

WHATSAPP STATUS: A NEW FORM OF ANNOUNCEMENT FROM A SOCIO-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates WhatsApp statuses as a new form of announcements. The study explores the significance of the sociolinguistic and cultural implications of WhatsApp statuses, and how they are employed by Yemeni young people. The study indicates that WhatsApp statuses are used by Yemeni young people to express their beliefs and to reveal their thoughts. WhatsApp statuses are also used as a form of announcement to express emotional, religious, cultural and social issues. Announcing social, political, and personal news is a way of showing up how language is used to form a part of young people's daily lives. The researchers employed Fairclough (2003) analysis in analyzing the data focusing on the intertextual elements of the text. The elements for the analysis of a linguistic text are the text itself, the production and the perception of the text. In the present study, the focus is on the text and its message. This work helps in better understanding and interpretation of WhatsApp statuses as a means of communication and its implications on the language of young people.

Keywords: WhatsApp Statuses, form of announcements, sociolinguistics, cultural, states of users, text.

INTRODUCTION

We are part of the world which has rapidly developed as far as technology is concerned. Using smart phones has widely spread, affecting the whole world, especially within the last decade to the extent that, in most cases, the number of these handsets in one house has surpassed the number of the family members. Indeed, the smart phones has become an indispensable tool and "a number one companion" for most people, surpassing the boundaries of locality, age, gender, nationality, and language, among other things. We are not exaggerating if we say that smart phones have become like the flood that has washed most people away in comparison with the other technology devices (Klimsa et al., 2006; Al-Smadi, 2017; Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qiu, & Sey, 2006).

Social media users between the ages of 18 to 35 years spend a minimum of two hours online daily to communicate with others, keep updated or to just mindlessly scroll through their newsfeeds which takes up almost a quarter of their day (Khaleej Times, 2016). The growing importance of WhatsApp as a means of communication monitors WhatsApp users often to state their thoughts, emotions or ideas on their smart phone's status. It is of no doubt that this status is almost seen by the users' followers. For this reason, it is convenient if we claim that

the smart phone users become aware of what they are publicizing on their status pages. Most WhatsApp users tend to carefully select both the picture and status that other users will see whenever they exchange phone numbers. Hence, they consider it as a part of announcing information, or something related to political issues, or social matters. The rise of this awareness is the main cause to write this paper as the researchers would like to investigate the socio-cultural and sociolinguistic implications of these WhatsApp statuses and explore to what extent these statuses are considered announcements. Most importantly, the study highlights the significance of WhatsApp statuses and whether or not the users mean what they write and to what extent.

This paper attempts to investigate the WhatsApp status among Yemeni people from a sociolinguistic point of view. It analyzes WhatsApp status to look at young people's use of WhatsApp statuses and how they employ these statuses to disclose their personal information, emotions, and thoughts. The choice of the status as a linguistic element is dealt with here from a sociolinguistic perspective. It aims at analyzing the WhatsApp status into its categories and showing the attitudes of the people towards them as they use and fix these announcements on their profiles.

Statement of the problem

The use of smart phones has affected people's lives all over the world. WhatsApp is available in over 40 languages and up to 60 on Android. WhatsApp statuses often uncover the users' thoughts, emotions and states. In addition, it becomes a habit that via WhatsApps status, people can follow the news and spontaneously spread it since it is almost seen by the followers. So, it is convenient if we claim that the smart phones users become aware of what they are spreading on their status page. Because of this, most WhatsApp users tend to carefully select both the picture and status that other users will see and start to change their status constantly, considering it as a part of announcing information on personal, political, religious, or social issues. This has been referred to as "self-presentation", which can be defined as "the process through which individuals communicate an image of themselves to others" (Yang and Brown, 2016: 404). Hence, they consider it as a part of announcing information, or something related to political issues, or social matters. The rise of this awareness is the main cause to write this paper as the researchers would like to investigate the socio-cultural and sociolinguistic implications of these WhatsApp statuses and explore to what extent these statuses are considered announcements. Most importantly, the study highlights the significance of WhatsApp statuses and whether or not they mean it and to what extent or they are just mere random choices.

