

Digitalk: An Exploration of the Linguistic Features of CMC

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Abstract—This pilot study was anchored on the viewpoint that language users are creative and innovative, and that Electronic English is an emerging variety of language. This study investigates the features and functions of electronic language used by Filipino Facebook users. Results of the pilot analysis of 1,671 Facebook statuses revealed that Filipino Facebookers used nine types of linguistic features. Of these nine linguistic features, code switching and acronym are the most frequently used. The linguistic features in this study show Filipino Facebookers' competence to make use of their linguistic knowledge in order to develop innovations in communication.

Index Terms—Electronic language variety, internet English, linguistic features, digital.

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication and interaction nowadays have gone beyond the usual face-to-face communication; consequently, the advent of technology opened another avenue for growth of language. References [1]-[3] discussed that social networking sites (SNS) have become the quintessential places for people to meet virtually and communicate with the aid of technology. As the language of the virtual world becomes recognized, various reviews and studies have started naming its users' expressions. One term that is used to refer to internet language is *Digitalk*. *Digitalk* is regarded as a new way to communicate in the digital setting, which evidently shows manipulation in the spellings and conventions that occur when people communicate with each other [4]. *Digitalk*, having its own conventions, was observed to be 'nonstandard' but is given enough attention in the cyber world. Although many have viewed *Digitalk* as an interesting way to communicate over the net, it can pose threat to communicators as they may have trouble switching from digital language to standard English [4].

However, despite the negative views about *Digitalk*, Internet English continuously penetrates not only the social networking sites but ordinary conversations as well. For example, *Photobomb* and *Selfie* are words that rose from SNS, and their popularity has been brought beyond the virtual world to the extent that they were carried even to the real world. It is now evident that people have started using virtual-borne words in traditional face-to-face communication, which justifies the need for investigating the new forms found in the internet.

Reference [5] conducted an exploratory study on Computer-mediated communication focusing on Social

Networking Sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter. Reference [5] claimed that although Facebook and other SNS have been regarded as a vital part of college students' lives, it was named as a boon and a bane in higher education [5]. Reference [6] revealed that some educators find Facebook useful in school but may be distracting to students. It is therefore necessary that teachers become eyewitnesses in the way students use CMC.

Reference [7] attempted to study the multi-features and forms in the Internet communication. The study focused on the analysis of several forms of media and identified the features and functions of the internet language of Malaysian speakers. From the observation, the authors concluded that Malaysian electronic communication is an emerging language variety with its features and functions. The new variety of language was evident in informal communication via Electronic media such as blogs, chats or instant messages, e-mails and text messages. The analysis revealed that Malaysian online communication has features such as code-switching and code-mixing, abbreviations and acronyms, discourse particles, borrowings, affixation, coinage and blending. Moreover, the varieties serve the purpose of affirming the participants involved in the conversation [7].

As SNS becomes a new world or society, much attention has been given to it by writers ranging from linguistic features to pragmatic functions. Focusing on the pragmatics of CMC, [8] constructed a self-made gratification scale to measure the level of gratification that the CMC participants receive in SNS. Gratification was operationally defined as the use of CMC, and its levels are diversion, personal identity, interpersonal relationship, and exchange of information. Results of their study revealed that participants use CMC for gratifying their interpersonal relationship needs. Moreover, among the types of CMC that participants use, SNS is the most gratifying because participants found the features complete which include chatting, the use of images, and others. This then leads to one feature of CMC which is multimodality. Reference [9] stated that in online texts, meaning is brought by various modes such as pictures and photo albums. The multimodality of SNS allows the Internet users to explore meanings and even add to existing ones; hence, Internet users also develop the skills to making meaning in online communication.

References [10] and [11] stated that there are 33.6 million active internet users in the Philippines during year 2013. The demography comprises 40% of users who are ages 15-24; 31% are between ages 25-34; 16% are between ages 35-44 and 9% are between ages 45-54 and 5% are ages 55 and above. Reference [11] added that the ages of most Internet users in Southeast Asia are 35 and below. Specifically,

Philippines comprises 71% of Internet audience who are between 15 and 34. Moreover, [10] claimed that Filipinos spend an average of 16.4 hours on the internet in which 41.5 % is devoted to social media; 17.3% on services; and 14.5% on news and information. With new technologies available, 40% of Filipino smartphone owners browse the internet using their mobile device. In addition, 50% of Filipino Internet users access blogs, with an average of 14.4 minutes spent on each visit [10].

Philippines, together with Thailand and Malaysia, is included among Top 15 countries with the highest Facebook penetration globally [11]. The list seemed to intensify the recognition by Southeast Asia Digital Future in Focus 2013 that Philippines was the fastest growing Internet audience in Southeast Asia. In relation to the significance of Internet to Filipinos' lives, it was reported that around the world, Filipinos constitute 17% of web users who visit social networking sites; 5% multimedia sites; 3% photo sharing sites; 5% entertainment sites; 3% search engine sites; and 1 % gaming sites [10].

