

## **Linguistic Deviations in Virtual Discourse: A Computer-Mediated Approach** الانزياحات اللغوية في النص الافتراضي

**Lect.**

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### **1. Introduction**

Virtual discourse is related to the new trends of using technology in communication. As such, different types of virtual discourse have been adopted such as electronic messaging, computer-mediated texts, e-mail messages and the like. These kinds of discourse are surely characterized by specific linguistic features that are different from the normal ways of speaking and writing. It is supposed that there are deviant manifestations in such discourse. This study is an attempt to investigate linguistic deviations in virtual discourse. Thus, it aims to answer the following questions:

What kinds of linguistic deviation are there in virtual discourse?

What is the value of such deviations?

The current paper is structured as follows: section 1 is an introduction; sections 2&3 present a theoretical background on both virtual discourse and linguistic deviation; section 4 is devoted to data analysis, results and discussion; finally, section 5 summarizes the most important conclusions.

### **2.Virtual Discourse: An Overview**

Virtual discourse becomes the focus of some modern discourse studies in the 1990's under what is called computer-mediated discourse (CMD). It is concerned with the analysis of electronic texts as "distinguished by its focus on language and language use in computer networked environments, and by its use of methods of discourse analysis to address that focus" (Herring, 2001: 526).Earlier, Baron (1984) concentrates the role of virtual discourse analysis in the study of language change and development.

Kiesler et al. (1984) focus on the socio-psychological aspects of computer-based texts. They use the term 'synchronic' to explain the online or direct interaction in computer. This can be seen in chat rooms

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discussions. Another case that can be detected in virtual communication is what can be 'diachronic' or offline messaging, where the message is stored in the receiver's site such as the e-mail (cf. Cherny, 1999). Although the genre is written in both online and offline virtual contact, the online is similar to face-to-face interaction of spoken conversations, and the offline is equivalent to what is envisaged in written texts.

However, virtual communication is, unlike ordinary conversations, characterized by lengthy gaps and overlaps (Lunsford, 1996). Another feature of this type of discourse is that the interlocutors do not almost always know each other very well. Besides, they may even use nicknames or misleading names. Others use names that are different from their own real gender: male for female and female for male (Hall, 1996; Herring, 1998). Like ordinary communication, computational interaction provides a variety of 'participation structures' which include one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one and even many-to-many interactions (Baym, 1996).

Some net users tend to hide their real names for different reasons. For example, they do not like to emphasize the racial or ethnic discretion or difference with others (see Burkhalter, 1999). In other words, they are more interested in group-identity and solidarity. This is also related to their own ideas of politeness and collaboration (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1987). A similar study implementing pragmatic orientation is Baym's (1996) in which he investigates the strategies of disagreements and agreements in online discussions.

Savignon & Roithmeier (2004) investigate the role of strategic competence in achieving successful communication with others focusing on some German learners of English. They discover that "an interesting as well as powerful strategy used by some participants to mitigate potential conflict was the conclusion of a posting by inviting comments or thanking the readers for their attention" (p. 282).

Androutsopoulos (2006) clarifies that virtual discourse creates a new environment for communication, saying that

the time is ripe for supplementing and eventually replacing the listings of 'prototypical' features that have been popular in mode-centered 'Internet linguistics' by a user and community-centered approach, which is promising for a more complex theorizing of the social and contextual diversity of language use on the Internet...viewed as a realisation of the 'Internet sociolinguistics' imagined by Crystal as a future research development, one of the aims of which would be to study

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the 'linguistic idiosyncrasies' which 'newcomers will have to learn if they wish to join in'. (p. 430)

Tapscott (1996; 1998) affirms that electronic discourse creates new norms in cultural communication as well as alternate linguistic styles and structures. He calls such tactics 'netiquette', where participants are required to follow specific prescribed communicative language. However, this view contradicts what can be seen as a deviation or deviance from communicative or linguistic norms, which is the topic of the current paper. Pragmatically speaking, virtual discourse could be a dangerous tool for strategic rudeness and anti-politeness. Thus, "with the protection of anonymity and distance, CMC users can exercise aggression against other real humans, with little risk of being identified or held accountable for their actions" (Hardaker, 2010: 238).

Following Foucault (1980) who assumes that societal constructions of power relations are reflected in discourse, some virtual communities set firm rules that cannot be violated by different participants. If they violate them, they will be sanctioned by the empowered heads (or admins) who administer such websites (see Kolko & Reid, 1998). Another example of virtual power is represented by the U.S. dominance of most computational technology and equipments all over the world (see Yates, 1996).

Crystal (2001) presents important insights on the progressing study of online virtual communities and language. In this work, he highlights chat groups and instant messaging as good examples in the study of language genre and use in a new and special context.

Some scholars, such as Cook (2004), think that virtual discourse and communication provide special tokens of speech communities. Moreover, they crystallize a variety of identity reflections and discussions. Some people try to pretend as a member of diverse group or ethnicity to argue others in a cunning or maneuvering style. "Social class, race and ethnicity have also tended to be relatively invisible on the Internet, ... most people participating in public group CMD have been highly educated, middle- to upper-middle class, white speakers of English" (Herring, 2001). Additionally, critical discourse analysis overlaps with virtual discourse in treating feminist attempts to combat gender inequality via the use of various strategies in different web contexts (see Herring et al., 1995).

Electronic devices give the chance for users to interact with each other from distant locations. "Without face-to-face interaction, the

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keyboard becomes the main translator and the screen vehicle for translation of conversation elements" (LeBlanc, 2005: 31). Furthermore, Walther (2010) incurs the importance of virtual programs in linguistic analysis. "language analysis programs that can be applied to large corpuses of digital texts have made online behavior more amenable to analysis and made textual analysis far less onerous than it previously was." (p. 489) .

