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Linguistic Deviation in Social Media: An Investigation of English Neologisms on Facebook by Sri Lankan Undergraduates

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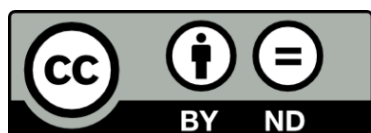
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Abstract

In the modern world, social media has replaced face-to-face interaction as an effective and efficient mode of communication. Language on these platforms is a significant variant of its everyday spoken and written formats as deviation from conventional linguistic norms is frequently identified in their discourse. In this context, the present study examined the English neologisms on Facebook used by Sri Lankan undergraduates. The study was conducted to examine the linguistic innovations in virtual communication, their lexical formation, and their role in facilitating communication. 30 first-year BSc undergraduates studying at a national university were selected through a questionnaire by employing the purposive sampling method. The data comprised of neologisms extracted from picture captions, individual comments and status updates of the individual Facebook profiles of these users. An open-ended questionnaire was also distributed among the participants to investigate the different functions of neologisms in the communication of Facebook. The findings revealed that, new lexical items were present in the participants' discourse in the forms of complete words and abbreviations. It was identified that compounding, clipping, omission of vowels, and derivation are the common strategies for generating neologisms on Facebook. As per the perspective of the participants, neologisms are mainly used for the objectives of experimenting with the language, for creativity, to draw the viewers' attention to the posts, to follow the language style of other Facebook users, and to save time. It was evident that linguistic innovation on Facebook facilitates effective communication by enhancing the better expression of ideas.

Keywords: Facebook, Linguistic Innovation, Neologisms, Social Media



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**Original Article****INTRODUCTION**

Human language is constantly evolving to facilitate the numerous communicative needs stemming from a variety of social settings. This can be observed across different communicative contexts including social media, one of the most recent additions to virtual communication. Today, social networking sites are increasingly becoming popular among all age groups as communication is heavily reliant on technology. Due to its ease of access, and the ability to share a piece of information with a large number of people over a short period, social media has replaced face-to-face human interaction as a successful mode of communication. Commenting on the use of language on social media, Chamajewa (2021) has claimed that, "the version of English used on social media is not the same that is used in the world of natural science. The modern form of communication differs from Standard English in its orthographic representation. Users want to bring their message across as fast as possible, without considering spelling rules" (p.3). According to Shahlee and Mustaffa (2019), communication on social media involves "some of the new vocabularies and words or terms which are not even officially established and recorded in the dictionary" (p.1). As evidenced in these statements, social media users employ a non-standard and informal variant of language which is salient to these online platforms.

Vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and even meaning are altered when the language is used for communication on social media. Al-Salman (2017) has defined this language as "a special jargon featuring symbols, abbreviations, acronyms, contractions and numbers to create new words and to consequently open channels for private communication with users" (p.147).

In this context, the study analyzes the English neologisms in the communication of Facebook by Sri Lankan undergraduates. 30 voluntary participants were involved in the study and language data was gathered from picture captions, individual comments, and status updates of the selected students over three months. Accordingly, the innovative lexical items in the participants' virtual discourse, their formation, and their functions in facilitating effective communication are examined.

The findings of the study are expected to generate a comprehensive analysis of language innovation on Facebook with an emphasis on the communication of young undergraduates. It is expected that the data gathered from their virtual discourse would reveal key aspects of innovative language use including the different linguistic strategies employed and the factors that have induced linguistic deviation. As fewer studies have been conducted in this domain specifically in the local context, the study would reveal unique findings in understanding the language

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deviation by young Sri Lankan undergraduates on social media.

Research Background

Over the past few decades, human communication has undergone significant changes with face-to-face interaction being replaced by Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). In this context, social media has become a popular platform of interaction today. According to Eijansantos (2018), “Facebook is among the most trafficked social networking sites (SNSs) on the Internet” (p.47). As indicated by Triana et al. (2020), “the existence of Facebook as a social media connecting people although they do not meet face to face in the real world is undeniable” (p.10). They have further commented that “Facebook has become a new communication trend where people can actualize their needs of connection and sharing information through the various devices and features that they have” (p.12). Thus, the language behavior of individuals on social networking sites especially Facebook has often been a key area of interest in many sociolinguistic studies. A particularly highlighted aspect in such previous research is how young communicators utilize language on this social networking site. It has been constantly observed that the conventional rules of language are altered during online communication by the aforementioned young users.