Aim of the study

This paper attempts to investigate the use of WhatsApp status among Yemeni students from a sociolinguistic point of view. It aims at analyzing WhatsApp statuses into various categories and the attitudes of the students towards them as they use them on their profiles.

Questions of the study

The research will answer the following questions:

1. Are WhatsApp statuses expressing their users' states?
2. What are the socio-cultural and sociolinguistic implications of these WhatsApp statuses?,
3. To what extent are these statuses considered announcements?

Significance of the study

The study analyzes WhatsApp statuses in the way that young people disclose their personal information, emotions, and thoughts. The choice of the status as a linguistic element is dealt with here from a sociolinguistic perspective. Furthermore, this study of the WhatsApp status might also open new visions for future researches.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The main advantage of using the smart phone is that it breaks the restrictions of being local and greatly reinforces the feeling of being international by realizing that anyone can be reached anytime by any person living anywhere all over the globe within seconds. Thus, using this handset means that a person is no longer living in isolation (Katz & Aakhus, 2002).

Socially speaking, a smart phone helps to easily befriend others and enlarge the circle of relations among those who have similar interests quite faster with little effort at the local and international level (Lamoureaux, 2011; Al-Azzam & Al-Quran, 2009). In addition, it has become a reliable instrument for achieving the daily routine assignments and duties at work. It can facilitate the different aspects of one's life and save time that is usually spent in running errands for people. Furthermore, it has a variety of smart applications, each of which can interestingly offers a different type of service for anyone using it.

WhatsApp is the most famous application of smart phones worldwide. The undeniable fact about this unique application is that it is quite hard for a person to spend the whole day without having a look at his/her WhatsApp application at least once a day. Many young people would be quite eager to update their WhatsApp statuses with what had happened within the last 24 hours. This is simply because this application has enabled the people from different parts of the world to enjoyably exchange text messages, photos, videos, and audio messages, among other things. Matters like receiving information, strengthening friendship, socialization, and school duties coordination have become attainable for all WhatsApp users. Thus, those who use this application actively have globally exceeded the number of 500 million people (<http://www.whatsapp.com>).

That being the case, the increasing importance of a such technological application and the great benefits and sociability, gained by WhatsApp users have aroused the researchers' curiosity to investigate the different aspect of this kind of new phenomenon that has recently dominated the world of communication. These research endeavors include: Sociolinguistic functions of English code-switching in mobile text messages of Jordanian students (Al-khatib & Sabbah, 2008); effectiveness of Arabic, English code-switching using WhatsApp program by Omani females (Al Shezawi, 2012). In addition, Al Rousan, Abdul Aziz, & Christopher (2014) examine the communicative functions of the text messaging of young Saudi university students. Five main categories of communicative functions had been indicated in Saudi undergraduate text messaging. There are friendship maintenance, socialization, school collaboration, coordination, and exchanging information. The study also indicates that text messaging is used beyond its original purpose which is staying in social contact. It proves that text messaging is essential for students' school matters. Badran (2014) investigates the syntactic and morphological variations of texts messages written in English by Jordanian females using WhatsApp. The results show that in addition to the availability of syntactic and morphological realizations in their texting, Jordanian females preserve English language structural order, and subject-verb agreement. Busabaa & Badurais (2015) study the influence of netspeak used by Yemeni youth on Arabic language analyzing the linguistic features of

this newly coined written form and the challenges Arabic faces. The findings prove that the netspeak used by Yemeni youth carries the features of the spoken language of its netizens with new emerging features which violate the purity of Arabic language and so has made a deviation from the standard orthography which is quite different from other papers findings where Arabized form is indicated as the norm. Furthermore, in their study, Al-Khawaldeh, Bani-Khair, Mashaqba, Huneety (2016) indicate that WhatsApp statuses were as a revelation of personal, social, religious and political issues the users are concerned about. Differences with respect to gender were not found in structural construction of the language rather in categories indicating various themes. Results showed that females status updates are more personal, religious and social while males are concerned more about political, national and international themes.

