

Language Use in New Media Digital Communication among Iraqi Interlocutors

Penggunaan Bahasa dalam Komunikasi Digital Media Baharu dalam Kalangan Interlokutor Iraq

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ABSTRACT

Language is constructed according to distinguishable forms and rules that individuals follow and native speakers have a conceptual pattern of these rules. However, linguistic rules that shift over time have exceptions, such as the plural of woman is women, not woman. In fact, we may recognise exceptions and alter by referencing our understanding of rules shared within a language community. Through Facebook, interlocutors could share their languages that enhance their ability to manipulate communication with others. Language is an opportunity for interpersonal dialogue and the new media language of Facebook adds fuel to the linguistic fire. This study will describe the linguistic patterns of language use among 730 Iraqi members of a translator's group in Baghdad University, specifically on Facebook and identify the mistakes through their communication. The methodology used in this study is Grice's Maxims (1975) and the results show the participants' understanding and awareness in the adaptation of the four maxims. In summary, the group practises different language styles, dialects, and lack the use of grammatical rules and prepositions. This means that there is misunderstanding of linguistic rules as well as frequent use of abbreviation in their speech and code-switching that leads them to resort to exercising their mother language (the Arabic language). To conclude, there is a serious lack of research on Iraqi speech via Facebook and the study ends with practical recommendations for researchers and educators.

Keywords: *Speakers, Facebook, Code Switching, Language Styles, Dialects, Register*

ABSTRAK

Bahasa dibina berdasarkan bentuk dan peraturan boleh dibezakan yang diikuti oleh individu dan penutur natif pula mempunyai bentuk konseptual berkaitan dengan peraturan ini. Walau bagaimanapun, peraturan linguistik yang berubah mengikut peredaran masa mempunyai beberapa kekecualian, seperti kata jamak bagi woman ialah women, dan bukannya woman. Malah, kita mungkin mengenal pasti kekecualian dan mengubahnya dengan merujuk kepada kefahaman kita terhadap peraturan yang dikongsi dalam kalangan komuniti sesebuah Bahasa Menerusi Facebook, interlokutor boleh berkongsi bahasa mereka sekali gus

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menambah baik kemampuan mereka untuk memanipulasikan komunikasi dengan individu lain. Bahasa merupakan suatu peluang bagi dialog interpersonal dan bahasa media baru Facebook merencanakan lagi situasi yang ada ini. Kajian ini menghuraikan bentuk penggunaan bahasa dalam kalangan 730 ahli sebuah kumpulan penterjemah Iraq di Universiti Baghdad, di Facebook dan mengenal pasti kesilapan yang berlaku menerusi komunikasi mereka. Metodologi yang digunakan dalam kajian ini ialah Maksim Grice dan dapatan berjaya membuktikan kefahaman serta kesedaran peserta dalam penggunaan keempat-empat maksim. Menerusi kajian ini rumusan dapat dibuat bahawa kumpulan tersebut menggunakan stail bahasa dan dialek yang berbeza serta kekurangan penggunaan peraturan dan kata sendi yang gramatis. Ini menunjukkan terdapatnya salah faham terhadap peraturan linguistik dan juga kekerapan penggunaan singkatan (abbreviation) dalam pertuturan mereka selain peralihan kod yang menyebabkan mereka mengambil tindakan menggunakan bahasa ibunda mereka (bahasa Arab). Kesimpulannya, terdapat kekurangan kajian yang ketara mengenai pertuturan orang Iraq di Facebook. Kajian ini diakhiri dengan cadangan yang praktis untuk para pengkaji dan juga pendidik.

Kata kunci: *Penutur, Facebook, Peralihan Kod, Stail Bahasa, Dialek, Laras*

Introduction

‘Facebook is a popular website that allows users to interact and collaborate within a pre-defined virtual community’ (Boyd & Ellison, 2007 as cited in Espinosa, L. F., 2015). Lantz-Andersson, Vigmo and Bowen (2013) also quoted in Boyd & Ellison (2007), add that ‘Facebook is the largest social networking site, with nearly a billion members, that allows people to make connections, share interests, and join groups.’ This technology has an interesting role in people's social life and it could play a noticeable part in communication with non-native speakers. It is well known that Facebook has become more and more widespread as a main means of communication. Two features which are firstly, its availability based on Internet connection and secondly, its free access are the best reasons behind its popularity. As a result, the possibility of using this tool anywhere and anytime for people to communicate has increased. In fact, according to Crook et al. (2008), the Web 2.0 provides a family of Internet services that have changed the way young people have engaged with it. The writers also add that ‘consideration is also given to how these new technologies create opportunities for education practice.’

