BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS OF FACEBOOK COMMUNICATION

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Abstract:The world we live in has changed due to the development of social networks, and as personal, informal conversations have been moved to a public forum, new linguistic codes have been created, and our perceptions about the ways we communicate have changed. Social networks have therefore become a powerful means of communication for the young generation, as they have exceeded certain limits and have changed their way of seeing communication. The Internet, as a means of advanced technology, has had a tremendous impact on linguistics, greatly changing language because of the way users communicate and interact. The purpose of the paper is to identify some of the benefits and drawbacks that social networks, especially Facebook, have on language at present.

Keywords: social networks, Facebook, communication, benefits, drawbacks.

Introduction

The Internet, as a means of advanced technology, has had a great impact on all languages, changing them a lot because of the way communication and interaction between users take place. One of the main reasons for this is the efficiency of internet communication and the easy accessibility of the global network. The prominent linguist Crystal (2001, p. 272), who expressed his point of view on this issue, claims: "When the phones arrived in the nineteenth century, people panicked because they thought they would destroy the language. Then television appeared in the 1920s and people panicked because they were convinced that everyone would be brainwashed. The same applies to the Internet. People have panicked because they thought it would have devastating effects on language."

Social networks: benefits and drawbacks

The use of social networks has grown a lot in the last 10 years. Buffardi & Campbell (2008) pointed out that web presence and connecting a growing number of people through SNS have become part of the daily routine of people, many of whom are young ones. In other words, as Downes (2006) states, the emergence of web 2.0 is not only a technological revolution, but rather a social transformation that allows and encourages communication, as these social networks allow members to express themselves and interact with others (McBride, 2009). There are several SNSs, but there is a special one, Facebook, originally created by a Harvard student in 2004 for in-campus socialization. Facebook has become the most popular SNS among young people (Cassidy, 2006; Stutzman, 2006) and especially among young people in Western countries (Godwin-Jones, 2010).

Facebook, and not just this social network, offers a wide range of technological benefits that support a range of interests that integrate multiple computer-mediated communication (CMC) modes such as self-presentation and written interaction between two or more people. Solomon & Schrum (2007) argue that Facebook improves communications services by allowing users to send e-mail messages, speak (text and video), participate in discussion forums, write on virtual boards, which are also frequently used to fulfill various social tasks and create a profile that may include descriptive elements as well as images.

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Blattner & Fiori (2009) claim that keeping in touch with friends on Facebook has taken a new dimension because it is facilitated by a series of notifications that users can receive and that inform them, for example, about status changes, profiles friends, new images etc. It is therefore not surprising to find that the SNS has been described as a "hot spot" where members can witness an ongoing life with the ability to see and share countless amounts of information (Vander Veer, 2008, p. 158). In addition, Facebook, and not only this website, allows users to engage in some kind of show, sometimes blocking certain viewers from seeing certain information. Therefore, users are able to adjust their privacy settings, which will eventually affect their online presentations to different friends on Facebook as they disconnect. Another aspect that is unique to websites like Facebook is that it allows users to connect with individuals, an event that could not otherwise have taken place without this electronic tool (Schwartz, 2009). In fact, it is now common for many people to become friends on Facebook as a way to share personal information, including discussion about common topics of interest. Schwartz (2009) recently pointed out that for many young people Facebook is an extension of the class where all types of connections take place, some of which become routines. In addition to such blogs, social networks provide users with opportunities and incentives for personal writing, self-reflection and, in some cases, interactive learning. For these reasons, educators have begun to see Facebook as a useful tool in linguistic pedagogy which "has the potential to find ways to make a connection in producing informal, reactive and academic messages." (Godwin-Jones, 2008, p. 7).