The most recent study concerning the linguistic aspects of WhatsApp in the Arab world is of Al-Smadi (2017). The study aims at investigating WhatsApp statuses as used by Jordanian people from a sociolinguistic point of view. The use of WhatsApp statuses in relation to the impact of gender and age was examined. 400 statuses were collected from Jordanian males and females who are divided into two main age groups. The data were analyzed quantitatively and categorized based on the religious, social, political, economic or fixed statuses. The results show that gender and age have essential impacts on the statuses used. The religious statuses are the most frequently used topic by Jordanian females while the social statuses are the most frequently used topic by Jordanian males. The political and economic statuses are the least frequent statuses used among Jordanians.

Another recent study is that of Maíz-Arévalo (2018). The study aims to redress self-presentation on WhatsApp; more specifically, by paying attention to emotional self-presentation in profile status. To that purpose, a corpus of 206 WhatsApp statuses was gathered in Spanish. Results show the existence of recurrent patterns connected to variables such as sex or age, which play a crucial role in determining the emotions users choose to display in their profile status.

This paper is an attempt to contribute to the recent academic studies of WhatsApp from a sociolinguistic point of view. From the above review, it is clear that the gap in the literature this paper is to fill is how young people are using WhatsApp to provide information about themselves and their thoughts. In other words, WhatsApp users are prompted to write an expression in order to complete their profile information. As a form of communication, the researchers address the issue of personal announcement in some way or another. WhatsApp statuses are always regarded as a way of communication designed by the sender to produce certain forms of reaction, behavior or attitude from the receiver of the message... [it takes the form of] a social process [and] as society changes, the transition of culture also changes (Akinbode, 2012). Announcing news politically, socially or personally is a way of showing up how language is used to form a part of human life. When using this or that form of announcements, it attempts to catch and attract the audience attention (Ezejideaku & Nkiruku 2010). Statuses state young people's attitudes as they pay attention to emotional self-presentation in their profile status.

In the early 1990s of the last century, people used to announce the birth of a newborn, condolence or make an advertisement using magazine or TV mass media and the like. Today, due to the fast and rapid development of technology, WhatsApp status becomes a form of advertising personal issues as a way of showing up special attitude, and a personal form to communicate through catching the attention of followers. Nowadays, with the increasing use

of the Internet to communicate, self-presentation takes place not only face-to-face but also digitally in the form of the profile or user status.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this brief related literature stated above has given prominence for this study to be the first of its type that investigates WhatsApp status as a new form of announcements from a sociolinguistic perspective.

METHODS

Research Design

The researchers spent 6 months collecting the data of the study. Two of the researchers who are staff teachers have taken the responsibility to ask their contacts who are students at Hadhramout University that they are going to observe their statuses for six months. So the data were collected both naturally and randomly. The users' identities remain top confidential. No personal data such as proper names, or photographs or even the expression used by the users have been displayed. Instead, they are exclusively reserved for research purpose so that to ensure both the ethics and validity of the data.

Data Analysis

Most WhatsApp users carefully tend to select both the picture and status that other users will see whenever they exchange phone numbers. As evidence of the importance of the status, the researchers follow Fairclough (2003) analysis in analyzing the data focusing on intertextual elements of the text. Text elements are co-operated and mixed to form one unit interpreting the state of mind of the user. Moreover, it may be an interpretation and a reflection of the state of the society as a whole. So, analyzing text sociolinguistically implies analyzing personal, social, religious, and political texts the WhatsApp status conveyed to linguistically display the meaning of every criteria of the short text next to the users' profile photo.

In this article, the researchers explore the connection between one element mentioned and the message the user would like to present of himself or herself or of the social everyday life. Undoubtedly, language is a part of social life (Fairclough, 2001). The elements needed for the analysis of a linguistic text is one of three types; the text itself, the production and the perception of the text. The concentration here is on the text and the message it conveys.