It was pointed out by Imran et al. (2011) that due to its interactivity, the use of social networks such as Facebook can inspire students’ participation and interaction to practise the language in real communication situations. Therefore, Facebook is of interest to us from two main aspects: (1) as a mass social phenomenon in itself where it plays a great role as a communication instrument and (2) as a distinctive window for statement and analysis on the contact through the criticisms and responses in Facebook. Discourse, register, speech community, dialect, race, honorific, politeness, spelling mistakes, abbreviations, standard language and code switching can be efficiently recognised by dialogue through Facebook (Halliday, 1978). There are several studies that have investigated the role of Facebook among the speech of communicators and this study will explore linguistic patterns of language on Facebook among Iraqi interlocutors through the employment of Grice’s Maxims (1975).

Research Problem and Objectives of the Study

Many Iraqi students lack grammar and vocabulary skills resulting in poor fluency in the English language. It is vital that translators especially maintain excellent English language communication skills and hence the need for this research to explore via Facebook how they communicate with each other, and their lack in the use of grammatical rules and prepositions which may lead to misunderstandings during their conversations.

This study aims to describe and analyse the linguistic patterns of language use among a group of Iraqi translators on Facebook and investigate the group's employment of Grice's Maxims.

Literature Review

English like other languages that are used on the Internet is constrained by the technology of the new media. As a result, some new styles and varieties of language which are used in communication are noticeable as users attempt to impose the techniques of modern information technology on the old system of language. The relationship between language and the Internet is a growing area of security interest and academic study. In recent years, a series of studies on sociolinguistic research online has been published, especially about the way how computers and smartphones are changing our attitudes towards language.

Lenhart et al. (2008) claim that many teenagers spend hours daily locked in textual communication with their friends on electronic devices such as cellphones and laptops, etc. They also mention that in order to understand the state of writing today among youths, we must understand the technological sphere that teens engage in. Godwin-Jones (2008, p.7) states that digital tools such as Facebook 'that enhance communication and human interaction can potentially be harnessed for language learning'. Even Ibarra quotes that 'when using Facebook as a platform for practicing writing skills...it could be determined that respondents appreciated and enjoyed working on Facebook' as there seems to be a general sense of having a low level of stress and anxiety when working online as their 'affective filter was reduced'.

Baron (2009) carried out a quantitative study on college students' instant messaging conversations and discovered that abbreviations, acronyms, and even misspellings are comparatively infrequent. He also mentions that a study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project confirmed that students from middle school and high school could differentiate between the kinds of language used in digital media and that which is utilised in the class. This is further supported by Lenhart et al. (2008) who quote that generally, people 'understand what kind of language is appropriate and in what context.'

Another significant effort on digital communication analysis was conducted by Gouws et al. (2011) that explain the nature of micro texts. The writers discuss that in order for users of electronic media to fulfill their particular needs, they tend to invent new writing conventions appropriate 'to the user contexts such as their age, geographic location, how they want to be outwardly perceived, and so on.' According to a study they had conducted on Twitter users, it was revealed that not all digital fields are equally created, but 'certain populations of users are much likely to use certain types of lexical transformations than

others. For example, it was found that British users tend to use fewer out-of-vocabulary terms compared to users within the United States.’

All the researchers mentioned in this literature review have contributed great effort in identifying the devices, text, context, and media communication. This current study will explain the new media digital language practised by a group of educated persons and their awareness to the employment of Grice’s Maxims (1975) through their conversations on Facebook. In addition, the linguistic patterns that the interlocutors relate to each other, such as politeness, gender, race, register, code-switching, spelling and dialect will also be identified.

Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Textual analysis is a methodology that involves understanding language especially symbols and pictures to ‘decipher’ how people communicate socially. Though this methodology, the symbols and pictures provide a cue to how communication could be interpreted. The textual analysis in this research adopted the Grice’s Maxims (1975) that contains four categories: maxim of quantity (be informative and avoid redundancy); maxim of quality (be truthful); maxim of relation (be relevant); and lastly, maxim of manner (avoid ambiguity and be polite). Examples of the language used by the group of Iraqis translators were collected and then analysed to identify the group’s usage according to the four categories and their adoption. It can be seen that their language includes specific style, grammatical knowledge, politeness, colloquialism and frequent use of abbreviation in their speech.

3.2 Data Collection

In this study, excerpts were collected from the conversations of a group of 730 educated Iraqi translators from the University of Baghdad, including some alumni. The data collected were then analysed based on Grice’s Maxims (1975).

3.3 Results

Table 1: Frequency of Linguistic Form Based on Grice’s Maxims

No	Categories	Linguistics form	Number of Frequency
1	Maxim of Quality	A - Have you read my selected book? B - Unfortunately, Coz I have no time. A - Reading in literature is fun. B - Dear, I like to read literature, but I have no time. A - How are you doing today? B - I am fine.	3

2	Maxim of Quantity	<p>A - Ali and Saher are reading this book next week. B - I will take into consideration both readings. A - Where is the nearest book shop? B - Beside the gate of Al- Mustansiriya University. A - What happened to your previous book? B - It was not on the desk, I read only its first pages.</p>	3
3	Maxim of Manner	<p>A - I hear you went to read this book last week; How was it? B - It was interested and produced a series of facts corresponding closely to the dynamic role of Literature. A - Where was Ali yesterday? B - Ali went to buy some books. A - When are you going to finish reading of this book? B - With two coming days. A - How do your new books collections look? B - They have varied and significant information about Literature.</p>	4
4	Maxim of Relation	<p>A - Reading in literature is really fruitful and cannot be ignored. It provides us with experienced lessons of others' lives. B - I hope people get lessons of others' experiences by reading literature. A - How long until the publishing? B - It is three week. A - How was your book? B - It is interesting. A -Where can I find this book? B - It's published on Google.</p>	4
5	Code-switching	<p><i>Walaahyahbeby</i> this book <i>kulish</i> useful</p>	3
6	Grammatical Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is really <i>bored book</i> ● it <i>don't</i> count as bad ● reading <i>are</i> a pleasure ● Where <i>does</i> I find this version ● Perfect book <i>to reading</i> ● <i>could</i> anyone tell me the name of author ● I'm <i>does not</i> reading ● I have <i>enjoying with</i> 	8
7	Abbreviations	<p><i>Coz</i> <i>Thanx</i> <i>u</i> <i>r</i> <i>OMG</i> <i>glhf</i> <i>Thanx</i></p>	11

		Coz Tq Y @	
8	Colloquialism	oh yeah Oh So, I had noticed certain books So, how do you know this book?	4
9	Conversational lexis	Yeah Hahahaha	1
10	Exaggerated meaning	what actually you are saying	1
11	Dialect	color (American) on the weekend at weekends Ustath (teacher) Estath (teacher)	5
12	Using of prepositions	I wish i have time <i>for</i> read I do a semiotic study <i>with</i> my thesis <i>on</i> appropriate way <i>on</i> the weekend <i>at</i> weekends	5
13	Using of symbols and numbers	I am @ university thank you Dr. 4 this useful book Allah bless you it is 4 the specialist I have no time 2 do	4
14	Using of smiley face icons	this book is 😊 please 😊 when u get it	2
15	Politeness	A - As our professor Dr. Abdul- Wahid said, “Literature is the fruit of language”. B - If you do not mind. C - Please teacher, if you have time D - Good bye	4

3.4 Analysis

Table 2: The Analysis of Linguistic Forms Based on Categories

No	Categories	Linguistics form	Expressions
1	Maxim of Quality	A - Reading in literature is fun. B - Dear, I like to read literature, but I have no time.	Speaker B is truthful. He does not give information that is supported by evidence.
2	Maxim of Quantity	A - Ali and Saher are reading this book next week. B - I will take into consideration both readings.	Speaker B gives as much information as is needed.

