Semantic Choices and Patterns in YouTube Commentaries as Digital Language Variation

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Abstract. Various forms of language use in social media characterize digital culture as part of digital humanities. It is fundamental to be able to get some knowledge of knowing the behavior of people using digital platforms, because nowadays people communicate via digital. Digital communication is a valid text that does not happen suddenly because it can be considered as something that is passive. This paper is important so that the reader can get knowledge about choices and patterns in digital communication. This paper investigated the variety of digital language as social phenomenon in YouTube commentaries. The goals of such investigation were to reveal the semantic choices and the pattern of these choices as online communicative events. Applying qualitative and diachronic approach the research used YouTube comments on a YouTube channel discussing about family vacation throughout 3 years of period, from 2019-2022. Using Halliday's theory about semantic choice, the paper revealed three groups of semantic choices, which were semantic choice for identifying logical fallacy, semantic choice for identifying statement of feeling and semantic choice for identifying ridiculous behavior. There is also a recurring pattern that can be identified following the results of the analysis. In conclusion, digital language could be used in comparison to in person communication as important and valid development of language in digital humanities.

1. Introduction

Digital culture has been identified as important part of human civilization. In the realization of global crisis of COVID-19 pandemic, people were living digitally even more than before. It is unthinkable that digitalization, which affects humans from birth, has no impact on the languages that involves human societies and cultures. These cultures are the sum of the values that societies have revealed over time as a result of historical-social evolution. Through the interaction and communication digitally, people could share their opinions about the world and connect to the issues of the world. There have been recorded attempts at digital interactions. The use of audio sources, weblogs, big data, and simulations are all examples of digitalization in the humanities [1]. One digital phenomenon in the digital communication is social media. Language as thought of culture is being used in digital activities quite commonly. Language in social media is an important milestone in the development of human culture. In the era of digitalization, digital culture as part of digital humanities are marked by the various forms of language use in social media.

Various forms of social media, such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and many more have evolved in the recent decade and have taken over a big part of users' life. Users of social media can actively convey their opinions and

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thoughts to one another [2]. As a result, many individuals around the world, particularly the younger generation, use social media to express themselves and vent their emotions. YouTube is one of the social media platforms that allows individuals to share their opinions.

While some scientific works focus on YouTube as a communication with direct and indirect effects on people involved in video production or consumption (or both), there is another way of approaching to studying YouTube. There is a perspective at YouTube that considers it to be a type of discourse in and of itself, with its own processes, content, textually-mediated social interaction, and multimodality. YouTube discourse, according to [3], should be viewed as a digital environment that covers much more than simply watching online videos: it should be viewed as a complex, multi authored, multimodal, and textually mediated social interaction. Many researches in the field of applied linguistics on YouTube has largely focused on the comment exchanges between YouTube viewers.

The comments on YouTube is considered as an interaction between the video creator and the viewers or between viewers. The urge to begin commenting on media content stems from the desire to express an emotion or an opinion, to provide information, to correct inaccuracies or misinformation, and to provide a personal perspective [4].

The reason why the researcher chose YouTube comments as the communicative events is because there is a cohesion relation with text in the comments. Therefore, the researcher will examine other people's comments in order

to know people's point of view. In this paper, there will be two problem formulation that the researcher is going to find 1. What semantic choices can be identified from the YouTube comments? 2. How the semantic process being continuously shown by the comments?

1.1. Objectives

Identifying the use of language in digital format is very important and beneficial to be understood. In order to understand the digital language, this paper will answer these research questions: first, to reveal the continuous process of semantic meaning in YouTube comments. Second, to identify the structure of the comments as a discourse through time.

2. Literature Review

Human life has been thrown into a state of irreversible change as a result of digitalization. People's interactions with one another, how experiences are shared and disseminated, and how reality is presented and perceived have all changed as a result of digital new technologies [5]. New media enables new types of communication, which have been studied in a variety of ways, including the linguistic characteristics of digital communication, as well as the identities of media users and their interactions with their interlocutors [6, 7]. Many messages conveyed via digital media and, indeed, many other media today, have always been "multimodal" (combining words, images, and sounds). Multimodality, on the other hand, is more pervasive, diverse, and important today than it has ever been [8].