Facebook is a popular platform for interaction among young

undergraduates in Sri Lanka. As the majority of them reside away from home, these individuals often use Facebook as a medium of keeping in touch with friends and family. They also use this virtual platform to share their memories, important achievements, to talk about current news and their university life. It is frequently seen that their discourse on social networking platforms involves unique linguistic attributes.

Limitations of the Study

Even though language innovation is seen across a wide variety of social media platforms, the data collected for the present study is restricted to Facebook applications. The selected participants are 30 first-year BSc undergraduates (20-23 years) studying at a national university. They speak Sinhala as their first language while using English as a second language of communication. Although social media discourse is enriched with different languages by interlocutors from various communities, the current study concentrates on the English language. In addition, picture captions, status updates, and individual comments comprise the corpus for analysis although Facebook is used for different communicative purposes. The data gathered from December 2023 to February 2024 is considered for the study.

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According to Trimastuti (2017), "the essence of communication is the transmission of meaning from one individual to another." (p. 64). As highlighted in many studies, language plays a crucial role in the aforesaid transmission. Tsamratul'aeni (2019) has claimed that "language is a social interaction tool or tool of human communication used in society" because "in every communication, "each one conveys information, in the form of thoughts, ideas, and emotions directly" and language is the most effective means of fulfilling these actions (p. 70). Over the past few decades, every language used in human communication has undergone numerous changes to facilitate communication within different contexts which is a phenomenon known as language change/ variation in the domain of sociolinguistics. According to Koka (2019), "linguistic variation is central to the study of language use. It is an inherent property of almost all widely used languages of the world. It is impossible to study the language forms used in the natural atmosphere without being confused with the issue of linguistic variation" (p. 1071). Based on a study by Nordquist (2019), "language change is the phenomenon by which permanent alterations are made in the features and the use of a language over time." He has stressed that, "all natural languages

change, and language change affects all areas of language use." The author has identified five different areas of change namely, sound changes, lexical changes, semantic changes, and syntactic changes. According to Jeresano and Carretero (2022), language change is mostly initiated by young adults as they are "undeniably the first digital natives that are born with estimable technological advances and are exposed to social media, smartphones, and instant accessibility of information" (p. 2).

Language on Social Media

Commenting on language variation on social media, Nwala and Tamunobelema (2019) have claimed that, "the language of the Facebook of late is in the state of flux. People use all forms of acronyms and neologisms to represent their ideas, opinions, and messages" (p.9). According to Jafarov (2020), the different linguistic innovations have resulted in a language that is peculiar to the context of social media, and "this peculiarity exceeds the bounds of rules and norms of traditional linguistics" (p.954). Based on their observations on the language behavior of social media users, Čilić & Plauc (2021) have claimed that "people's creativity to communicate faster has accelerated the transformation of language rhythm and words" (p.116). They have further stated that "new words are evidently and constantly entering the lexicon to describe new concepts and technologies and what they mean to us.

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Conversely, older words become more archaic and continually fall out of use as they decrease in cultural significance" (p.117). According to Al-Salman (2017), "the kind of discourse used in social media may be described as a special jargon featuring symbols, abbreviations, acronyms, contractions and numbers to create new words and to consequently open channels for private communication with users" (p.173). According to Verheijen (2017), language on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) including social networking sites "is a digitally written language variant that is especially used by youths in informal communication via new media and is characterized, to a greater or lesser extent, by deviations from the standard language norms at different levels of writing, such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation" (p.76). In their study on the language behavior of young adults on Facebook, Jeresano and Carretero (2022) have stated that the different linguistic features used by individuals in their virtual communication "revealed their digital culture which demands speed of typing or says something in an easy way, creates specific code of symbols that bears meanings to prove that they are part of a certain group, introduces new trends, shows their creativity, adoptability, and adaptability as well" (p.18).