3	Maxim of Manner	A - I hear you went to read this book last week; How was it? B - It was interested and produced a series of facts corresponding closely to the dynamic role of Literature.	Speaker B's replay is clear and brief. He avoids obscurity and ambiguity.
4	Maxim of Relation	A - Reading in literature is really fruitful and cannot be ignored. It provides us with experienced lessons of others' lives. B - I hope people get lessons of others' experiences by reading Literature.	Speaker B says things that are pertinent to the discussion.
5	Code-switching	Walaahyahbeby this book kulish useful.	I swear my beloved that this book very useful.
6	Grammatical Competence	It is really <i>bored book</i> .	It is really <i>boring book</i> .
7	Abbreviations	<i>Coz, thanx, ur, OMG, glhf</i>	Cause, thanks, your, oh my god, good luck, have fun
8	Colloquialism	<i>oh yeah</i> <i>Oh</i> So, I had noticed certain books	Uses to switch topics and make sure the conversation is heading in his desired direction. <i>Oh</i> shows the hesitation indicator. It is a way for the speaker to prompt to the listener that the next information is relevant to the listener's attentions.
9	Conversational lexis	<i>Yeah Hahahaha</i>	Serves as supportive minimal vocalisations.
10	Exaggerate meaning	what actually you are saying	Refers to what person is trying to say
11	Dialect	Color (American) <i>Ustath</i> (teacher) <i>Estath</i> (teacher)	Colour (British) <i>Ustath</i> is used in Baghdad <i>Estath</i> is used in south of Iraq

12	Using of prepositions	I wish I have time <i>for</i> read. I do a semiotic study with my thesis. on appropriate way on the weekend at weekends	I wish I have time to read. I do a semiotic study in my thesis.
13	Using of symbols and numbers	I am @ university. thank you Dr. 4 this useful book Allah bless you. it is 4 the specialist. I have no time 2 do.	I am <i>at</i> university. thank you Dr. <i>for</i> this useful book Allah bless you. it <i>for</i> the specialist. I have no time <i>to</i> do.
14	Using of smiley face icons	this book is 😊 please 😊 when u get it	This book is good Please call me when you get it
15	Politeness	A - As our professor Dr. Abdul-Wahid said 'Literature is the fruit of language'. B - If you do not mind.	Uses title to respect a person. If you agree.

Discussion

Obviously, Facebook allows users to maintain superficial social relationships with large numbers of people. This study described the language use of a group of Iraqi intellectuals via Facebook. The habitual use of Facebook and its integration into daily life indicates that it has become an indispensable tool for this group. Some of the users share the same grammatical mistakes as they are in the same setting. These findings indicate that these people have their own way of understanding each other. We notice that all the Iraqi participants practise Grice's Maxims (1975) of the Cooperative Principles. There are similarities in their style, grammatical knowledge as well as the use of politeness and abbreviation. In general, the findings from the qualitative analysis identify the language and grammatical rules used by Iraqi Facebook users as can be seen in the following examples:

1. A: Reading in literature is fun.
B: Dear, I like to read literature, but I have no time.

In the example, we could see that speaker B's contribution is informative as required and no more information is needed.

2. A: Ali and Saher are reading this book next week.
B: I will take into consideration both readings.

In Example 2, speaker B obeys the maxim of quantity (as his response attends to the topic initiated by A). As a result, it can be said that speaker B has taken into consideration the reading of his two peers without deliberating the omission of the name of the two readers.

3. A: I hear you went to read this book last week; how was it?
B: It was interesting and produced a series of facts corresponding closely to the dynamic role of Literature.

In the example, speaker B tries to be as clear, brief, and orderly as one can be in what one says, avoiding obscurity and ambiguity.

4. A: Reading in literature is really fruitful and cannot be ignored. It provides us with experienced lessons of others' lives.
B: I hope people get lessons of others' experiences by reading literature.

In this example, speaker B obeys the maxim of relation by providing the requested information and saying something in relation to the first sentence. The second speaker intends his contribution to be relevant as an answer to A's opinion.

5. *Walaahyahbeby* this book *kulish* useful.
(I swear my beloved that this book very useful).

In this example, the Iraqi speaker obviously does not have an equivalent for the Arabic words "*Walaah*" that is actually the speaker's swearing. "*yhabeby*" means "*my sweetheart*" and "*kulish*" is the Arabic equivalence of the English phrase "very much". It could be noticed that the language of the speaker is changed in the conversation. The Iraqi participant decides here to shift from the English language to Arabic in order to provide continuation to the speech and also because of his failure to find the suitable expression.

