

## A GENRE ANALYSIS OF FACEBOOK CONVERSATION ON STUDENTS POLITICS

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the communicative terms of Facebook conversation among students of Kogi State University, Anyigba. These terms constitute the social function, the schematic structure and linguistic features. The theoretical framework for this study stems from the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) by Halliday and Hasan (1989). Purposive or deliberate sampling was used in selecting the data. The data selected were analysed using descriptive and analytical method after segmenting the data into clauses. Twelve (12) clauses were found. The analysis of the clauses found showed that the social function of Facebook conversation focuses on certain topics of interest. The analysis further revealed that the schematic structure of Facebook conversation deals with Greeting (G) – Opening Conversation (OC), Bringing the Topic (BT), Discussion (D), Pre-closing (Pc) and Farewell (F). Lastly, the study revealed 14 linguistic features, which are commonly used by Facebook users. The work therefore concludes that Facebook conversation is a representation of a socio-cultural event embedded in a context of situation.

**Keywords:** Facebook Conversations, Students Politics, situational variable, Genre and Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL).

## **Introduction**

The beauty of language is in its inner characteristics. Language never exists apart from the social fact, for it is a semiological phenomenon. Its social nature is one of its inner characteristics (Saussure, 77). The primary function of language has gone beyond “communication” to “purposeful communication with social significance”. Taiwo observes that language is the most vital tool in the hands of a man and a conveyer belt of social power that he uses to create a meaningful environment for himself.

Nowadays, everyone can witness how man has used internet to create a beautiful and educative environment for himself, which has reduced the stress in the means of communication. One of the top social networking websites these days is the Facebook which is also called technologically mediated communication. An information technology – aided conveyance or processing of messages, is a pragmatic/digital domain with multi-faceted layers of interpretability, which contrasts face-to-face communication. Conventional communication according to Coates is usually done face to face between two or more people. However, the internet has provided a bridge for everyone around the world to communicate. The online media communications, which one of them is Facebook, facilitates her users to have instant messaging or so-called online chatting, like a real face-to-face communication (134).

In communicating, Coates (169), following Labov, asserts that language change occurs “when a new linguistic form, used by some sub-group within a speech community is adopted by other members of that community and accepted as the norm”. This is where the internet takes an important role as a media liaison for

its users who are facilitated to communicate with people from all over the world in making a new linguistic form.

When a means of communication is established between two people, particularly via online conversation, certain result is usually produced, which is a discourse that has various topics whenever a communication is begun in another time or even in the same time, similar stages of how to open a communication, to sustain the communication, and also to close the communication. In addition, it can be found that this discourse has many unique features of language. One of the reasons is because online conversation is basically in the form of written text, but seen through the language used, it appears to be a type of spoken discourse.

Fairclough qtd. in Yohana (2) opines that genre analysis is ‘a socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity’. This obviously explains that Facebook conversation is also a type of social activity, because it involves two or more people interacting with each other using language. Motivated by Eggin and Slade’s theory, Yohana (3), stated that chat cannot be characterized in generic terms, the researcher was challenged to take a study on chatting. However, online chatting was taken as the subject of the study.

Furthermore, Martin states that ‘a genre is a stage, goal oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture’(43). This means that online conversation has a goal to achieve, it has a platform or stage and also a certain language use. Therefore, this study aims at discovering the social function (goal), the schematic structure (stages) and the linguistic features of the language used in Facebook conversations.

## Digital Discourse

Digital discourse offers a distinctly sociolinguistic perspective on the nature of language in digital technologies. It starts by simply bringing new media sociolinguistics up to date, addressing current technologies like instant messaging, text messaging, blogging, photo-sharing, mobile phones, gaming, social network sites, and video sharing. According to Pilar and Patricia, digital discourse lies at the intersection of (none) language resources, society and technology (6). This helps digital researchers draw on a range of diverse socially – oriented language disciplines, whose methods and research tools may need to be critically assessed and reflectively adapted, and perhaps also expanded and even combined with others to suitably account for the communicative practices that occur in the digital world and embeddedness within the social world at large.