Digital communications can be asynchronous (for example, on websites where people can comment on posts from days or weeks ago) or synchronous (for example, when people conduct fast-paced interactions through online chat), but they all have the potential for interactivity [9]. Digital media allows for flexible, dialogic, and interactive interpretation of written language by allowing it to be used in ways that are similar to face-to-face speech language [10].

In common usage, the term text refers to written language. Modern linguistics, on the other hand, has developed the concept of text, which covers all types of utterances; thus, a text could be a magazine article, a television interview, a conversation, or a cooking recipe, to name a few examples [11].

Text linguistics, according to [12], is "the formal description of the linguistic rules guiding the organization of texts." There is a chronology or series that can be identified as the structure of a family vacation. [13] take a broader approach, defining text as a communication event that must meet the following seven standards of textuality:

a. Cohesion: the grammar used in this object is present tense.
b. Coherence: the coherence is purpose, because it explains about what is happening during family vacation.
c. Intentionality: the title of this video is suitable for people who wants to know more about general things that happen during vacation.
d. Acceptability: the video is focused on Western culture but it is acceptable for other cultures because the video has general sketches.
e. Informativity: the information provided by the video is sufficient, so people would give an expected comment.
f. Situationality: the role can be identified easily.
g. Intertextuality: despite the fact that this video was produced years ago, it can still be understood and appreciated in the comments by various times.

According to [14], text is everything that matters in a given situation: "By text, then, we imply a continuous process of semantic choice". [14] also stated, there are two grammatical classes based on meaning, or semantic function: verb, which expresses (an) action, and noun, which expresses (the) actor; the two combines to form a piece of discourse. Text and context, according to [15], are the two types of information that contribute to the communicative content of an utterance in all approaches within discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis is a tool for sociolinguists in identifying talk norms among various social and cultural groups in various conversational and institutional contexts, as well as describing the discursive resources people utilize in constructing various social identities in interaction [16]. Discourse is a term that refers to the language used by specific discourse communities [17].

3. Methods

The researcher used qualitative method for this paper. Qualitative research provides natural language, utilizes small samples, and is frequently focused on specific individuals, events, and contexts, allowing for an idiographic form of analysis [18]. The data for this study were taken from a comment on a YouTube video created by a channel named Smosh.

4. Data Collection

In order to fulfill the data collection procedure, the researcher need to do it correctly. First, the researcher selected one video from YouTube to be used as the source of data. The title of the video is "Every Family Vacation Ever" created by Smosh. Second, the researcher identified and categorized the comments following the years in which the comments were uploaded. Third, the researcher identified the semantic choices in comments following theory by [14] to fulfill the research purposes. Finally, analysis of the comments was done by identifying the process of these semantic choices, as detailed by [14].

5. Results and Discussion

Results of this study are divided into two parts, following the research questions. Discussion for each part

follow-suit as the data is presented. The YouTube channel produced several videos, one of which was portraying the typical family vacation. This paper uses a video entitled "Every Family Vacation Ever". This video is about a family who is going on a vacation and many things happen during their trip and when they arrived. Namely, the children are impatient because they are on the road for too long, all of the children wanted to go to the bathroom at the same time when they arrived at their lodging, a person feels furious because when she wanted to take many pictures on her trip to show it to her social media followers, her phone is out of batteries and there are no power adapter around, and many more general things that happen during vacation.