Nowadays, one of the main questions about the social network is its influence on users' linguistic competence. A lot of research has been done to find out how social networks influence the language of users and in most cases positive results outweigh the negative ones, especially for pupils or students learning a foreign language, English in particular. Taking into account the results of a 2015 study on the impact of social networks on students learning a foreign language, the participants stated that there is a positive effect of social networking sites in language learning. They mentioned the following: with the help of social networks, trainees can follow the teachers and they offer them various facilities to talk to improve their writing or speaking skills (Huseyin, Saide, Gunay, 2015). The use of social networks by students is so aggressive recently due to easy access to devices such as smart phones, tablets, iPads, and laptops connected to the internet (Jomon, Hope, Justin, 2012). However, to find out the positive and negative aspects of this issue, we decided to study the impact of social networks on the evolution of the current Romanian language. As in most countries and in Romania, networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others are widely known and widely used, indicating that the social network is already integrated into our daily academic lives, and people spend a significant time on network hubs.

The world of social communication has changed drastically; in the 80s and 90s, people used to speak face-to-face or on the phone, communication being generally verbal (Bruner, 1972; Warschauer, 1999). Halliday (1993), Kaplan (1995) and McLuhan (1962) agree that the development of social networks has created a social revolution that has brought about a change in the way of communication; instead of favoring private verbal communication, there has been a shift from verbal communication methods to written ones, based on online communication. Communication has become a technical-social activity where conversations are no longer personal or private, but have become a socializing method. With the development of social networks, we can notice a change in the purpose of written communication. Instead of writing as a formal communication form, social websites such as Facebook are becoming informal writing and communication forms, very different from those used by previous generations.

This kind of informal interaction based on the written text brings to the fore the main purposes of language, to communicate and to interpret the experience by organizing it in

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significant models (Halliday, 1993). The advantages and disadvantages of this new type of written communication consist in the fact that, despite being informal, it has become open to the public. The common language previously used by young people was considered to be private and it was used as part of the social and cultural color of that generation. With the development of social networks, the color and specificity of the slang of the current generation of social network users as well as other unconventional language codes have become public. Some researchers argue that this has led to the degradation of the language and implicitly of our culture (Stoll, 1995; Talbott, 1995). Other researchers argue that this is just a representation of the culture and social understanding of this technological generation (Bolter, 1991; Lanham, 1993). One thing is clear: this is the language of the young people and they use it as the most suitable way of public and private informal communication (Moyle, 2010).

Young people use social networks as an informal form of communication in the same way that speech or spoken language has been used before. The major difference is the following: spoken communication is fluid and non-permanent, while the same can not be said about written communication (Hamad, 1991). After writing, communication is "transmitted, stored, archived, re-evaluated, edited, and rewritten" (Warschauer, 1999, p. 6). It has become the way of communication for the present generation and whether we agree or not that this way of communication can lead to linguistic degradation, as educators we have no choice, we can only recognize it for what it is, a new subcategory or a branch of our culture and a new social language (Douglas, 2009). In the same way that slang changes social culture, this new language based on the text does the same thing. The difference is that this is a written way of communication and is much more permanent. Once written, it exists not only for the people who are the original recipients but for the masses, becoming the main characteristic of online social networks (Hamad, 1991).

In social networks, this type of written communication was initially used only among friends, but now it has become a new language that requires decoding and understanding in order to be able to participate in the conversation. This language is almost a separate language on its own, and it can be stated that it has no known place of origin, it is the language of the current generation, one that is completely different from that of the previous generations, who must either accept it to participate in communication, or to ignore it, and thus to risk being removed from conversations with people belonging to the younger generation. Therefore, involvement in social networks is essential to understanding and this makes them attractive, valuable, and popular communication methods. So, social networks, such as Facebook, become interesting arenas for decoding and critical understanding.

For today's young people, the main form of communication is Facebook; as such, it is impossible for teachers to ignore this essential way of communication. As teachers, we often think that this type of communication has no real value, being just about young people who share thoughts whose perceived value is addressed to the participants (Stoll, 1995; Talbott, 1995). This is a restrictive and narrow view of social networks, and their growing popularity is in fact a counter-argument, as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are living proofs of changing the nature of social interaction and communication.