Facebook and Language Study

Since its inception in 2004, Facebook has been a popular application among linguists as a means of studying language, its variation, and how individuals of different age groups utilize language in virtual communication. According to Kay et al (2022) today, Facebook "has become a network for people to stay in touch despite the distance between them and without having to meet in person" (p. 2). Based on the observations of Dąbrowska (2019), "online communication via social media like Facebook, which encourages a spontaneous and relaxed way of self-expression, is a good tool for studying both the character of English as a global language and gender differences in the use of language also in the written form, so far largely neglected in sociolinguistic studies" (p. 250). Syakur et al (2021) have identified that on Facebook, there exists language variation and variety "as a result of social diversity and diversity of language functions" (p. 4). Features like acronyms and abbreviations, neologisms, unstructured language formats, creative use of spelling and punctuation, and logograms have been identified as common characteristics of the language on Facebook by many scholars like Nwala and Tamunobelem (2019), Benamara et al (2018) and Kurniawan (2016).

**Original Article****Previous Studies in the Sri Lankan Context**

It was examined that the language in social media discourse is a relatively novel area of research in the Sri Lankan context. Few studies have explored different facets of language used for communication on Facebook by the Sri Lankan interlocutors. In analyzing the social media behavior of university students in Sri Lanka, Athukorala (2021) has stated that “the popularity of social media among higher education students appears to be growing by the day, and many of them rely on it for connections and communication” (p.410). Hence, the author claims that social media usage by undergraduates is remarkably at a high level. Jayawardhana et al (2023) have identified that Sri Lankan bilinguals incorporate the morphological strategies of borrowing, compounding, clipping, and the use of acronyms to form a new set of vocabulary on Facebook.

As indicated in the above literature, social media, specifically, the Facebook application is an interesting source for investigating language innovation in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). Further, youth and their language behavior on social media has been a frequently studied area of research. However, there is an absence of sufficient studies in the domain of language and social media particularly in the local context where social networking is an extremely popular medium of communication among the

younger generation. Therefore, the research gap concentrates on Sri Lankan undergraduates and their language innovation on Facebook.

METHODOLOGY**Target Population**

The target population of the study was first-year BSc undergraduates studying at a national university in Sri Lanka. To create a homogeneous sample group, a questionnaire was distributed among the students to identify: their first and second languages, if they frequently use Facebook and for what purposes, their preferred language of communication on Facebook, how they rate their proficiency in English, their familiarity with Facebook terminology and how often they use innovative language during their communication on Facebook.

Sample Group and Their Background

Based on the responses to the questionnaire, 30 participants were selected. The group comprised 17 female and 13 male students belonging to the age group of 20-23 years. They are Sinhala speakers of English and they all rated their proficiency in English as good or very good. Their medium of communication on Facebook is English and they are active users of the Facebook application primarily to connect with family and friends in addition to sharing information. Regarding the use of language, all the undergraduates acknowledged their familiarity with

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the salient terminology used on Facebook. Further, they indicated that they do not adhere to the conventional rules of language during their communication on Facebook and that they frequently incorporate creative expressions/ non-standard forms of language to share their ideas, thoughts, and messages.

Data Collection Method

With the participants' informed consent, the individual Facebook profiles of the students were accessed and language data belonging to the categories of status updates, individual comments, and picture captions were extracted. Data collection was conducted over three months, from December 2023 to February 2024. The gathered data was categorized based on the different linguistic features and coded for easy reference and identification. An open-ended questionnaire was also distributed among the participants to examine their purposes of linguistic innovation in virtual communication. The data gathered from the responses to the questionnaire is presented using a graph (Figure 1).

Ethical Considerations

Before data analysis, informed consent was obtained from the participants through a consent form and a research information sheet distributed before data collection. Accordingly, the purpose of the study, the nature of data to be gathered from their Facebook profiles, and how that data was to be

utilized in the study were explained to them in detail. Their anonymity was ensured and they were also explained that any information that could disclose their identity or any sensitive information would be deliberately avoided from being considered for the study. Further, the students were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the opportunity to withdraw their consent anytime during the period of study.