Table 1. Semantic Choices of YouTube Comments

No.	Type	Number	Percentage (N=13)
1.	Identifying logical fallacy	4	30.76%
2.	Identifying feelings	5	38.46%
3.	Identifying ridiculous behavior	4	30.76%

As can be seen from the table, the researcher collected 3 types of data with a total of 13 data for this research. According to Halliday's theory of semantic choice, there are two semantic meaning, which is verb that expresses an action and noun that expresses the actor. The first type of semantic meaning that the writer found was identifying logical fallacy that can be identified as Halliday's semantic meaning, because it expresses an action. For this type, the researcher found 4 data and can be calculated in a percentage of 30.76%. The second type was identifying feelings that can be identified as Halliday's semantic meaning, because it expresses an action. For this type, it was found 5 data in a percentage of 38.46%. The third type was identifying ridiculous behavior that can be identified as Halliday's semantic meaning, because it expresses the actor. For this type, it was found 4 data in a percentage of 30.76%. All the data that has been collected were in line with the theory.

5.1. The semantic choices in YouTube comments

Before investigating the semantic choices in the data, it was equally important to identify the data as a complete text. Identifying a text as a social event required the data to be seen as a text [14]. The YouTube video was shown to be a complete text, meeting the requirements of 7 standards of quality as stated earlier in the literature review [13]. In the YouTube comments, various comments can be seen to have certain meanings. In this section, the data show the continuous process of the semantic choices of 13 comments from 5 years period.

According to Halliday's theory, when people make actions, there are choices they make based on the desired situation. The data collected was the same as what Halliday conveyed because these data can be considered as an example of what Halliday calls semantic choice. These choices can be categorized into three groups. They are as explained below:

1. Semantic choice of identifying logical fallacy
2. Semantic choice of identifying feelings
3. Semantic choice of identifying ridiculous behavior

For the semantic choice of identifying logical fallacy, an example can be seen in Figure 1 below:
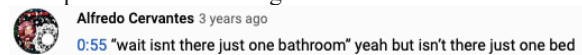

Fig. 1. Sample of semantic choice for identifying logical fallacy in the YouTube comments (1)

As can be seen from the example, the comment is about a family who went on a vacation and when they arrived at their lodging, the children wanted to go to the bathroom at the same time, but they only realized that there is only one bathroom. They do not even acknowledge the fact that there is only one bed because they are too busy fighting over who is going to the bathroom first.

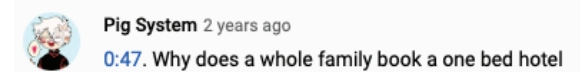Another example can be seen in the following Figure 2:

Fig. 2. Sample of semantic choice for identifying logical fallacy in the YouTube comments (2)

This comment has similar meaning with the first comment. It also talks about a family who booked a one bed hotel. The meaning of these comments is asking a question about why none of the family realize that the place they are going to stay only have one bed. The fact that were displayed in this video is not realistic, because how can a family who is going on a vacation only book a one bed and a one-bathroom holster. In reality, there will be no family who goes on a vacation but not planned beforehand.

Logical fallacy can be mean as a statement or something that is not logical. As can be seen from the example in figure 1 and figure 2, these types of comments can be considered as semantic choice of identifying logical fallacy because the fact that one family goes on a vacation without considering or looking out at their lodging that make them stay in a one bed and one-bathroom hotel is not realistic and considered to be under planning.

For the semantic choice of identifying feelings, the examples can be seen in Figure 3 below:
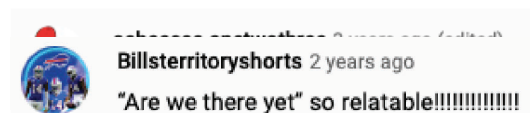
Fig. 3. Sample of semantic choice for identifying feeling in the YouTube comments

This comment is about when a family goes on a vacation, the children will most likely ask the question "are we there yet?" to their parents. They do not only ask once but they can ask the same question over and over again until they arrived at their destination. This type of question shows how impatient children are when they are on the way for too long because most of the children get bored easily when they are doing an intense activity continuously. The saying "are we there yet?" is considered as an exaggeration because it is more likely to be the beginning of typical problems of a family who is going on a vacation. These types of comments can be considered as semantic choice of identifying feelings, because the commentator feels the same way as what happened in the video by commenting "so relatable".

