

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON LANGUAGE
ERRORS: A STUDY ON WHATSAPP TEXT MESSAGES
BY IIUM STUDENTS

BY

NURUL TASNIM BINTI AHMAD NAJMAN

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ABSTRACT

People around the world use different languages as a medium of communication. Without learning the correct grammar, it would be hard to understand a language. Grammar plays an essential rule for both spoken and written languages in order to convey the right meaning in communication. It is fascinating to see how all languages are changing in social media daily, but these changes have shown negative results on how social media's users use incorrect language in their communication. This study seeks to examine (i) the types of language errors in Malaysian students' WhatsApp messages and (ii) the effects of constant messaging on WhatsApp Messenger on students' verbal communication. The researcher created a conceptual framework named 'The Common Error in Writing in English' adapted from Azar's (2002) famous English grammar book titled 'Understanding and Using English Grammar' to analyse the data taken from WhatsApp messages and spoken conversation from 20 IIUM Malay students. There are four types of grammatical errors such as nouns, verbs, tenses and subject-verb agreement were identified and explained. The findings showed that students make grammatical errors on texting and it has affected their spoken communication. This may happen due to the confusion, unaware of the errors and habit of writing on social media. Social media function as mean for social interaction between the users; therefore, there is a high possibility that the way people interact with each other will get affected because of social media (Cabrera, 2018). Slowly but surely, social media have made students lose their ability to speak and write efficiently.

خلاصة البحث

لقد استخدم الناس في جميع أنحاء العالم لغات مختلفة كوسيلة للاتصال. دون تعلم قواعد اللغة الصحيحة، سيكون من الصعب فهم اللغة. تلعب قواعد اللغة قاعدة أساسية لكل من اللغات المنطوقة والمكتوبة من أجل نقل المعنى الصحيح في التواصل. من الرائع أن نرى كيف تتغير جميع اللغات في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي يوميًا ولكن هذه التغيرات أظهرت نتائج سلبية حول كيفية استخدام مستخدمي وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي للغة غير صحيحة في اتصالاتهم. تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة (1) أنواع الأخطاء اللغوية في رسائل الواتساب للطلاب الماليزيين و (2) آثار الرسائل المستمرة على برنامج واتساب على التواصل اللفظي للطلاب. وصمم الباحث إطارًا مفاهيميًا بعنوان "الخطأ الشائع في الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية" مقتبسًا من كتاب قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية الشهير لآزار (2002) بعنوان "فهم واستخدام قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية" لتحليل البيانات المأخوذة من رسائل واتساب والمحادثة المنطوقة من 20 طالبًا من الطلاب الماليزيين في الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية ماليزيا. هناك أربعة أنواع من الأخطاء النحوية مثل الأسماء والأفعال والتوترات واتفاق الفاعل-الفعل تم تحديدها وشرحها. وأظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب ارتكبوا الأخطاء النحوية على الرسائل النصية مما أثرت على الاتصالات المنطوقة. وقد يحدث هذا بسبب الارتباك، غير مدركين لأخطاء وعادات الكتابة على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. كما يعني من وظائف وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية للتفاعل الاجتماعي بين المستخدمين؛ لذلك، هناك احتمال كبير بأن تتأثر طريقة تفاعل الناس مع بعضهم البعض بسبب وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي (كابريلا، 2018). مع مرور الوقت ببطء، لكن بالتأكيد جعلت وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية الطلاب يفقدون قدرتهم على التحدث والكتابة بكفاءة.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Science in English Language Studies.

.....
Maimunah Abdul Kadir
Supervisor

.....
Wan Nur Madiha Ramlan
Co-Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Science in English Language Studies.

.....
Siti Nurnadilla Mohamad Jamil
Examiner

This thesis was submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Human Science in English Language Studies.

.....
Siti Nuraishah Ahmad
Head, Department of English
Language and Literature

This thesis was submitted to the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Human Science in English Language Studies.