During data collection, language variation identified in the undergraduates' Facebook profiles was documented in the form of screenshots. The data gathered throughout the period of study were stored in the computer hard drive and password protected to ensure that they were accessible only to the researcher. In the process of data analysis, the participants remained anonymous and coding was used to identify the data.

Data Analysis

The study relied on observation and documenting extracts of the undergraduates' virtual communication to generate findings. Hence, the gathered data was descriptive in nature which required a detailed analysis. Further, the linguistic characteristics of each data required to be examined individually in order to produce a comprehensive and accurate conclusion. Therefore, the qualitative method was applied.



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Data analysis of the study involved four key stages. Initially, the screenshots of language extracts were documented. Secondly, their similar linguistic attributes were classified. In the third phase, the identified characteristics were analyzed with emphasis on their innovative features and how those linguistic attributes have changed the conventional norms of language. At the final stage, conclusions were made based on the findings of the analysis. The findings of the open-ended questionnaire were analyzed by categorizing similar responses together and presenting them in a graph.

RESULTS

In the language extracts gathered for the study, compounding, derivation, omission of vowels, and clipping were identified as the most common strategies for generating an innovative lexicon. Accordingly, it was examined that the resultant neologisms were abbreviations or complete words. Further to these neologism formation strategies, some popular innovative terms widely used on the platform of Facebook were also observed in the undergraduates' discourse. It was evident that, in the absence of face-to-face interaction, the non-standard terminology on Facebook helps its users to convey a message effectively.

The aforementioned types of neologisms along with their word formation strategies are analyzed

below with extracts from the undergraduates' Facebook discourse.

Complete Words

It was observed that innovative words on Facebook mostly belong to the grammatical categories of nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. In addition, neologisms with associative meanings and popular Facebook neologisms were also recognized in the undergraduates' virtual communication. It was further identified that compounding and derivation are the commonly used word formation strategies employed by the selected participants.

Compounding

In the formation of Facebook neologisms by the undergraduates, compounding was identified as the most frequently employed method where two different lexical items were combined/joined resulting in a word with new meaning and form. While compounding in traditional linguistics is confined to the combinations of two nouns (N+N), two verbs (V+V), and noun and verb (N+V), deviations in these rules were observed in the gathered data.

Table 1. Compounding

Code	Neologism	Formation
E1	<i>Chillaxing (n)</i>	chill + relaxing
E2	<i>Awwwdorable (adj)</i>	awww + adorable
E3	<i>Eggspensive (adj), Eggstremely (adv)</i>	eggs + expensive, eggs + extremely
E4	<i>Futurepreneurs (n)</i>	Future + entrepreneurs



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E1 depicts an example of compounding a noun and verb (N+V) which has resulted in an innovative verb, chillaxing. A combination of a noun and adjective (N+Adj) and a noun and an adverb (N+ Adv) have generated the words eggspensive and eggstremely in E3. E4 illustrates the compounding of two nouns (N+N) to create the neologism futurepreneurs. A different strategy can be observed in E2 where a popular virtual expression “awww” (an indication of praise and affection), has been combined with the adjective “adorable” which has resulted in a word with new meaning.

In all of the above examples, linguistic deviation is evident in the exaggerated use of conventional language rules to generate a non-standard lexicon. As these neologisms are restricted to the context of Facebook, it is understood that their objective in virtual communication is to facilitate the expression of ideas.

Derivation

Further to the examples discussed above, derivation was also seen as a frequently employed strategy in generating neologisms. In morphology, derivation denotes the idea of creating a new word by adding a prefix or a suffix. The resulting words are usually different in meaning and form in comparison to the original word. Derivation on Facebook was a commonly observed technique of producing neologisms, particularly about innovative adjectives and nouns.

However, adding suffixes was the only derivation strategy identified in the undergraduates’ discourse.