With the information stated above, it is of great interest to investigate the Filipino Internet users' language. Specifically, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the prevalent linguistic features evident in the language of Filipino Netspeakers?
- 2) What functions are played by the features of the Filipino Netspeakers' electronic language variety?
- 3) Why do Filipino Netspeakers use the electronic language variety in Computer-mediated communication?

II. METHODOLOGY

The present study reports the findings of the pilot analysis of Filipino internet language involving 20 college students who are 10 females and 10 males with ages ranging from 15 to 24. The subjects update their FB statuses regularly, at least once every week, and they all have updated their statuses more than 50 times since they became a FB member. Although the status updates were posted publicly, we sought the permission of the Facebookers before accessing the data.

Using the Status Compiler Application of Facebook, 1,671 status updates were collected from the respondents. The status updates that were included date from August 2012 to August 2013. After gathering a number of expressions from FB, the answers were analyzed according to the features of electronic English [7].

Reference [7] identified eight features of electronic English, and they are the bases of our analysis of the Electronic language variety. *Code-switching* and *codemixing* are marked by the use of two or more languages interchangeably. *Abbreviation* and *acronym* are characterized by shortening of lexical items for brevity. The third feature, *discourse particle*, comprises short expressions which replace the functions represented by grammar and intonation in oral discourse. *Borrowing* appears when no specific counterpart is found in one language. The next feature, *blending*, is a word produced by combining parts of more than two words. Lastly, *compounding* is marked by the combination of words to form a new word with a new

meaning.

The respondents were surveyed as to the reasons why they use their language in the internet. In addition, they were asked to give the electronic language counterpart of some English expressions and list down the common linguistic expressions they use in Facebook. Some of the expressions included in the survey were taken from studies on CMC by [12].

III. Discussion

Using a framework for analyzing Electronic English, our analysis reveals that the most prevalent linguistic feature was the use of acronym. There were also *abbreviations*, *discourse particles*, *borrowing*, *affixation*, *compounding*, *blending*, and *code-switching* [7] in the status updates of the Facebookers. These are graphically presented in Table I

Table I shows the nine features of Filipino internet language that were evident in the status updates of the Facebookers in this study. The features include *Abbreviation* (F1), *Acronym* (F2), *Discourse Particles* (F3), *Borrowing* (F4), *Affixation* (F5), *Compounding* (F6), *Blending* (F7), and the last, *Code-switching* (CS), which was classified into *Inter-sentential* (F8) and *Intra-sentential* (F9). *Intra-sentential CS*, *Inter-sentential CS*, and *Acronym* are the most frequently used features.

Nearly half of the total number of identified linguistic features is *Intra-sentential Code-switching*, making *Intra-sentential Code-switching* the most prevalent linguistic feature in the status updates of the Filipino Facebookers in this study. Moreover, *Inter-sentential code-switching* ranked third in the list with nearly one hundred occurrences (11%). The findings of this pilot study seem to corroborate a study on Filipino Electronic mail communication wherein code switching was also found to be evident [13]. Reference [13] identified several instances of *Intra-sentential* and *Inter-sentential CS*, establishing that *Code-switching* is a predominant characteristic of electronic communication.

There were a little above one hundred instances (18%) of *Acronyms* in the status updates of the Facebookers in this study, making the said linguistic feature ranked second in the list. The expressions *OMG* (*Oh my God*), *OTW* (*On the way*) and *Laugh out loud* (*LOL*) were some of the popular acronyms used by the Facebookers. Yule's (1996) *Word-formation Processes* explained that the occurrences of acronym in Electronic communication are due to the language users' ability to form new words. This ability is further explained by the inherent characteristic of language users which is creativity [14].

In relation to the second research question, the linguistic features found on the status updates of the Filipino Facebookers revealed various functions. The Filipino Facebookers used *Abbreviation* to express strong emotion aside from shortening their expressions. *Acronyms* were used to shorten the expression so that the Filipino Facebookers can provide a simple update about themselves. *Discourse particles* were used to provide emphasis to the statement that follows. The Filipino Facebookers tend to use *Discourse particles* to introduce their status update. It was also revealed that Filipino Facebookers borrowed items that belong to the technical vocabulary. Moreover, the status

updates showed that *Affixation* tends to provide local color to the English expression. *Compounding* was found in the status updates of Filipino Facebookers who put together two words to create a “new” term that covers the essence or meaning of the combined words. It seems that the

Facebookers used this as a strategy to shorten expressions. *Blending* seems to make the Facebookers appear stylish. Lastly, *Code-switching* enabled the Filipino Facebookers to post status updates with ease based on the language that they prefer to use.