.....
Shukran Abd. Rahman
Dean, Kulliyah of Islamic
Revealed Knowledge and Human
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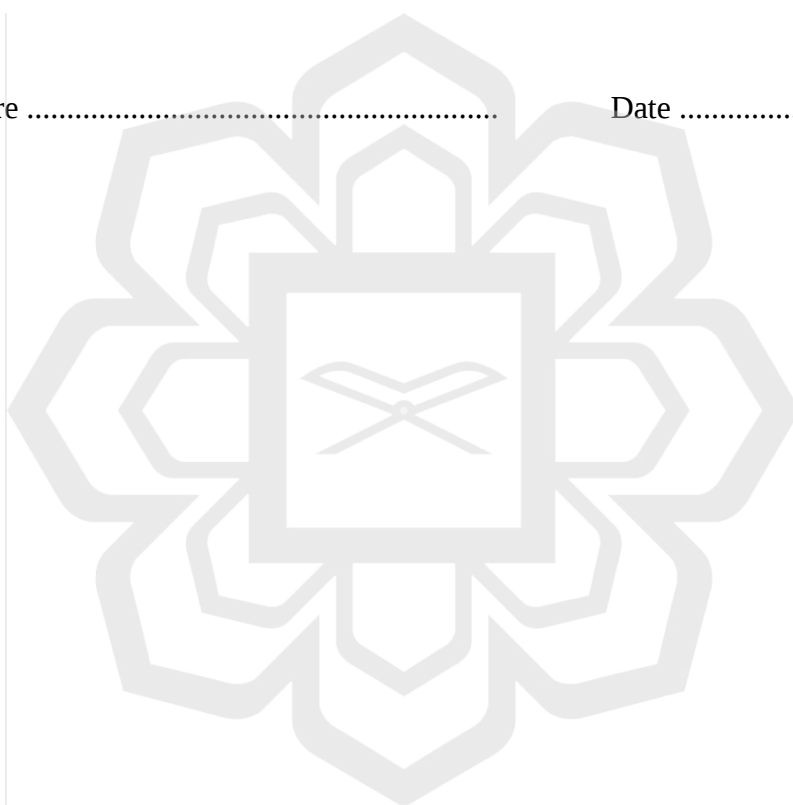
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I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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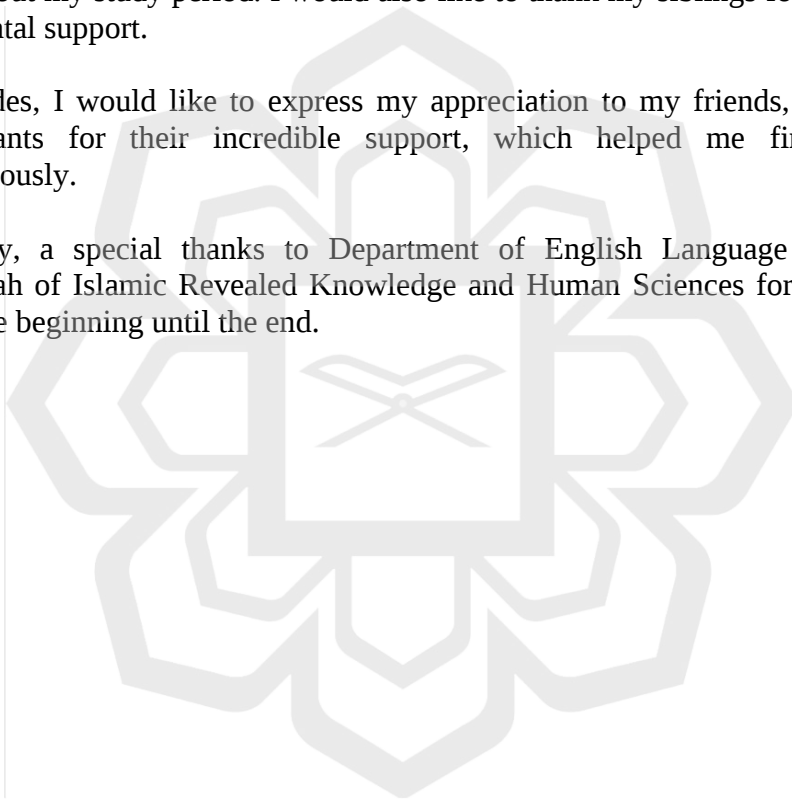


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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

People around the world use different languages. Language is used as a medium of communication. Undeniably, all languages are unique, diverse and beautiful in their ways, whether in the way they are written or their grammatical rules. Besides, different cultures, nations, races and ethnics use different languages to communicate among them. They use language to send, receive or reject messages from each other. Interestingly, people worldwide have unique ways to communicate with each other. They use language to enable them, especially in conveying their thoughts, ideas and opinions (Lestari, 2018).

Communication helps in everyday life in sharing ideas, information and knowledge. Communication is done to pass the information from a place or a person to the other. As mentions by Tohkhwan (2019), communication failures happen when the speaker is incapable to deliver the meaning to the listener. That is why it is important to make sure that each listener and speaker understands the point of details shared to avoid conflict and frustration due to misinterpretation or misunderstanding. Also, they need to master the language in order to have understandable and clear communication.