Table 2. Derivation

Code	Neologism	Formation
E5	tripping	trip + ing
E6	selfie-ing	selfie+ing
E7	gorgeousness	gorgeous + ness
E8	constants	constant + s
E9	handsomes	handsome + s
E10	christmassy	christmas + sy
E11	limey	lime + y

As indicated in the above examples, the participants have generated new word forms by altering the existing words via the addition of suffixes “ing,” “ness,” “s,” “sy,” and “y.” Accordingly, the nouns handsomes (people who are handsome), constants (the ones who are constantly there), and gorgeousness (the state of being gorgeous) have been generated through derivation. Two newly generated verbs: tripping (the action of going on a trip), selfie-ing (the action of taking a selfie), and two adjectives: limey (having the taste of limes) and Christmassy (having the Christmas atmosphere) have also been invented and used in communication.

Exaggerated application of standard language rules can be observed in the above lexical items as well. Some of the suffixes in the examples are existent in the conventional spoken and written language while the others have been invented by the interlocutors. However, the resulting word in each case is a neologism that has to be interpreted based on its context of use.



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Neologisms with Associative Meaning

Nkhata and Jimaima (2020) have emphasized that even though morphology analyzes how interlocutors can produce potential words, they are still capable of creating many new words that are not used in utterances. Therefore, they argue that the lexicon is persistently subject to change. Consistent with this statement, neologisms with associative meanings were identified to be a frequent occurrence in the virtual discourse of participants. This was mostly observed concerning picture captions as follows,

*Dreams come true!!! Met my favorite music band WAYO at the concert last night. What a **FAN**tastic moment 🥳*

In the above post, the word fan in the term fantastic has been written in capital letters to denote the meaning that the Facebook user is a “fan” of the aforementioned music band. Within a common word, he has attempted to identify and emphasize a different implication that fits both his communication and the context.

*Do I look **spec-tacular** or not 😎*

This caption was used along with a picture where a person had tried spectacles for the first time. She has attempted to make the caption relatable to the photo by altering the adjective spectacular as spec-tacular suggesting that she was referring to her spectacles.

*Found 3 puppies (1 female, 2 male) outside the campus gate. Please share this and help them find **fur-ever** homes. Photos will be uploaded soon.❤️*

The above post shared by an animal lover is a message intending to find homes for stray puppies she has found close to the campus. A neologism, “fur-ever” can be identified which has been used as an expression of love and adoration to replace the conventional term “forever”.

*Spending **quali-tea** time with these lovelies ❤️*

A group of friends having tea at a famous local restaurant was the picture titled this caption. Creative use of language which has resulted in an innovative linguistic element can be observed here in the expression ‘quali-tea time’. The user intends to communicate that she spent quality time with her friends while having tea. In conveying this idea, she has generated this novel term which creatively brings out both her messages in a concise manner.

Popular Facebook Neologisms

The undergraduates’ discourse extracts revealed some popular Facebook neologisms as well. These lexical items facilitate fast and innovative communication though most of them do not bear meaning outside virtual interaction. Certain everyday words that express a different meaning (re-appropriation) were also identified among them.



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Table 3. Popular Facebook Neologisms

Code	Neologism	Intended Meaning	
E12	<i>FAMBAM</i>	family	
E13	<i>bestie</i>	best friend (female)	
E14	<i>Friendversary</i>	anniversary of celebrating friendship	
E15	<i>Like, share, and hit thumbz up</i>	the icons on Facebook that allow users to perform different actions	

While the terms *FAMBAM* and *bestie* in E12 and E13 are frequently used neologisms salient on Facebook, *friendversary* in E14 is a compounded term generated by joining the nouns, friend and anniversary together. Like, share, and thumbs up in E15 are examples of re-appropriation where the existing lexical items have been given a new meaning relevant to the context of social media. Accordingly, these terms refer to the icons on Facebook that allow the users to engage in the actions of clicking the like button, sharing a picture or a post in their profile, and selecting the thumbs-up icon which allows them to show their agreement to a content shared by another user.

Innovative Abbreviations

In the Standard English language, abbreviations are formed by combining the first letter of each word. Further, these letters usually appear in capitals. However, in the discourse of undergraduates on Facebook, several innovative deviations from these rules

were observed. While two or more words are required to form an abbreviation, it was widely seen that single words are also abbreviated using a variety of novel linguistic strategies. Also, as per the data gathered from the participants' Facebook profiles, abbreviating the common words in the language is a recurrent practice involved in their discourse.