According to Ahmad (2014), 'Code-switching could be defined as a term used to refer to the act of conversing in another language, besides the mother tongue' and also that it is a 'combination of words, phrases and sentences that result from sentence limitations in similar speech context.' Freeman and Freeman (2001) as cited in Hughes, Shaunessy, Brice, Ratliff, and McHatton mention that code switching is 'an indicator of subtractive development of language when students select words and phrases because of the inadequacy of their language abilities' as 'when a student does not have the grasp of a second language firmly enough to communicate, they must reach for their primary language to fill in the gaps'. Consequently, code switching "serves as a 'filler' to continue the flow of the communication process, but it also is indicative of a weakness in the second language, a subtractive element".

6. It is really bored book.

This example shows the participants' lack of grammatical competence. As a matter of fact, without grammatical knowledge, the sentence is just as a combination of contents whereby communicators are likely to convey their thoughts in a wrong way, hence affecting the meaningfulness of their communication. Azar (2007) as cited in Lin (2008) points out that

“the role of grammar is to ‘help students discover the nature of language, i.e., that language consists of predictable patterns that make what we say, read, hear, and write intelligible’”. Azar also states that, ‘without grammar, people would have only individual words or sounds, pictures, and body language to communicate meaning’ and that ‘effective grammar instruction can help students use this knowledge as they write’. The Iraqi Facebook interlocutors show their lack in specifying the meaning of a language associated with its grammatical knowledge. They do not understand how a sentence is used and how sentences are formed in a message. The differences in meanings between *-ing* and *-ed* adjectives as in the indicated sentence may lead to misunderstanding.

7. *Coz, thanx, ur, OMG, glhf*

Abbreviations on Facebook are usually created by using only initial letters of the words which are to be written. In the above example, the word *Coz* may have different meanings because it can serve as an abbreviation. To prove this statement, another example is provided: *OMG* could mean *All Mighty God* or *Original Messages Gained*. Therefore, abbreviations that are used by the Iraqi interlocutors are influenced by the factors that are based on general knowledge, e.g. *thanx*.

As a matter of fact, abbreviations are understood by their addressees. In the above-mentioned example, *gl* and *hf* have secret meanings which lead to misinterpretations. Furthermore, words like *Coz* and *ur* may not be commonly used and might not be understood by everyone. The abbreviations, e.g. ‘*Thanx* my dear...indeed *u r* same’ make the conversation more intimate. It may have also been used for quicker typing.

8. *Oh yeah, Oh*

In this above example, colloquialism has occurred and it is used to change the topic. In colloquial conversation, speakers exchange innocuous comments without trying to persuade one another of validity of a particular view. A participant may be asked questions to find out if his assumptions were correct and so he uses *Oh yeah* to switch topics and make sure the conversation is heading in his desired direction. Additionally, *Oh* is sometimes used to change the topic. *Oh* is a way for a knowledgeable conversationalist to avoid uncooperative silences. Additionally, *Oh* shows the hesitation indicator as it is used possibly to give the person time to think whilst typing or it is something the reader thought and then typed. This hesitation indicator is often used in spoken language for ‘thinking time’ so that a person can keep his turn in the conversation.

8.1. So, I had noticed certain books

In this example, the speaker is replying to the listener’s question with a sentence-initial *so*. But why is this *so*? One explanation is that in this case, *so* is being used as a filled pause, as in the way that *well*, *um*, and *like* are used in conversations. Nevertheless, *so* as a discourse marker is ‘more nuanced’ than that. When one person asks a question and the other person’s response begins with *so*, it sounds like you should be continuing a narrative. In fact, *so* is not being used just to fill a pause but as a tool for conversation management.

The participant begins his sentence with *so* as a signal that his coming words are chosen for their relevance to the listener. If words like *so* and *oh* were used to arbitrarily fill a

pause, they would not take on such different functions from each other. Thus, the sentence-initial *so* is a way for the speaker to prompt to the listener that the next information is relevant to the listener's attentions. Whether or not the information is actually relevant is for the listener to decide.

The following is another example:

8.2. So, how do you know this book?

In this example, we see that *So* is used to carry on the conversation. *So* is a tool that helps ensure the conversation keeps up its pace by allowing a quick transition from one topic to another.

