

A Linguistic Analysis of Hashtags via Social Media : A Morpho-Pragma- Discourse Study

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Abstract

This study tackles the linguistic function of Hashtags via the social media. These days, digital communication makes it easier and faster for people to interact with one another and express their thoughts, opinions, and views with a large audience. Hashtags were first created as tools for topic-based information aggregation and categorization, but they are currently utilized on social media for much diverse purposes. This study attempts to explore the expressive potential of hashtags using a mix of case studies, field research, and literature reviews. Morpho-syntactic analysis, pragmatic analysis and textual analysis were performed on various hashtag usages to reveal broadly applicable patterns. Thus, a number of communicative roles of posts are used to identify the significant of hashtags . To sum up the idea, hashtags show the ability to express oneself freely and develop a distinctive online identity. Extralinguistic components are crucial to the evolution of discourse in digital communication activities, based on discourse analysis.

Keywords: *hashtags, morpho-syntactic function, discourse analysis, communicative functions, social media, pragmatic functions, Instagram, digital technologies.*

تحليل لغوي للوسوم (هاشتاج) عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي: دراسة مورفولوجية -
براغماتية - خطابية

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المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الوظيفة اللغوية للوسوم (الهاشتاقات) عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. في الوقت الحاضر، يسهل التواصل الرقمي على الناس التفاعل مع بعضهم البعض والتعبير عن أفكارهم وآرائهم أمام جمهور واسع. لقد تم إنشاء الوسوم في البداية كأدوات لتجميع المعلومات وتصنيفها حسب الموضوع، لكنها تُستخدم حاليًا على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي لأغراض أكثر تنوعًا. تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف الإمكانيات التعبيرية للوسوم (الهاشتاك) من خلال مزيج من دراسات الحالة، والبحث الميداني، ومراجعة الأدبيات. التحليل المورفو-تركيب، والتحليل التداولي، والتحليل النصي اعتمد في استخدامات الوسوم المختلفة للكشف عن أنماط قابلة للتعميم. وعليه، يتم تحديد عدد من الأدوار التواصلية للمنشورات بهدف التعرف على أهمية الوسوم. وباختصار، تبرز الوسوم كوسيلة للتعبير الحر وتطوير هوية رقمية مميزة. وتُعد العناصر غير اللغوية ضرورية لتطور الخطاب في أنشطة التواصل الرقمي، وذلك اعتمادًا على تحليل الخطاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الوسوم، الوظيفة المورفو-تركيبية، تحليل الخطاب، الوظائف التواصلية، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، الوظائف التداولية، إنستغرام، التقنيات الرقمية.

Introduction

The use of social media platforms has steadily increased over the last few decades, necessitating the development of tools that assist users in sorting through and finding material in vast quantities. More and more people are using hashtags on a regular basis because they are available on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and even messaging apps like WhatsApp. However, a brief look at the online world reveals that hashtags are now used for much more than just identifying topics; you may use them to notify readers what sort of smartphone the author is using or to evangelize. The world is changing as a result of information technology. This argument now reflects the necessary procedures occurring in the world, rather than appearing to be an exaggeration. Every aspect of civilization is impacted by contemporary innovations, from television to education, from language to rocketry. These developments are important even though linguistics is changing more slowly than the media industry. The advent of the Internet and the rise of online media and social networks have transformed communication in a manner akin to that of the printing press. Along with the communication strategies, the relevant texts' substance, stylistics, and structure have all changed. Hashtags are being created and used by social network individuals more frequently in their submitted content on different social media platforms. By including metadata in their posts, individuals can improve their chances of being seen and followed by using the hashtag. Caleffi (2015) defines it as "a string of characters preceded by the pound symbol #" (p. 46). Zappavigna (2011) has referred to this tagging process as "ambient affiliation," suggesting that users may not have had direct interactions with one another. However, their shared interests bind them together. Zappavigna (2015) claims that The adoption of hashtags has signaled a shift in people's browsing behavior from finding material to looking for other communities that match their views. Hashtags were initially used to categorize posts on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. When "#barcamp" originally appeared on Twitter in 2007, it was the first hashtag ever used. In July 2009, Twitter introduced hyperlinks for hashtags, enabling users to click on them and be sent to posts that had the same hashtag (Pasho, 2017).

Literature Review

Digital technology and discourse analysis were the study's main topics, and discourse has been sufficiently researched to provide a theoretical and conceptual basis for discourse analysis. The theoretical framework required for critical discourse analysis, research, and discourse theory is provided, for instance, by the works of Fairclough (1995, 2013), van Dijk

(1995, 2008, 2009), the relationship between concepts of power and communication, the role of media in the formation of power discourse, pragmatics of discourse analysis, etc. This is where one may find the theoretical underpinnings needed for critical discourse analysis, research, discourse theory, the relationship between communication and power notions, the role of the media in fabricating discourses of power, pragmatics of discourse analysis, etc. In his earlier research, Foucault (2005, 2013) established the applicability of discourse theory and presented his theories on its characteristics and boundaries (Hook, 2007). Hashtags have been examined by numerous scholars from a wide range of disciplines, including public opinion, Sociology, advertising, and the spread of info. Despite the abundance of research on social media language, hashtags have not yet received adequate attention from linguistic scholars. Marwick (2013) and Papacharissi (2002, 2013) investigate the problems of media representation and the investigation of online identity creation. In particular, Kozhemyakin (2016) and Jones, Chik, and Hafner (2015) discuss digital technology and discourse analysis.