Communication on Facebook is actually a complex social interaction with layers of rich language, social and cultural understandings. The importance of communication does not consist in communication itself or in symbols, accent, emoticons or punctuation, but in the combined use of these linguistic components. Some researchers (Warschauer, 1999) even support the idea that the incorrect use of these components is irrelevant, because the true value of any communication must be understood by the recipient and in this effort communication is successful and meaningful. This success in communication is based solely on the premise that the recipient would understand all these social and cultural indices and

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could interpret not only the information communicated, but also the intentions and the spirit in which the messages were emitted. Perhaps a communication of this type would not work, for example, with someone from a different age group, because the perceptions of generations may be different and what would mean success in transmitting the message to some could be regarded as a total failure for others.

However, with the development of technology, it can be noticed that more and more users of social networks show major shortcomings in how they express themselves in writing (Cummins, Sayers, 1995). Often there are reports in certain groups on Facebook, for example, of posts that prove nothing but the ignorance of some basic rules specific to the Romanian language, which supports the idea that it may also question the aspect of language degradation used when communicating on social networks. In this sense, there have even been published numerous articles in newspapers that draw attention to this phenomenon, which has only led to a complete decline of the contemporary Romanian language. Moreover, Coja emphasizes the following: "The novelty of the phenomenon makes it necessary to investigate and research it as a type of communication, computer-mediated communication being a relatively little discussed phenomenon and analyzed by the linguistic works elaborated up to the present. The lack of linguistic research on the phenomenon is due to its current character and the fact that it is in full stage of development and transformation at the same time" (2010, p. 9). However, the work of the above-mentioned author only deals with the phenomenon of chatting, not necessarily discussing the social networks, which, in 2010, the year when the paper was published, only began to develop and have more and more users.

So, although ten years ago the social network was a fairly new concept, at present websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn have more than one billion users and account for almost 25% of the usage of the Internet. According to an article posted on Facebook, it seems that Facebook only active monthly users now exceed 800 million and daily active users exceed 400 million (Facebook, 2012). It seems that overnight, social networks have become indispensable to our lives – from friendship and meetings, to news, weather forecasts and business issues. According to a Nielsen (2012) report in the U.S. only, the total number of minutes spent on social networks increased by 83% over the same period last year.

From a linguistic point of view, the impact of social networking is reflected in new words or phrases that did not make any sense a few years ago, or which had completely different meanings from what they have today. Even respectable dictionaries, especially English one, have included terms such as *selfie, phablet, emoji* etc. Moreover, it is obvious how the use of social networking in Romania puts its mark on the current Romanian language, which, whether willing or not, has taken over a lot of Anglicisms, sometimes wrongly interpreted, which may create confusion in understanding the transmitted messages.

With regard to the studies that have been carried out so far, it should be noted that they are not very numerous. In recent years articles have been published in the print media, in which their authors warned about the degradation of the Romanian language due to the increasing frequency of the use of incorrect forms, indicating both spelling mistakes, as well as morphological and semantic ones, but no scientifically substantiated study has yet been carried out, which should consider a classification of these mistakes, and possible caused of their production. However, the effort of such journalists is commendable, but we believe that precisely because this phenomenon of degradation of the Romanian language, as it has been called in the print media, is increasing in size, a linguistic study would be more than welcome.

There were also authors (Coja (2010), Vârlan (2012), Molea (2017) etc.) who were concerned about the way Romanian has suffered and still suffers changes in social networks, but who narrowed the scope of interest in particular to chat language, although they managed

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to draw an alarm signal on how the language skills of the younger generation are influenced by this way of communication.