Discourse, in our view, is concerned with “social practice” (Fairclough, 28). Rather than language in use, as it was originally – and more narrowly – conceived, as it concerns itself with how multimodal, multisemiotic resources are employed to enact identifies, activities and ideologies in the digital world, as part of a larger society world (Gee, 20). According to Thulow (23), a key objective of digital discourse is to show how it studies attends to both micro-level linguistic practices and more macro – level social processes; by the same token, scholars in the field are increasingly interested in understanding how language intersects with other modes of communication.

Putting ‘language’ in its place – and following the lead of those scholars already mentioned – it is essential to recognise that discourse is interested in language only in so far as it illuminates social and cultural processes (Bucholtz and Hall, 8). In other

words, the primary concern is not with the abstract, grammatical language of linguistics, but rather the everyday functions and uses of language.

It is for the above reasons that we tend to use the term discourse (Cuplan, 18). In linguistically – oriented discourse analysis there is typically a shared commitment to the following; the social functions of language, the interactional accomplishment of meaning, the significance of communicator intent, and the relevance of context.

### **Facebook Technology**

Facebook is a type of technology that is commonly used on specific mobile phones and computers. Since the smart phones became popular, many messaging services were launched, Facebook remains the most popular of all (Abosede, 395). This application is highly addictive and can create a great impact on regular users. Facebook messenger's functionality has recently been improved upon. It is available on Blackberry, Nokia phones, windows phone and phones. For users to get started, send a friend request or accept a friend request of an intended person. Facebook uses a variety of services, tools, and programming languages to make up its core infrastructure. As far as customization is concerned, Facebook has developed a custom partitioning scheme in which a global ID is assigned to all data. They have also a got of custom archiving scheme that is based on how frequent and recent data is one a per user basis. Most data is distributed randomly (Zuckerberg, 40).

People often press their phones while walking, in buses, on their beds; to mention but a few, to converse on Facebook. It is one of the most popular chat applications in the world today. People have thousands of chatting messages, photos, videos and audio

attachments on their Facebook account, birthday wishes, marriage wishes, naming ceremonies are all celebrated on the Facebook. The development of digital technology has facilitated easier communication between people and organizations. Facebook is used for various purposes like commercial, teaching of students, friendship interactions among others. It allows direct interactions.

### **Social Media**

Social media can be defined as forms of electronic communication through which users interact among people in which they create, freely share, exchange and discuss information, ideas, personal messages and other content about each other and their lives using a multimedia mix of personal words, pictures, videos and audio, utilizing online platforms while they are connected to the internet. Social media, according to Kuppuswamy (10) is a virtual platform for interactivity and information exchange...where issues are shared, debated and defined. According to Adebola, social media users collaborate in content creation (72). It is proactive in media participation. Social media includes Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Twitter, Myspace, YouTube among others and all these are available to as many that want it.

### **Linguistic Genre**

Genre studies according to Richard (40), is an academic subject which studies genre theory in several different fields. Linguistic genre studies is best described by two schools of literary genre; the systemic functional linguistics or “SFL”, scholars of this school believe that language structure is an integral part of a text’s social context and function. English for specific purposes or “ESP” is another. The scholars for this school believe that genre studies help the non-native English speakers on how to use

the language and its conventions through the application of genre analysis, the identification of discourse elements such as register, formation of conceptual and genre structures, modes of thought and action that exist in the specific discourse community.

Genre, according to Eggins qtd. in Ezeifeka is “the staged, structured way in which people go about achieving goals using language” (42). It is a culturally recognised form of discourse that follows socially agreed structures with distinct communicative purposes. Genres are very important in our everyday life and we do not realize how much we use them, how much they affect us, how much they determine the way we act and understand the others. Martin confirms this when he states that ‘a genre is a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture’ and ‘genres’ are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them (248).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This work adopts Generic Structure Potential Theory. The theory was propounded by Halliday and Hassan in 1989. The theory states that language structure is an integral part of a text’s social context and function. Fairclough (14) once stated that genre analysis is ‘a socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity’. This obviously explains that Facebook conversation is also type of social activity, because it involves two or more people interacting with each other using language. According to Ezeifeka, every text is supposed to have a “generic structure” or “schematic structure” which delineates its discourse community (42). From the above, it is obvious that two different discourse communities may likely not to have the same generic or

schematic structure. This tradition influence how language is used in diverse situations, with that of Facebook conversation not an exception.