As a form of communication, the text presented in the profile of WhatsApp users is an interpretation of the users' state in one hand and the society state in another hand. The researchers address the issue of personal and social announcement in some way or another. These texts are always regarded as communication designed by the sender to produce certain forms of reaction, behavior or attitude from the receiver of the message as Akinbode (2012) states, "[it takes the form of] a social process [and] as society changes, the transition of culture also changes". Announcing news politically, socially or personally is a way of showing up how language is used to form a part of human life.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The researchers analyzed the users' statuses that express their states. Then the statuses that were counted as announcements were identified and analyzed.

WhatsApp statuses that express its users' states

The majority of the statuses were verbally written expressing the state of the users. This can be interfered from the emotional expressions and the language of these statuses as they are

characterized having the users' use of emotional expressions interpreting their feelings and states.

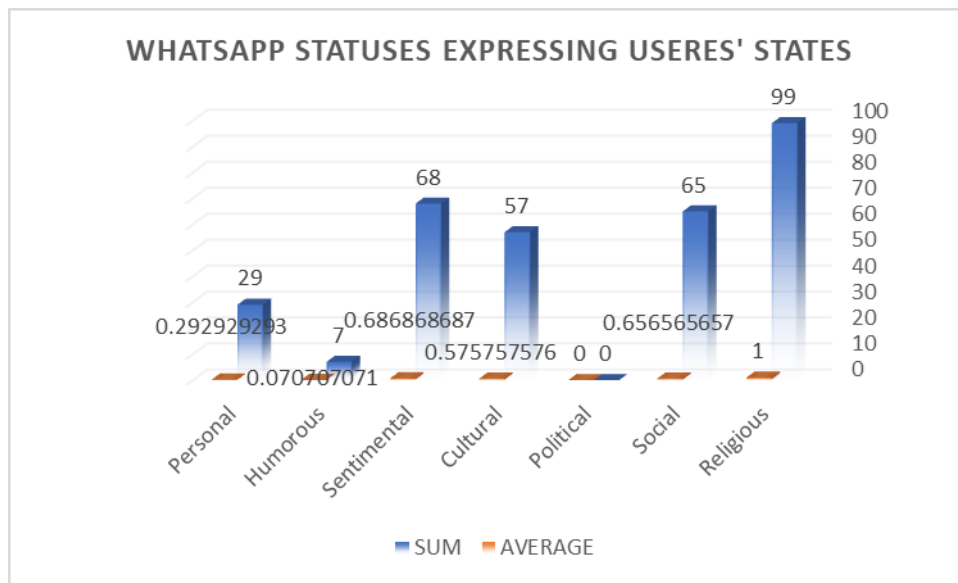


Figure 1. Average of WhatsApp Statuses that expresses users' states

As shown in figure (1) the states varied. These states have been classified into seven different types that express the users' personal information, emotions, and thoughts. The seven classes of the states can be categorized as religious, social, cultural, sentimental, humorous and personal. Figure (1) shows the number and average of each type of the states. The most prominent feature of the users' statuses is religious. 99 WhatsApp statuses were of religious nature. Out of the 325 statuses, 99 statues are religious, 65 are social, 57 are cultural, 68 are sentimental, 7 are humorous, 29 are personal and no state is recorded as political.

To what extent are these statuses considered as announcements?

WhatsApp statuses had been formed as announcements due to the expressions and language the users use. Qur'anic verse, proverbs, and religious expression are used to declare new information the users would like the recipient to know about.