1. Hashtags' Terminology

On social media platforms, hashtags (#) are frequently used to arrange material and make it easier to locate. When you say "hashtags with reference," you can mean the following:

- Using Hashtags to Cite Sources: Some individuals utilize hashtags to include relevant sources or subjects in their posts, such as:

Have a glimpse at this climate change report! #Research #Science.

"#HarvardStudy shows that sleep improves memory."

- Academic or Professional References: Although hashtags aren't commonly used in official citations, they could be useful for structuring discussions around particular subjects, like:

"#APAStyle for proper academic referencing."

"#MarketingTrends2024 based on Forbes report."

- Using Hashtags to Give Credit: Some creators use hashtags to give credit to their original sources, such as:

"#PhotoBy @username" in addition to "#InspiredBy #Shakespeare"(Burns and Burgess, 2011)

1.1. Hashtag use- Power conflict - Activism via hashtags

In the world of digital technology, the Internet, and social networks in particular, hashtags are utilized frequently to communicate information in a concise, precise way. Hashtags like #MeToo, #TimesUp, and #BlackLivesMatter have been used by the feminist movement in the fight against discrimination against social groups based on skin color, race, ethnicity, and other characteristics. (Welles, Jackson, and Bailey, 2020)

1.2. The significance of methods for online communication and their function in discourse analysis

Jones, Chik, and Hafner (2015) propose the term "digital communication practices" to describe human behaviors or processes that occur through electronic communication or the web. In more detail, they characterize this as the realization of social identities, the reproduction of social links, and the application of digital technology to achieve socially worthwhile goals. Digital communication practices are characterized by semiotic and discourse meanings, which contrast with the term's technological or software-hardware content. (Kozhemyakin, 2016).

Instagram hashtag research is still quite active because Instagram is a relatively new platform. The literature review addresses two primary viewpoints for hashtag research, namely morpho-syntactic aspects and pragmatic functions, in accordance with the goal of the current study.

2. Functions of Hashtags

2.1. Morpho-syntactic function of hashtags

Many academic studies have focused on the morphological and syntactic characteristics of hashtags, including their structure and placement inside posts. Caleffi (2015) examined a corpus of English and Italian hashtags used both offline and online in order to look at hashtagging as a new morphological process for word construction. Eight categories of English hashtags were suggested by her as a preliminary taxonomy (see Table 1).

She investigated the characteristics and composition of these novel language components. She describes hashtagging as a new productive word creation strategy that can be utilized to construct creative linguistic entities by joining several words together, even though it may lead to the rewriting of established word and part of speech categories. Caleffi's (2015) model

stated that consideration is given to the hashtag's word count and placement inside the post, whether it is at the start, middle, or end. Additionally analyzed are the items that follow the "#" sign, such as words and phrases, acronyms, letter-digit combinations, and symbols.

Table 1: English hashtag taxonomy (Caleffi ,2015). Note. Reprinted from Caleffi (2015, p. 53)

Type of hashtag	Example
# + acronym/abbreviation	#ootd
# + 1 word	#marathon
# + 2 words	#prettyplace
# + 3 words	#ThingsNobodySays
# + 4 words	#fromwhereistand
# + 5 or more words	#IAmElyarsBillionthGirl
# + letters and numbers	#b2bhour
# + ??	#duhDumduhDumDuhDumDuhDumDuhmdduhm

2.2. Pragmatic functions of Hashtags

In addition to its fundamental classification and search capabilities, which have been the subject of several studies, hashtags have developed to serve a number of pragmatic and linguistic functions. Zappavigna (2011) looked into how hashtags function as technological instruments for discourse. The idea of "searchable talk" refers to the way hashtags encourage "searchability" as a language action that fosters community. Using a hashtag in the hopes that other users would follow suit develops a "folksonomy," or an online community that engages in collaborative tagging. Zappavigna (2011) defined "searchable talk" as "online conversation where people actively render their talk more findable" (p. 804).

Tamara (2011) distinguished between two types of hashtags: informative and commentary (judgments/ opinions). She found that about 71% of Twitter tweets had informative hashtags. In contrast, Zimmer (2011) focused on the use of ironic hashtags, namely "as a vehicle for self-directed sarcasm" (Par. 3). He thought "the 'hashtag' convention has been pressed into the service of self-mockery" (Par. 1). Additionally, Zimmer (2011) suggested a closer look at these sarcastic hashtags, particularly those that

involve self-mocking based on race and class, "to make way for a deeper self-examination" (par. 7).