### **Methodology**

The researcher made a deal with the students of Kogi State University, Anyigba particularly, students from the department of Arts Education, in communication in order to get permission to use their Facebook conversations. The researcher searched several conversations between two persons to be used as the data, each taken from the researcher's students' Facebook account. From the accounts collected, four Facebook conversations were chosen for analysis. The data collected were analysed within the purview of Halliday and Hassan (1989) Generic Structure Potential Theory (GSP). The data were segmented into clauses, identifying each conversation using SFL'S metafunctions to find the social function, the schematic structure and the linguistic features.

### **Data Presentation, Analysis and Results**

*Grace: I want to ask if you have picked the interest and nomination forms.*

*Eleajo: That's a good decision*

*Grace I was told it's now available with the eleco chair...*

*Eleajo: hope you have picked?*

*You're not serious.*

*Grace: Yeahhh....hehehehe. I met your guy yesterday but he failed to recognize me. What department is that guy self?*



*Hmmm--- questionnaire grace, have you*

*Elejo: Shuu! Management nan.*

*Grace: I am hanging out for a while..*

In the conversation above, Grace recalled her experience with her friend's guy, whom she has met the previous day. They discussed with each other and played into each other's private life. Grace opened the conversation by telling Elejo her experience with her guy until they all ventured into each other's private life.

*Fave: Hi... Grace you chose to go and hide since after graduation.*

*Grace: I know, updating status is your hubby..... Since last week, you have updated more than 10 times.*

*If had gone hiding, how will I have known that you update your status regularly.*

*Fave: Tnks, talk much later – stay cool*

In the conversation above, Grace conversed with her mate, Elejo. They both have known each other for a long period of time. They conversed about the departmental elections. A critical look at the conversations, revealed again that Grace conversed with her close friend. They talked about situation after their graduation.

### **Summary**

The social function of Facebook conversation is to discuss something under one or more certain topics. It is the contextual feature that relates to the subject matter of the conversation, that

is, what the text is all about as well as the topics referred to. This refers to the social activities in which language plays a part. This development agrees with the view of Odebunmi (54) which views field of discourse as referring to the ongoing activity, and the particular purpose that the use of language is serving within the context of that activity. Accordingly, in the study of Facebook conversation, several activities and topics that have concern with the conversants are discussed.

The first conversation has the following schematic symbols

OC ^ BT ^ D ^ Pc ^ F

**Key to symbols:**

OC: Opening conversation

BT: Bringing the topic

D: Discussion

Pc: Pre-closing

F: Farewell.

This conversation is started with Grace asking his friend Eleojo whether or not she has picked her interest and nomination forms for the departmental election announced to be happening weeks ahead.

Grace brought the topic stage when she opened the conversation. At the discussion stage, Grace was given to questioning while Eleojo was just answering. After the discussion, Grace talked about the attitude of Eleojo's guy which signals pre-closing stage. The farewell stage was observed in Grace's farewell expression" I am hanging out" which shows the social

relationship or affiliation that exists between the two conservants.

The second conversation has the following schematic structure:

$G \wedge OC \wedge BT \wedge D \wedge PC \wedge F$

**Key to Symbol**

G: Greeting

OC: Opening conversation

BT: Bringing the Topic

D: Discussion

F: Farewell

In the second conversation, the Greeting stage was begun by Fave. She said ‘Hi’ that is followed by the first name of her friend, Grace which she engaged with some greeting words. In this conversation it is clear that the opening conversation did not start immediately because opening conversation is usually marked by asking of each other’s conditions. Bringing the Topic is marked by Grace’s desire to know the department of her friend’s guy. In discussion stages, Grace and Eleojo interacted on the academic background of Eleojo’s guy. The pre-closing and farewell were observed simultaneously.

The third conversation has the following schematic structure.