Mastering a language means someone has to understand grammar because grammar is an important part in language learning for spoken and written communication. Indeed, in any communication, words do express meaning but words by themselves will not make sense without mastering the basic rules or grammar of the English language. A set of words or collection of words will make up a sentence or

phrase, yet, they are meaningless without the correct use of grammar. Therefore, it is crucial for the speakers to put words in the correct order so that the listeners will understand the meaning of the sentences (Kroeger, 2005). For example, the sentences 'big fish that I eat' and 'mother give money to person old that' are difficult to define its meaning because they are not in the correct order. The right sentences are 'I ate that big fish' and 'Mother gives money to that old person'.

Abduh and Algouzi (2021) stated that language is incomprehensible without words and grammar. Without grammar, a phrase or sentence does not give any real meaning, so grammar plays a vital role in giving the meaning to the sentences and phrases. Clearly, as we all do not speak the same language, hence the rules of grammar for all languages are also different.

Grammar plays an important rule for both spoken and written languages in order to convey the right meaning in communication. According to Julaehe (2015), grammar is needed in spoken language because when a speaker speaks ungrammatically, it will confuse listener. By having a good understanding of grammar, it helps communication to be clearer and can avoid misunderstanding.

Without learning the correct grammar, it would be hard to understand a language. There is a description of how a language uses rules of structure to convey specific meanings in grammar. It is crucial to identify the grammatical system of language to transfer the message correctly. Learners tend to make errors during the learning process and it is unavoidable. Besides, it is also essential for learners to learn from their errors, recognise the errors, explain the rules and correct the errors (Dedy Subandowo, 2013).

Traditionally, people communicate using smoke signals, pigeons and letters to send their message to others (Etta, 2019). In today's world, people can converse easily

due to technology advancement and Internet communication. Also, the ways people communicate have changed with the Internet and communication technology development (Llyod, 2007; Werenowska & Rzepka, 2020). With easy internet access, people start using social media as the medium of their communication. Day by day, social media has become an essential tool for daily communication. Consequently, it has brought together all social media users around the world.

Today, social media is becoming an important part of global technology and is dominant in the economy. Nowadays, social media is getting more popular universally and the need for social media is increasing rapidly. Social media allows users to communicate via texting, sharing pictures, making audio calls and video calls. Countless social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn and many more have helped people worldwide to share information (Nutakor, 2015). As a result, social media has both positive and negative impacts on communication skills.

Language isn't fixed; it's constantly evolving. Languages do not get better or worse when they change because they just change. Where a lot of people see deterioration, grammarians like David Crystal, for example, see expressive development. In Crystal's book titled 'The Language Revolution' (2004), he states that people should stop seeing language change as decay and deterioration. He further adds that language change is unavoidable, nonstop, worldwide and multidirectional; therefore, people need to accept the change as a normal process.

In Crystal's another book titled 'Language and the Internet' (2001), he investigates the impact of the Internet on language. In the introduction, he mentions that there is a popular discussion about how Internet is going to affect the language in a bad way. However, in his book, he argues that the Internet is in fact providing

unprecedented opportunities for personal creativity and enabling a dramatic development to the variety of language.

Language use in social media is dynamic and keeps changing. As a result of this language usage, social media users' tendency to use casual writing in social media is very high. New words, expressions, Internet slang and abbreviations happen every time. In Ishola's (2019) study, online social network or social media has resulted in enormous new words and expanded the English vocabulary. Moreover, some words convey different meanings. For instance, 'Apple' and 'Blackberry' are no longer known as fruits but as famous electronic gadget companies (Ishola, 2019). Besides, the words such as 'tweet', 'like', 'follow', 'friend', 'subscribe', 'trending', 'story', 'status' and 'comment' are other examples of the social media's trends (Poell & Van Dijck, 2015).

It is fascinating to see how all languages are changing in social media day by day but these changes have shown negative results on how social media's users use incorrect language in their communication. Social media users need to practise the correct use of language because it affects one's language. Besides, the incorrect usage of language on social media also shows that the users neglect their languages rules, especially grammar whenever they write on their social media. The users of social media are not bound to any linguistics rules when they are writing their posts, comments and statuses (Aisyah Khaleeda & Noor Raha, 2020). However, using social media language or variation of style on social media is not totally unacceptable or can be over simplified as errors, but, since as it has affected on students' language usage, researchers has been conducted countless of studies to have better understanding related to this matter.