9. *yeah and hahaha*

In the example, conversational lexis, e.g. *yeah* and *hahaha* are used to keep the flow of the conversation and make it more spoken although it is a piece of written text. They can also serve as supportive minimal vocalizations.

10. what actually you are saying

In this example, 'what actually you are saying' is an exaggerated question to extract what person 'b' is trying to say.

11. 'Ustaath' (teacher) 'Estath' (teacher)

In this example, we can see from the speech segments that the language variety/dialect of the first participant does not match the dialect of the second speaker. Solano-Flores (2006) describes dialect as 'a variation of a language that is characteristic of the users of that language' and register as a 'variation of a language that is determined by use – a situation or context.' Halliday (1978) as cited in Solano-Flores (2006), quotes that 'dialects are different ways of saying the same thing; they reflect social structure (e.g. class, gender, and origin)' whereas 'registers are ways of saying different things; they reflect social processes (e.g., division of labour, specialty, contexts, content areas, and specific activities)'.

The association of dialect with register is related to the fact that conversation calls for certain dialectical modes. The style of the Iraqi speakers is transformed into individual dialect or individual speech that is recognised as the style-generating factor. The word *Ustaath* (teacher) (articulated with rounded lips) that the first speaker used is related to the Iraqi capital where most people have the same dialect and standard language form. On the other hand, the second participant used the word "Estath" (teacher) (articulated with opened lips) which has a different pronunciation that refers to a city in the south of Iraq in which almost everyone has their own dialect but does not consider standard language. However, the two speakers understood each other but produced different language forms.

12. - I wish I have time *for* read.
- I do a semiotic study with my thesis.
- on appropriate way
- on the weekend
- at weekends

Prepositions are simple; they only function to show relationships. In the above examples, we could see the widely incorrect usage of such prepositions. In the last two examples, there is a difference in the use of British English and American English. Iraqi participants use the American English *on the weekend* instead of the British English *at weekends*. This may be related to the impact of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.

13. - I am @ university.
- thank you Dr. 4 this useful book Allah bless you.
- it is 4 the specialist.
- I have no time 2 do.

Using symbols and numbers is an art of converting abstract meanings into marvelous text symbols. In the above examples, the interlocutors use symbols to create more interesting and entertaining Facebook experience. They paste them in their comments in order to make their communication in a myriad of fun ways.

14. this book is 
please  when u get it

In this example, the Iraqi speaker's facial expression changes when having a conversation and a smiley face is used in text messages to achieve the same result. It lets participants know the speaker is smiling, laughing or is very happy with the conversation taking place. The speaker would take that to mean the other interlocutor was smiling when he sent the message or know if he was joking with him/her. A simple smiley face allows participants to show emotions. Despite its simplicity, a smiley face helps a person to correctly interpret their intent and meaning in Facebook conversations.

15. A - As our professor Dr. Abdul-Wahid said 'Literature is the fruit of Language'.
B - If you do not mind.
C - Please teacher, if you have time...
D - Good by

In these examples, there are indirect speech acts that are designed to show or convey deference. As such, the politeness strategies allow Iraqi participants to convey a sense of respect for the other interlocutor. The speakers display a positive relationship with each other and also use politeness registers that allow them to indicate their education level or type of relation with each other.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Facebook allows users to maintain superficial social relationships with large numbers of people. Most of the Iraqi participants in this study (through the employment of Grice's Maxims, 1975) have a basic understanding of Facebook conversation that takes part in certain situations. They tend to be satisfied with the mere *idea* of language control in their communication. Although many restrict their selection of accurate expressions, they do seem to fully understand that their level of language is relative to the number of friends. However, new applications and features are developed and implemented continually on Facebook. Therefore, it can be assumed that language of users changes as technological framework changes. However, the results indicate that participants used less knowledge of grammatical rules but frequent use of abbreviation in their communication. In summary, people should realise that improving language communication skills will not only enable them to become better communicators but also improve their culture and country's position in the international arena. The writers hope that the findings in this study will contribute to this process of education on Facebook knowledge. It would be desirable to conduct further research to examine how users' words change over time and also investigate the relationship between interlocutors as this would enable educators to further develop strategies for user education and also seek improvement in interlocutors' interaction.

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