$G \wedge OC \wedge BT \wedge D \wedge PC \wedge F$

**Key to Symbol**

G: Greeting

OC: Opening conversation

BT: Bringing Topic.

D: Discussion

PC: Pre-closing

F: Farewell

In the conversation, Greeting stage came first with the exchange of pleasantries. The opening conversation came with “hiding” after graduation. Bringing Topic stages. Occurred when Fave mentioned” graduation which also formed the Discussion. The pre-closing occurred when Fave relaxed the discussion and this was followed immediately by farewell stage as Fave thanked Grace and advising her to stay cool.

### **Summary:**

The schematic structure of Facebook conversation observes the following:

Greeting stand for “G”

Opening conversation stands for “OC”

Bringing the Topic stands for “BT”

Discussion stands for “O”

Pre-closing stands for “PC”

Farewell stands for “F”

From the above, it is obvious that Greeting and pre-closing are optional while Bringing the Topic and Discussion are recursive.

There were 14 linguistic features found in the Facebook conversation of students who discussed on their forthcoming elections.

Those linguistic features commonly used among students during the Facebook conversation were as follows:

1. Material and relational linguistic features are mostly used processes. While material feature addresses the process of “doing” and “happening”, Actor (the doer of the action), Goal (one to which the process is extended), scope (typically occurs in intransitive clauses) relational process deals with “being and having”.
2. Declarative is the mostly used mode. This has to do with the nub of the argument, the border of the clause which cannot be ignored by the succeeding speaker.
3. Ideational theme is mostly theme. This means that, in Facebook conversation, certain lexical elements are made to carry high prominence over and above other features and which the speaker at this end wants the listener at that end to focus on.
4. While other tenses are also used in Facebook conversation, present tense is most used.
5. Short sentences are mostly used and lowercase instead of uppercase.
6. Pronouns are most times omitted and punctuations are considered in consequential.
7. Morphological processes such as clipping, contraction, abbreviation, alteration of word forms are used in

Facebook conversation for convenience and easy communication.

8. Facebook users use parenthesis and exclamation marks.
9. Facebook users also use smileys, emoticons and stickers.
10. They use repetition of letter or punctuation and capitalization for emphasis.
11. They use Onomatopoeia – this means using a word that represents the sound it describes.
12. Words are usually linked.
13. Sometimes descriptive language is used.
14. Sometimes repairs typo or wrong words are usually used.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Facebook users adopt purposive role that has to do with the focus of the activity in which they are engaged i.e. show what their language is all about, what experience they are verbalizing and what is ‘going on’ through language. This finding supports the view of Odebunmi (54) who asserts to the ongoing activity, and the particular purpose that the use of language is serving within the context of that activity.

From the data presented above, it is evident that the observation of schematic structure by Facebook users is very strong as most of the conversations are made up of constituent stages – constituent structure, structure by which the whole, complete interaction is made up of parts: a Beginning, Middle and an End. The finding is in consonance with the view of Swales (3) which asserts that schematic structure is a socially recognised

recurrent, culturally defined speech event with its own formal characteristics, cognitive – move structures and communicative purposes.

Similarly, linguistic features commonly used among Facebook users during conversation are found in SFL approach, particularly its metafunctions which are ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction and textual metafunction.

### **Conclusion**

Much, if not all, of what is covered by the researcher in this work is contextual and falls within the scope of systemic functional linguistics ‘SFL’ of definable notion of the domain of discourse (Facebook conversation). The work is believed to have partly broadened the scope systemic functional linguistic ‘SFL’ and the analysis of text linguistics. The social function of Facebook conversation discusses something under one or more certain topics. The schematic structure of Facebook conversation deals with Greeting – Opening Conversation – Bringing the Topic – Discussion Pre-Closing and Farewell, while the linguistic features commonly used by Facebook users are material and relational processes, declarative, ideational theme, present tense, lowercase, parenthesis, contraction, similes, onomatopoeia, etc.

The researcher therefore concludes that Facebook conversation is a representation of a socio-cultural event embedded in a context of situation--- context of situation is the semio-socio-cultural environment in which the conservation unfolds, and that is why it is called “social semiotic”.

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