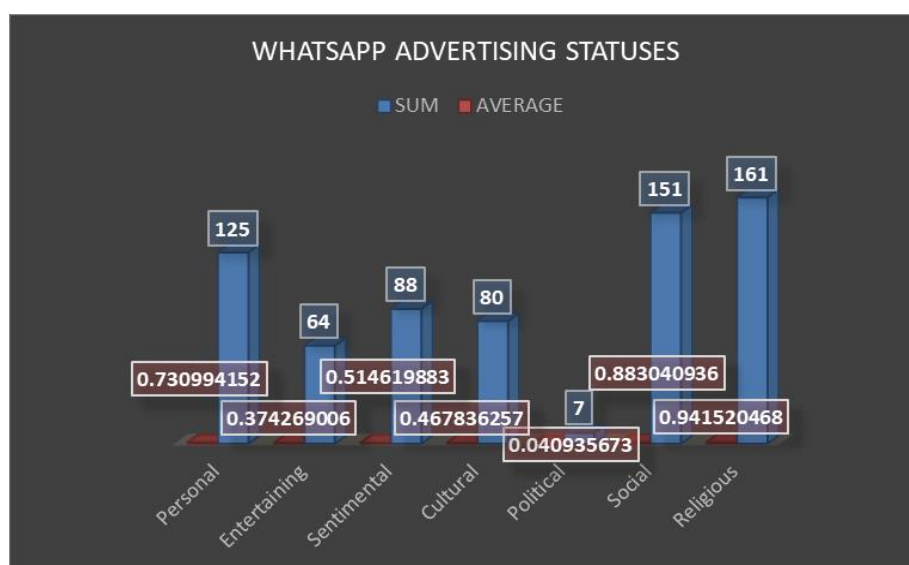


Fig 2. WhatsApp Advertising Statuses

Moreover, writing such expressions that indicate informality shows user's feelings to another user in his/her contacts, which is a way to show up and reveal understanding of each other. Using informal language may be viewed as a form of revealing private identity as an announcement simplified, abbreviated, shortened, and conditioned to fit the context.

Out of 676 statuses of 171 WhatsApp users are considered as announcements which are classified into 7 different types; religious, social, political, cultural, entertaining and personal. Out of the 676 statuses, 161 statuses are religious announcements with a percentage of 94%, 161 are social with 88%, 7 are political with 4%, 80 are cultural with 46%, 88 are sentimental 51%, 64 are entertaining with 37%, and 125 are personal with 73%.

DISCUSSION

The present paper analyzes the linguistic element of WhatsApp status and its use by Yemeni young people from a sociolinguistic perspective. The study explores the relationship between what young people post as WhatsApp statuses and their beliefs, and sometimes their everyday lives. From the data analysis above, key findings emerge. The analysis of results provides both a quantitative and qualitative interpretation of the findings.

The present study confirmed the findings about WhatsApp statuses and the fact that they express users' states. The study indicates that WhatsApp statuses are rigorously selected by its users. WhatsApp users are very careful in selecting the pictures and the 'language' of their statuses as they believe that these statuses represent their identities.

This hints that there are numerous socio-cultural and sociolinguistic implications of these WhatsApp statuses. Language evolves as a result of our interaction with new technologies, including WhatsApp. Now, users of such applications are using the language in a novel way to implicitly shed light on their identities, beliefs and everyday lives. This cast a new light on the impact of social media on language, and it could open the door for new researches about the language of social media.

The study also proves that WhatsApp statuses are employed as announcements by their users in order to express their feelings, beliefs, and identities. From the results, it is clear that most of the users' states expressed through WhatsApp statuses are religious ones. Furthermore, the results provide evidence that the users of WhatsApp statuses employ the language to express personal, humorous, sentimental, cultural, social, and religious beliefs. However, there are no recorded incidents of political statuses.

In this research paper, the researchers have explored the linguistic and cultural nature of WhatsApp statuses used by Yemeni young people to get valuable insights into the implication of these statuses. The limitation of the present study naturally includes the thorough analysis of the texts employed in the WhatsApp statuses.

CONCLUSION

Communication among young adults has shifted from the traditional face to face communication to other different forms of interaction supported by the advent in technology. WhatsApp, which is rated as the 5th most downloadable application in the world is used for such "smart communication" through instant messaging as well as WhatsApp statuses updates which unveil both social and linguistic insights about its users. This paper investigated the use and effectiveness of WhatsApp status among Yemeni people from a sociolinguistic point of view. It analyzes WhatsApp status used by young people to disclose their personal information, emotions, and thoughts. The study analyzed the WhatsApp status

into its categories and showed the attitudes of young people towards them as they use them as announcements on their profiles. This work represents a novel direction for sociolinguistic research on the impact of social media in the form of WhatsApp statuses.

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