Page (2012) separated hashtag to three groups: declarative, imperative, and question, based on the type of clause or language that surrounds the hashtag in consideration. She also found out that celebrities use hashtags to promote themselves. Consequently, Page (2012) noted that "search terms related to professional expertise tend to emphasize the tweet author's identity as a practitioner within a particular field" (p. 10). They achieve this through two main post types: those on national events and those about professional identity. Wikström (2014) used the theory of speech acts to study how hashtags communicate. He gave eight examples, including playing games, providing parenthetical explanations, and acting humorous, passionate, and emotional.

2.3. Metafunctions of Language

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) defines language as a system of communication through choices. (Halliday, 1978). The different purposes that language is used to accomplish have an impact on its organization and structure on all levels. These functions—known as metafunctions—occur concurrently and appear as various layers within a clause's structure (Halliday, 1994).

Methodology

The research method that is adapted in this study is the qualitative method which describes the use and the benefit of hashtags in communication between people on social media. The system-functional technique is used to describe how discourse manifests itself in digital communication via digital technologies. Information was manually gathered from postings on the accounts of Arab and Iraqi celebrities throughout a range of time periods in order to examine the usage of hashtags on Facebook or Instagram, particularly Arabic and English language hashtags in different themes such as hashtags of university of Al-Qadisiyah, of funny reels, educational page(Ayman English), Ministry of health , shrokeen page, Yaman chicken, and foundation of martyrs.

Caleffi's (2015) taxonomy is used to accomplish a morpho-syntactic analysis on the selected hashtags. Her idea is based on anything that follows the "#" symbol, such as acronyms, letter or number combinations, and any symbols used to separate words. The hashtag's word count and position inside the post are also considered.

The study examines the pragmatic functions of hashtags using Zappavigna's (2015) methodology. Her taxonomy of hashtag functions is based on the SFL paradigm, a social semiotic theory that examines discourse in context to address issues of how meanings act within the unique contexts in which they are formed. To find out if the chosen hashtags offer an evaluative comment or identify the post's topic, they will be analyzed and categorized using Zappavigna's (2015) categorization, which is described above. As will become clear throughout the study, practically all hashtags simultaneously enact the textual function.

Data Analysis

The hashtags present in the sample Instagram and Facebook posts were extracted and examined. It was discovered that there were 598 hashtags in the sample overall. The morpho-syntactic features of the hashtags are covered in the first part of the study, and their pragmatic purposes are covered in the second.

- Morpho-Syntactic Structure Features

This section analyzes the selected hashtags' morphological structure and syntactic properties. The study takes into account the hashtag's word count, character types, and placement inside the message, as per Caleffi's (2015) methodology.

The sample hashtags' word counts range from one to five, which is a considerable variation (see Table 2). Most hashtags are just one, two, or three words long. Seldom do hashtags surpass this quantity. This supports the idea put out by Caleffi (2015), shorter hashtags are preferred.

Table 2: shows the number of words in hashtags.

Number of words	Example of hashtags
# + (1) word	#شروكين #منشن #لصاحبك #الصحة #aymanenglish#English#arabic#family#reels
# + (2) words	#نشاطات_ - رمضان#جامعة- القادسية#علمان-وسنسثمر#رئاسة الوزراء#مؤسسة-الشهداء#راجمة-الجنوب #lia-elgoni
# + (3) words	#كلية-التربية-للبنات#قسم-النشاطات-الطلابية
# + (4) words	#مديرية-الاعلام-والعلاقات-العامة#دجاج-يمان-يسبب-الادمان
# + (5) words	#كلية-علوم-الحاسوب-وتكنولوجيا-المعلومات

- *Pragmatic structure features*

The current phase of this investigation will look into the practical purposes of the sample hashtags. Zappavigna (2015) highlighted that hashtags can be classified into three major classes relied on the reason for their use:

1. Experience-based hashtags is employed for selecting a post's topic.
2. Personal hashtags: They simplify the exchange of viewpoints or positions.
3. Textual hashtags: These organize posts using typography.

Table 3. *Experiential vs. interpersonal hashtags*

Examples experiential hashtags	Examples interpersonal hashtags
جامعة- القادسية#	نشاطات_ - رمضان# كلية-التربية-للبنات# قسم-النشاطات-الطلابية# كلية-علوم-الحاسوب-وتكنولوجيا-المعلومات#
رئاسة-الوزراء#	مؤسسة-الشهداء# عامان-وسنستمر# مديرية-الاعلام-والعلاقات-العامة#
شروكين#	راجمة-الجنوب#
منشن#	لصاحبك#
دجاج#	دجاج-يمان-يسيب-الادمان#
#aymanenglish	#English #arabic
#lia-elgoni	#family #reels

Conclusion

Although hashtags were first created to categorize messages and make them easier to find, they have since evolved to serve a variety of linguistic purposes, providing fresh approaches to creating meaning. The current study has attempted to investigate the pragmatic functions and morpho-syntactic characteristics of Arabic and English hashtags using a sample of Instagram and Facebook posts, given their extensive usage on numerous social media

websites. The digital environment is rapidly evolving. To ensure that the linguistic strategies and speech meanings utilized in the network are sufficiently considered, discourse analysis techniques might be applied. They can help demonstrate that digital platforms, like websites, are only used for the live transmission and expression of human-innate thoughts, feelings, tasks, and ambitions.

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