For the semantic choice of identifying ridiculous behavior, the examples can be seen in Figure 4 below:

Fig. 4. Sample of semantic choice for identifying ridiculous behavior in the YouTube comments

The comments above is about a scene where the family is going to the beach and the children was putting on some sunscreen and one of the children name Keith has a dark skin color. He also put on some sunscreen and the result was not like other children because of his skin color. The sunscreen was made for people who have a light skin color but he still uses it. As it can be seen in the comment, he stated that Keith is white now because of the sunscreen that he was not supposed to use and it makes him laugh seeing how his skin suddenly change colors. These types of comments can be considered as semantic choice of identifying ridiculous behavior, because the way Keith behave in this video is ridiculous when he knew that he has a different skin color but he still forces himself and wants to follow others that makes the result ended badly. From the results, this is what the audiences have identified. The audiences stated it in the comment section. It was found that there are three categories of semantic choice. For each of these categories, there are clear meaning identified from the comments. These meaning are in line with the theory. These categories are semantic choice of identifying logical fallacy, semantic choice of identifying statement of feeling and semantic choice of identifying ridiculous behavior. The semantic choice of identifying logical fallacy given in the examples, is considered a lack of planning. For semantic choice of identifying statement of feeling, it can be stated that the commentators feel relatable with the situation of a typical family problems during vacation. For semantic choice of identifying ridiculous behavior, it is stated that the act of this one person make the commentator laugh because he is applying the sunscreen that makes his skin color change that is actually an absurd thing to do and can end badly.

5.2. Recurring patterns in the YouTube comments

In the category of semantic choice of identifying logical fallacy, the pattern shows that it is an interrogative question. This interrogative question can be identified as pure interrogative with a WH question or an auxiliary verb that can be seen in the comments that the commentator use "why" and "isn't". The comments structures always highlight the object or fact they want to question, which is the "one bed" for one family. Therefore, the comments have the structure of a question. In this comment, there is also a contradiction object. If a comment has a contradicting statement and object, it must be logical fallacy.

For the semantic choice of identifying statement of feeling, the pattern shows that the statement in the comments are something that is relatable. These comments quotes what is on the YouTube video in the form of conversational intersection in YouTube comments. Therefore, the comments are in the form of statements. The comments also latch to the previous saying, catchphrase or utterance in the video.

As for the semantic choice of identifying ridiculous behavior, the comments show that in ridiculous behavior, there are always similarities, such as the comments always rephrasing the incident, which is the sunscreen and or mentioning the name of the person in the incident, which is Keith.

6. Conclusion

As can be seen from the results and discussion, this paper has shown that YouTube comments have interesting forms and meanings. The cultural and social context has been delivered through the comments. The researcher found and identified three semantic choices, which are semantic choice of identifying logical fallacy, semantic choice of identifying statement of feeling and semantic choice of identifying ridiculous behavior. The semantic choice of identifying logical fallacy in the examples is regarded as a lack of forethought. As for the semantic choice of identifying statement of feeling, the commentators or audiences feel relatable to the situation of a typical family problem during vacation. For the semantic choice in identifying ridiculous behavior, it is stated that this one person's act makes the commentator laugh because he is applying sunscreen that causes his skin color to change, which is an absurd thing to do that can end badly.

From these YouTube comments, there are also a recurring pattern that can be identified. The pattern of the comments for the meaning of logical fallacy has the structure of a question, highlighting the object "one bed" for one family meaning it is a contradicting statement, that is why it is considered as logical fallacy. The pattern of the comments for the meaning of statement of feeling, are something that is relatable, in the form of statement latching to the previous saying, catchphrase or utterance in the video. Last but not least, the pattern of the comments for the meaning of ridiculous behavior is rephrasing the incident

or mentioning the action or the actor (name of person). The pattern of comments made from time to time from these comments turned out to be no significant comments. There is an ongoing process that shows that semantic choice does not change.

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