Popular Internet/ Social Media Abbreviations

Discourse on Facebook consists of popular social media abbreviations that are widely used in communication. As evidenced by the data, they are extensively employed by many interlocutors. While the majority of these abbreviations do not have any meaning outside the context of Facebook, its users, especially the younger generation frequently incorporate them in virtual communication. In examining the data gathered from the undergraduates' profiles, it was evident that the aforementioned abbreviations are a common occurrence in their language usage as follows,

Table 4. Popular Internet/ Social Media Abbreviations

Code	Abbreviation	Intended Meaning
E16	<i>lol</i>	laughing out loud
E17	<i>DM</i>	Direct Message
E18	<i>HBD</i>	Happy Birthday
E19	<i>#TBT</i>	Throwback Thursday
E20	<i>BFF</i>	Best of Friends
E21	<i>pls</i>	please
E22	<i>hun</i>	honey



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As can be seen in the data, many of the above-abbreviated words follow the conventional rules of abbreviating. Accordingly, they have been composed by using the first letter of each word. However, a deviation of this rule can be observed in E21 and E22 where the omission of vowels (pls) and phonetic sounds (hun) have been used respectively. It can be conceded by observing the above examples that young social media users employ the above-discussed abbreviations as a means of adopting the communication style of their peers. Using these newly invented terms in discourse could be an indication of their desire to identify themselves as members of their age group and the virtual community.

In addition to the common Facebook abbreviations, it was observed that the communication of undergraduates contains many innovative abbreviations that have been generated by altering the standard rules of language. They are presented below in detail along with their language formation strategies.

Omission of Vowels

According to Stapa and Shaari (2012), the reduction of vowels is a widespread feature of online language among young participants. This was observed in the present study as well. Key examples extracted from the undergraduates' communication are listed below,

Table 5. Omission of Vowels

Code	Abbreviation	Intended Meaning
E23	<i>Dnt, knw, cnt, hv</i>	Don't, know, can't, have
E24	<i>exm</i>	exam
E26	<i>whn</i>	when
E27	<i>awsm</i>	awesome

While nouns are the most often abbreviated lexical unit in the Standard English language, a deviation in that norm can be seen in the above examples. Not only nouns but also verbs and question words have also been abbreviated in the extracts depicted in Table 4. In all the examples, the participants have intentionally omitted all or some of the vowels in each word. In E23, punctuation marks have also been left out as part of abbreviating. A different form of abbreviating can be seen in E24 and E27 where the vowel letters apart from those in the beginning have been omitted. It is clear that only the vowels that appear in between consonants are omitted by the users.

Clipping

Clipping or the formation of words by omitting letters was also identified in the study. This was often seen in the omission of the last few letters and this method was particularly observed with regard to abbreviating nouns and adjectives as follows,

Table 6. Clipping

Code	Abbreviation	Intended Meaning
E28	<i>fav</i>	favorite
E29	<i>fam, pic</i>	Family, picture
E30	<i>darl</i>	darling



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In the examples presented above, only the first three/four letters of each word have been typed while the remaining letters have been omitted. Consistent with the previous set of examples, it can be conceded that the users expect their peers to understand the message by following the given letters or through the context of communication.

Abbreviating Questions

While a large number of abbreviations were identified with regard to single words, the following abbreviated expressions were observed in the formation of questions. This was a novel finding which was not identified in previous studies.

Table 7. Abbreviated Questions

Code	Abbreviation	Intended Meaning
E31	W r u?	Where are you?
E32	W b u?	What about you?

In E31, the first letter of the question word has been used at the beginning. But the remaining two words have been replaced by the letters synonymous with their phonetic sounds /a:/ and /u:/. Similarly, in E32, the first letter of “where” has been typed while the word “you” has been indicated using phonetic spelling. However, in typing the word “about,” only the middle letter (b) has been inserted. It is evident that the creative use of language is not only restricted to word formation but it is employed in the construction of questions as well. Both these abbreviations were

individual comments that appeared in a conversation involving several other interlocutors. Therefore, consistent with many of the previously discussed examples, the intended meaning of these terms cannot be comprehended outside their discourse.