Thus, Coja (2010) highlights the following: "The Internet is an environment with great linguistic freedom, where there are strong tendencies of simplification and concision. This is why the language used in chat has some peculiarities" (2010, p. 72), which led to the questioning of a sufficient number of subjects, chat users, precisely to highlight their views on the impact of using the chat on Romanian language: "a large percentage of respondents said there was an influence on the language. Asked about the positive or negative nature of this influence, the vast majority said that the influence is negative, showing that most people are aware of the different character of chat language (2010, p. 70).

The same conclusion is reached by Vârlan in a study published in 2012 on Internet language and its impact on Romanian communication: "In recent years, informal communication has expanded through chat rooms, messengers, forums or other means of Internet communication" (2012, p. 325). Being aware of this phenomenon, the author points out some of the advantages of this type of communication, among which: "he tendency to simplify the language, the quick possibility to access information, the transmission of messages to several receivers at the same time, the manifestation of a certain type of socializing (2012, p. 326), as well as its drawbacks: "encoded language, based on certain abbreviations and symbols, the transmission of information in an erroneous form; lack of censorship that makes possible the appearance of vulgar words and expressions etc." (2012, p. 326).

The author also attempts to present the language-specific features used in forums, blogs and chat, which, in her opinion, "will probably become a new language with multiple implications for our language and, unfortunately, not the positive ones" (2012, p. 326). Among these characteristics we mention: the extended terminology in the familiar register, the use of inappropriate English terms or inappropriate adaptations, avoiding an existing Romanian equivalent, the lack of diacritical marks, the abandonment of capitalization, the lack of hyphenation when it is mandatory, the frequent use abstractions and graphical changes of sounds (*sh* instead of *ș, tz* instead of *ț, k* instead of *ca* etc.), the strong tendency to write Romanian words with *k* instead of *c*, also mentioned by Rodica Zahiu in numerous articles published in Romanian newspapers and magazines.

Another author, in an article published in the *Limba română* magazine, highlights the same characteristics mentioned above, placing them at the expense of the concept of *digital orality*, "a hybrid form between the written and oral form of communication, the so-called written orality through the virtual space, the internet" (Molea, 2017, p. 1) specific to SMS language, chat conversation, or social networking.

Trying to describe the specific linguistic phenomenon specific to the new language specific to Internet users, Urușciuc (2008) states: "By distinguishing itself by rapidity, efficiency, dynamics, important data storage and utilitarianism, the virtual character of the new language (with its specific forms such as SMS, chat, Messenger, e-mail etc.), influenced more by English, has become as a universally accepted way of communication inside and outside the electronic environment (...). Thus, we are witnessing a more and more obvious imposition of a special, original (but also clichéd), simple and synthetic language (with its own rules and methods of use)" (2008, p. 114).

Ungureanu (2014) noticed that this type of communication "is done by writing and reading at the same time" (2014, p. 6). It occurs according to the classic face-to-face model, but visual and auditory contact is missing, important elements in an oral conversation, and the spoken text is written. The basic question is the lack of a mechanism that would render emotion, impression, feeling, attitude, in other words, the lack of nonverbal and paraverbal aspects in expressing oneself. This is why users of this type of communication have created

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various graphic elements, icons, the so-called emoticons, to express the emotional load of the written online conversation.

Conclusion

As it can be seen, the vast majority of researchers interested in this phenomenon has mostly focused in particular on chat communication, which is indeed, part of social networks, such as Facebook for example, which is accompanied by Messenger. The purpose of the paper was not to make predictions about how this new "oral/written" language will evolve, but we must not overlook the freshness of verbal expression in the virtual space, which denotes unlimited possibilities of language, an infinity of variants for communication and implicit for the dynamics of the current Romanian language. The present paper aimed at drawing a signal on the positive and negative aspects of Facebook communication and it will definitely become part of a broader study meant not only to underline advantages and disadvantages of such type of communication and its impact on the contemporary Romanian language, but also to try to find out possible explanations for such a communicative behaviour which sometimes does only only have positive effects on the users.

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