given. Remember in that election other political parties are involved including other candidates gunning for the same elective position, but instead of the response to have a definite candidate he is in support of, he flouted and became ambiguous by responding thus: "God knows am only human." Then, when he noticed that he was not bringing in a clear response, the poster moves again to finalise that the exchange was not healthy to the question raised, he concluded in these words: "There we go again." Which signifies the violation of a simple rule in the conversation.

Emmanuel Chukwudi Ugwu posted on his Facebook timeline on 23rd March 2015 and stated thus:

Already home

Smooth accreditation and voting are over in Unizik's Polling Units of Garuba Square axis.

Just 1 security officer (nscdc: woman) generally very peaceful and nobody was disenfranchised

Good Luck to all

The researcher posted this on his Facebook timeline just to put information across on the vote casting exercise during the 2015 Nigerian general election. Though the



intention of the writer is for readers to understand the last words in the last line but it was grossly flouted by the replies received. Only four readers commented on the post. The good luck was used in that post because the poster supported one of the leading candidate in that election which has Goodluck as one of his names.

Although, the leading candidate at that point later failed the election and conceded defeat, the following replies flouted the intention of the post.

□ Chikwadam C. Amujiogu

Good news

□ Chinedu Lord Zeus Ibe

It's a different story ere o. card readers were nt workin, odofficials came late, and as of now voting is still on

□ Epunem 'Bishop' Izundu

patriotic Nigerian... I'd recommend you to the government for appointment.

□ Somchuks Alex

So, is it really true that there was a bomb blast in Awka and where in particular.. i also heard of one in one of the local govts in Onitsha

The first comment was a little bit closer in alignment with the intention of the poster when he replied with "Good news". Although, it was obvious that the replier's intention was on the success the poster pulled through during voting.

The second reply from Chinedu was totally different considering his version of response on what had happened in his domain. He was totally of the view that nothing is working in his area without addressing the last line of the post.

The fourth from Epunem was totally replied without considering anything about the words in the post. One may consider the idea of bringing in an offer of appointment to a post that did not discuss anything concerned being unemployed in the post. Nonetheless, being a patriot is not by voting and posting updates on social media, because others did same without announcing the proceedings on social media.

The fourth on the list gave it the flout needed. Sometimes, people bring issues that may be better asked in private to the public domain. Although the post was on voting updates for somewhere within Awka environ, but the reply brought up the

issues of bomb blast, and asking if there was actually any around the environment of the poster.

One needs to understand the intention of sender and reader of any post and their peculiar satisfaction around a given post. Is the sender and reader on the same page as they chat, if not, there would be a flout of implicature during conversation? The conversation below may look comical but the sender was busy writing, misplacing and representing most of the words and at the replying end, the reader was also busy supplying relevant replies in consonance with the flouting conversation from the choice of questions of the sender.



Despite the actual misinterpretation of misspelt words like “prease whos disc ??” meaning Please who is this? The idea on this side was that the sender could not comprehend that he was sending wrong signals of words to the person on the

other side which one may consider as flouting replies from the friend on the other end.

The sender requested for a picture (pix) of the other person and he sent the face of pig emoji. Remember that the request was “Can you send me your pig??” The sender thinking that the pig emoji was a mistake or flouting, decided to emphasise, “I mean your pigs”. The other person replied with multiple faces of pig, because this time the pig was pluralised.

The sender might be comical but in every discussion one needs to be relevant and understand the situation at hand, to be able to supply the required answer in the conversation. It also demands politeness in whatever one does especially in our conversations. The reader will notice that when the demand for the full pig came up instead of full a picture (pix), the replier came up with the picture of a full pig itself unlike the usual face emoji of the pig.

## **Conclusion**

This study brings to mind that without conversations, social media will not have the attention and responsiveness, it has today. In other words, computer mediated communication has become highly essential in the day to day activities of human beings, in this present age. Managing language use on social media go a long way in making conversations more understandable. The nature in which language users manipulate words to suit the situation on ground is also noticed.

As a result of language, every post counts and make meaning for those in groups, such as on WhatsApp. More so when posts are shared, understanding of implied and underlying meanings of the posts are made possible those within the circle of the poster.

Language made it that every post counts and makes meaning to those in the group. Also some posts are shared and those in the circle of poster may understand the underlying meanings in that very post.

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