It was noteworthy that none of the abbreviated words in the communication of participants were lengthy lexical items consisting of a large number of letters. Also, all the abbreviated expressions are single-word terms. Further, these innovative abbreviations do not bear meaning outside the discourse in which they appear. Hence, it can be assumed that the abbreviation on Facebook is utilized as a means of creativity in addition to saving time. Further, in examining the abbreviated lexical items, it can be surmised that the participants concentrate primarily on making their message clear by using as few words as possible.

Functions of Facebook Neologisms

To explore how linguistic innovation facilitates effective communication in the virtual environment of social media, an open-ended questionnaire was distributed among the participants. In addition to inquiring about their familiarity and frequency of generating/using innovative words on Facebook, the students were instructed to list down the different functions of neologisms as per their perspective as Facebook users. The most common



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responses are categorized and presented below,

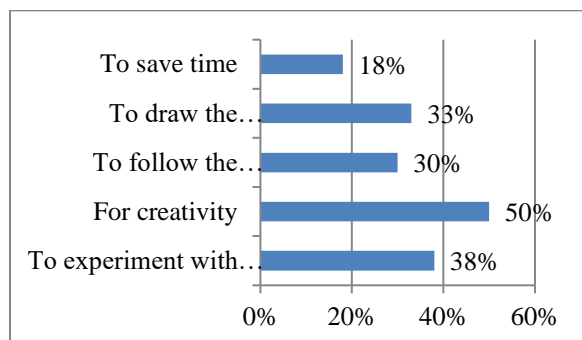


Figure 1. Functions of Neologisms on Facebook

Source: Questionnaire survey, 2024

As depicted in the above graph, the majority of the participants use neologisms as a means of creativity during virtual communication. According to 38% of the undergraduates, neologisms on Facebook enable them to experiment with the language which is not a practice accepted in other communicative contexts. Interestingly, 33% have claimed that they use innovative lexical terms to draw the attention of other viewers to their photos, comments, and pictures. The participants have also stated the need to follow the popular language trends on social media as a reason for using neologisms. It can be conceded that young Facebook users are keen to embrace and adopt the language practices of their peers. The lowest percentage (18%) of the participants mentioned that they incorporate neologisms as a mode of saving time during virtual communication. It is understood that, innovative expressions allow the users to share a

message in a less period in comparison to using standard language.

As the younger generation is keen to embrace and initiate language change, data gathered from their discourse sheds light on the key aspects of language variation on Facebook. In examining the Facebook discourse of undergraduates, it was observed that compounding, derivation, clipping, abbreviating, and omission are the most common strategies for constructing neologisms. In comparison to many previous researches, unique findings were identified in the present study about the neologisms with associative meanings and abbreviated questions. The study also revealed that the key purpose of neologisms on Facebook is to facilitate effective communication whereas expressing one's ideas and thoughts could be challenging in a virtual context due to the absence of face-to-face interaction. Further, it was understood that, through the innovative use of language, participants can communicate efficiently and effectively by consuming limited space and time. It is expected that the findings of this study will be a foundation for further research on identifying and analyzing the many facets of the ever-evolving social media discourse. Since the present study examined the virtual language of young undergraduates, future research can concentrate on social media users outside the university context. Accordingly,



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different age groups, professionals, and speakers of different first languages can be considered.

CONCLUSION

As revealed by the findings, undergraduates on Facebook incorporate the rules of language in unconventional and informal ways to produce a variety of new lexical items that are synonymous with the context of their communication. Hence, the present study contributes to developing a better understanding of language variation and the role of technology in promoting the aforementioned change. The findings of the study can be regarded as a foundation for further research analyzing the different facets of the ever evolving social media discourse. Since the present study examined the virtual language of young undergraduates, future research can concentrate on social media users beyond the university context. Accordingly, different age groups, professionals, and speakers of different first languages can be considered.

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