In the linguistic studies, there is one style of writing known as linguistic deviation (LD) under the concept of foregrounding. Mousavi and Hajiaqababaei (2020) define LD as a style of writing that does not follow the standard or ordinary rules of a standard language. In this research context, it is referring to English language where it usually happens among bilinguals, either intentionally or unintentionally. There are different types of LD and it depends on what rules are broken and which level of language it occurs. As state in Aisyah Khaleeda and Noor Raha (2020), LD is classified into lexical, semantic, orthographical, grammatical, phonological and dialectal deviation. In this study, it focuses on grammatical deviation as the users of social media intentionally or unintentionally violate the rules of English grammar.

More studies focus on language errors and the correct use of grammar on social media from time to time. A study conducted by Mohammed (2020) reveals that the wrong writing styles on social media have resulted in grammatical errors in students' examination scripts. The incorrect usage of language on social media has impacted the grammar used such as wrong spelling, punctuation, word verb forms, spacing, capitalisation, vocabulary and other errors. To conclude, students or learners are more likely to make errors when they write on social media. A research conducted by Hyland and Jiang (2017) says that informality has become something normal on social media. They concluded that informality has now invaded written and spoken discourse, following this trend, also including academic writing.

Savci, Ercengiz and Aysan (2018) state that social media usage is increasing and widespread by advanced mobile applications. They also mention that 2.7 billion people from across the world are actively using social media in 2017. Social media

users communicate through video calls, voice calls, chats, posts and status updates to share about experiences, ideas and feelings with the readers (Hyland, 2018).

A few studies on grammatical errors made by Facebook users have been conducted by Corral (2017), Muhammad Hudri (2019), Atika Puspasari and Iwan Romadon (2011) and Dedy Subandowo (2013). Thus, this study attempts to use another social media platform, WhatsApp Messenger to look at the language used by IIUM students and how it affects their verbal communication. One of the most popular social media platforms, WhatsApp Messenger, is chosen for this study because of its advantages and benefits.

Compared to other social media that exist on the Internet, the researcher decided to choose WhatsApp as the source to collect the data because of many strong reasons and its advantages. According to the New Straits Times (2017), the largest WhatsApp users worldwide in 2017 are Malaysians. This shows that WhatsApp is the most popular texting app compared to others for Malaysians. Therefore, it makes WhatsApp the most suitable social media in identifying students' language errors. To conclude, the researcher hopes that data from WhatsApp messages will help this study to look at the language errors that students intentionally or unintentionally use to determine the effects of their spoken communication errors.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Internet has many benefits in connecting people across the world (Agrawal & Das, 2011). It has also formed a new networking and socialisation trend, for example, social networking sites, online education, online shopping, online banking etc. (Bosamia, 2013). The Internet helps people to communicate among each other globally. People can communicate directly with someone who lives far away and

whoever they want by using mobile phones and computers from their homes. The Internet and its social platforms help families and friends stay connected (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007).

With the Internet's help, social media platforms such as WhatsApp Messenger, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram have fully improved the way people communicate with each other. Besides, social media platforms are gradually becoming more comfortable, and using them has become common practice worldwide. However, social media users write messages using the short form or incorrect way of writing, such as wrong grammar and wrong punctuation, to save time. This free way of writing can happen either when they are consciously and also unconsciously aware of their writing mistakes. In this way, they tend to get used to this writing habit, which has become a big issue, especially for students.

When people are excessively using text messaging on social media, there will be a tendency to influence their communication styles, whether in written or verbal forms. The habit of using social media's language in everyday writing will affect the way they write in other contexts and they will have difficulties to write appropriately in their formal profession (Songxaba & Sincuba, 2019). A study from Behera (2021) proves that social media increases the rate of communication, uses acronyms and abbreviations, alters or reappropriate the existing meaning, invents new vocabularies and develop lousy grammar. Social media may help people to communicate better and faster but they are adapted to using wrong grammar, incorrect punctuation, unacceptable structures, full of abbreviations, shocking misspelled words that are wrong in the English language (Behera, 2021).

In Malaysia, educators show concern in students' English writing due to the declining standards of written language because of the usage of colloquial English in

their texting (Muniady et al., 2010). Concerning this matter, Khairul Firdaus (2017) conducts a study on abbreviations and acronyms from WhatsApp language on formal English writing and how it affects writing performance. He finds out that due to the time spent using WhatsApp, the practice of using such features on WhatsApp may be transferred into formal writing unintentionally. His findings show that using WhatsApp somehow affects the use of acronyms and abbreviations in formal writing. Even though the numbers seem small, it is a matter that needs to be concerned as it happened amongst students at a tertiary Institution. It needs to be dealt with and managed properly because it can create a bigger issue in future education. Thus, this study attempts to identify the types of language errors in Malaysian students' WhatsApp messages and examine the effects of constant messaging on WhatsApp on students' verbal communication.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 1- To identify the types of language errors in Malaysian students' WhatsApp messages.
- 2- To examine the effects of constant messaging on WhatsApp Messenger on students' verbal communication.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the language errors made by Malaysian students in their text messages?