TABLE I: THE LINGUISTIC FEATURES IN FILIPINO ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

	*LF1	LF2	LF3	LF4	LF5	LF6	LF7	LF8	LF9	Total
**M1	2	6			2		1	1		12
M2		11	1		3			6	15	36
M3		2						4	9	15
M4	2	1	3			1	5	2	16	30
M5	3	6		1	1			3	14	28
M6		5		3	2	2	1		3	16
M7	3	3	2		1				7	16
M8		4			1			2	4	11
M9	2	18	3	6	5			3	21	58
M10			1	3	7				21	32
***F1	2	9	1	7	6			6	26	57
F2	6	9	4	6				11	50	86
F3	4	8		2	2			4	10	30
F4	2	7						1	6	16
F5	1					1		5	4	11
F6	1	5			1	3		2	20	32
F7	1	2		5				5	22	35
F8	1	10	2			3		2	5	23
F9	2	6	2	12	9			9	34	74
F10		4	3		2			7	13	29
TOTAL	32	116	22	39	48	10	7	73	300	647

*LF- linguistic feature **M- male ***F-female

This study aimed at investigating why Filipino Facebookers use the English electronic variety in Computer-mediated communication. According to the respondents, they use acronym because it is more convenient to use. On the use of code-switching, some mentioned that code switching enables them to express what they really mean. Some respondents reported that they use code-switching because it is more understandable to their readers. Others reasoned out that they use this feature because their readers use the same linguistic feature. They revealed as well that code switching is used for lack of words and stylistic purposes. Filipino Facebookers stated that they use shortened words when communicating using ICT because they save space, time of encoding, and because they got used to them. Emoticons were used by the respondents because they amplify their feelings, virtually represent gestures, provide emphasis, deploy humor, give orders and ask favors. The respondents seem to have an evident degree of familiarity in the practice of using the Electronic language variety in the ICT.

In addition, the respondents were asked to list down the common linguistic expressions they use in Facebook. Some of the expressions they listed were brb (be right back), pls (please), and mornyt (good morning+night). In the ICT, symbols seem to contain their own meaning since there were

respondents who identified the use of [?] and [:)] to graphically represent the expression “why” and express a favorable emotion like happiness. In addition, we prepared a total of twenty-five expressions and asked the five respondents to provide the internet or electronic language counterparts of the expressions enumerated in the survey questionnaire. The respondents’ (represented by the labels R1-R5) answers are shown in Table II.

Table II shows that the respondents have different and similar ways to express themselves in ICT. As shown by the listed electronic language expressions, the respondents tend to employ a variety of features such as acronym, shortenings and use of symbols. The respondents took the liberty in choosing between the original English expression and their electronic language variety depending on their preference. It is also evident in the list that some respondents demonstrated the use of the standard English spelling of words, while others have their unique version of the English expressions.

Findings of this pilot study revealed the feasibility of conducting linguistic analysis on the language of the Internet. The linguistic features in this study show Filipino Facebookers’ competence in making use of their linguistic knowledge in order to develop innovations in communication. In addition, Filipino Facebookers’ English

electronic variety shows similarities with the Malaysian English Electronic variety. However, due to the restrictions imposed on our data, generalizations cannot be made regarding the features of Filipino internet English. Hence, we recommend that a study involving larger sample of Filipino Facebookers or other SNS be made. Furthermore, an analysis using intercultural rhetoric framework be made

in order to investigate the cross-cultural differences and similarities in electronic communication. It would also be of great interest to conduct a follow-up investigation involving a reverse method in the linguistic survey to find out whether the internet users can identify the English expression counterparts of the Electronic language expressions.

TABLE II: RESPONDENTS' ELECTRONIC LANGUAGE EXPRESSIONS

Expressions	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
1. good morning	gud mrng	Gud morning	Gudam	Gudam	gud am
2. by the way	by d way	By d way	Btw	Btw	Bdw
3. before	b4	B4	Before	b4	b4
4. you	U	U	U	U	U
5. as soon as possible	Asap	Asap	Asap	Asap	Asap
6. because	Bcoz	Bcause	Bcoz	Bec	Bcoz
7. what	Wat	What	Wat	Wat	?
8. together	Together	2gether	Tgether	Together	2gther
9. tomorrow	Tmrw	2morrow	Tom	Tom	2moro
10. see you later	see u latr	C u later	cu later	cu later	c u l8r
11. me too	me too	M 2	me too	me 2	me 2
12. I am sorry	I am sorry	I'm sorry	Sorry	I m sorry	am sori
13. Friend	frnd	Friend	Friend	Friend	Frend
14. Something	something	Something	sumthing	Sumthng	Sumthng
15. Nothing	nothing	Nothing	Nothing	Nothing	Nothng
16. do not	dnt	Do not	don't	do not	dont
17. never mind	never mind	Nvr mind	never mind	nevermind	nevr mind
18. the	the/ d	D	don't	D	D
19. happy birthday	happy birthday	Happy bday	Hbd	hapi bday	Hbd
20. good night	nytnyt	Gud nyt	Gudnyt	g'nyt	Gudnyt
21. oh I see	oh I see	Oh I c	oh is ee	o I c	Oic
22. thank you	thank u	Thank you	ty/ thanks	thank u	Tnx
23. I love you	I love u	I love you	I love you	I love u	i luv u
24. congratulations	congratulations	Congrats	Congrats	CONG-RATS!	Congrats
25. good bye	gudbye	Gud bye	Bye	g'bye	gudbye/bye

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