2. What are the effects of constant messaging on social media on students' verbal communication?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study offers potentially crucial knowledge for speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL) in Malaysia and for speakers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) worldwide. Furthermore, this study explores the common types of grammatical errors committed in English by Malaysian students' WhatsApp messages. This study also examines the effects of constant messaging on the WhatsApp Messenger on students' verbal communication. Constant messaging means the frequency or how often the participants text by using WhatsApp in their daily conversation. Hence, the study's findings will help provide an overview of social media's effects on Malaysian grammatical errors, specifically Malay Malaysian students in IIUM both in writing and spoken forms. The researcher chooses two situations to show that language errors happen in both situations; students' written text messaging on WhatsApp and students' every day's spoken conversation. Therefore, this study would help students strengthen their knowledge of grammar and overcome these language errors during text messaging and conversations. This study will help students to be aware of their grammatical errors that usually happen in their speaking.

Moreover, it will assist them to understand the errors that they made unintentionally fully. The study result will also benefit the teachers to know what grammar rules that the students have not mastered yet both in their writing and speaking. In a nutshell, the researcher hopes that this study will help future researchers to conduct studies related to the English grammatical errors on WhatsApp messages and spoken conversations of Malay bilinguals.

1.6 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

ELAN

According to the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, The Language Archive website (2020), ELAN is a computer software to transcribe audio or video recordings.

Error

According to Nur 'Atiqah Jamilah (2017), errors happen not by choice, but students usually commit errors when they lack knowledge regarding their language system's rules. In this study, Netspeak or the Internet's variety of language is considered an error. This study's focus is on the influence of social media on language errors, specifically grammatical errors.

Grammar

According to Richards (2006), to understand someone's language, the vital component is grammar. Hence, someone has to master the order of words or rules of the language to ensure the other person gets the correct information (Miller, 1951).

Language

Language is a communication tool to send or receive information in spoken or written form through technologies such as computers or mobile phones. According to Pusat Rujukan Persuratan Melayu (PRPM) (2017), the definition of *bahasa* or language is a system of symbols. This system is used as a communication device for a group of people to express feelings and thoughts and words are arranged according to grammatical rules and operated by a person in spoken or written form.

Netspeak

Netspeak is a type of unique language on the Internet that involves writing and speaking. It is a form of communication, but it is different from face-to-face interaction, where Netspeak happens virtually while face-to-face occurs physically (Crystal, 2001). According to Thangaraj and Maniam (2015), Netspeak is related to abbreviation and frequently used by Internet users, commonly among friends during online communication.

Social media

Carr and Hayes (2015) define social media as Internet-based medium that allow users to communicate with others either in real-time or vice versa.

WhatsApp

Jakhar, Kaul and Kaur (2020) describe WhatsApp as a free instant messaging smartphone application and currently one of the most popular social medium platform worldwide. It allows its users to communicate using text and voice messages, video and audio calls, photos and videos with an Internet connection.

1.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presents and discusses the background of the study. Besides, it explains the concepts of language and communication, provides a brief introduction of social media and presents the grammatical errors found in social media. Moreover, this chapter discusses the problem statement to identify the types of language errors in Malaysian students' WhatsApp messages and determine the effects of constant messaging on students' verbal communication. Additionally, this chapter also presents

the research objectives and research questions of the study. This chapter also mentions the study's significance. Finally, this chapter explains the definitions of terms used in this study.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the literature review and the conceptual framework used in the study. First and foremost, the review focuses on internet and social media and WhatsApp as a social media platform. This chapter also reviews the language of social media. Furthermore, the literature review emphasises on the negative effects of social media on student's language usage and the effects of social media grammatical errors on social media. Lastly, this chapter covers the conceptual framework uses for the study, Betty Schramper Azar's (2002) book titled 'Understanding and Using English Grammar' to define her terminologies and concepts in teaching grammar.

2.2 INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Undeniably, technology has a very close connection with the Internet and social media. In this new digital era, people acknowledge the importance of Internet and social media to society's development (Zulbeni, 2017), so people have to appreciate and be grateful of having social networks that let them to communicate with people from around the world. People may forget that there was a time when there is no Internet and people do not even have any social media's accounts as today. Therefore, there will be no social media without the Internet as can be seen during this time. The link between Internet and social media is inseparable (Okonkwo, Eyisi & Ololo, 2015) where they must have to come together so that people can enjoy the benefits.

Technology is developing fast and people use social media every day. Sadly, this is also bad news to society because it makes this generation addicted to