More importantly, "it is a popular perception that computer-mediated language is less correct, complex and coherent than standard written language" (Herring, 2001: 566). Thus, the linguistic structure of the virtual discourse has specific arrangements and features. For instance, it is asserted that participants adopting net messaging used to employ fewer subordinate clauses and narrow scope of vocabulary (Baron, 1984: 131-2). Herring (1998) states that web users may use small strings of language to be economical in effort. However, this study attempts to discover more reasons for this kind of language use focusing on linguistic deviation.

### **3. Linguistic Deviation: Tenets and Principles**

Linguistic deviation has long been the focus of many studies interested in stylistic analysis of literary texts (see Leech, 1969). Leech (Ibid: 57) refers to linguistic deviation as 'foregrounding', whereas the 'background' is the normal use of language. Chapman (1973: 114) defines deviation as "linguistic usage considered to depart from normal expectations of users of the language". This definition suggests that deviation or deviance is negative since it constitutes a breach of the rules of grammar. This can be a hindrance to effective communication (Cited in Mbatiah, 2012: 118). However, Chapman's definition does not invoke a negative opinion towards deviation. Moreover, linguistic deviation can be an effective tool for successful communication especially in literary texts, and even in ordinary speech because it tends to use language in a special way with which we are not accustomed.

McIntyre (2012: 10) states that 'peculiarities' are those linguistic deviations which make any discourse open to many level and ways of interpretations. Besides, he asserts that what seem deviant to us is the converse, viz. what is normal in literature is what we see as deviant. In this case, normal speech will be deviation in the eyes of the poet or any litterateur. Beauty is in the eye of beholder.

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Thoms (2008) argues that some scholars attempt to compose what is termed 'poetic grammar'. This type of grammar has failed because it does not enable analysts to distinguish between well-formed and ill-formed sentences, which is a condition for any successful theory of grammar. "This is a major problem for a theory of poetic grammar: one cannot distinguish between what kinds of deviation can and cannot be admitted to the poetic grammar" (p. 9).

Nofal (2011: 61-2) affirms that linguistic deviation in literary texts can be achieved by different ways: abnormal syntactic structures, some illogicality in usage, lexical freedom and word plays, the use of archaic and neologised diction ...etc.

Pirnajmuddin&Medhat(2011) indicate that linguistic deviations may represent a challenge for the translator. Therefore, they suggest that literal translation would be a useful tool to soften this challenge.

More recently, Nabian&Iraji (2013) point out that the use of linguistic deviation in any type of discourse is related to human aspect of linguistic creativity and productivity. Yet, such deviations should have stylistic value and significance. They add

Whenever a writer tries to make his language creative, he uses the language in a different way from the conventional one. He can give his readers unexpected surprises by using unconventional language and he can make a strong impression on their mind by doing so. This kind of the creative use of language is what technically called linguistic deviation, which can be used as an instrument for a writer to create novelty by deviating from the norms of literary convention or every day speech.(p.1454)

In the light of this review, it should be asserted that linguistic deviation in this module is something intentional, i.e. it is made by the writer or speaker for specific purpose. Conversely established, linguistic deviation will be considered as a kind of mistake or lapse.

Now, it should be turned to types of linguistic deviation. Different scholars and researchers proposed various kinds of it. They can be summarized as follows:

a. Grammatical/syntactic deviation:"It is a kind of deviation in which the [writer] disregards the rules of sentence or syntactic features"(Pirnajmuddin&Medhat, 2011: 1331), as in the following example:

Our heart's charity's health's fire, ... (Ibid)

Here, the use of genitive case is out of the normal in English.

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- b. Lexical deviation: It means the violation of word-formation rules. It also involves what is named 'neologism', the invention or coinage of new words or meanings of words. For example, Eliot has invented the prefixed word unflowering (Nofal, 2011: 47).
- c. Orthographic deviation: This is concerned with the deviance from the normal ways of writing such as abnormal spelling and the use of new acronyms (Thoms, 2008: 2). Several examples are presented to show such type of deviation. It is said to be the commonest deviance on the net (Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary of American English, 2007).
- d. Phonological deviation: This is the deviation in sound or pronunciation which is done deliberately in regard to preserving the rhyme, as when the noun windis pronounced like the verb wind or pronouncing never as niver (Pirnajmuddin&Medhat, 2011: 1331).
- e. Sociolinguistic deviation: This is related to code deviance where some speakers or writers tend to switch from one code (language or variety) for specific social aims. It is named 'dialectal' deviation in terms of Leech (1969).

### **4. Data Analysis, Results and Discussion**

The texts are collected from five different websites on the internet. They include chat rooms and talks and some web comments. The main linguistic deviations are presented below with examples followed by brief discussion on the stylistic value of such deviant aspects.

#### **4.1 Grammatical Deviation**

Data analysis shows various aspects of grammatical deviations. Here are some examples:

- a. Changing subject pronouns into object pronouns:
  - Silent, me printing my document
  - Me finish my lunch hah.

(Net: 3)

Here, the writer changes the subject I am into me.

- b. The lack of verb 'be' in most sentences:
  - can we[be]frnds ?
  - Hahaahi think she[is ]sleeping sis.

(Ibid)

- c. The use of 'be' instead of 'do':
  - Fine and where are you live? (Net: 4)
- d. Deletion of some words from the sentence:

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-no i don't know[anything]about jain

-[It]means u are hindu

-ya he is my bro.[he is] from delhi

-i m talking [to] u

(Ibid)

e. Using stative verbs in progressive:

-I am new to Korea and I am wanting to learn Korean (Net: 3)

The normal way of saying this is: I want to learn Korean. But, it seems that the speaker wants to emphasize his wish.

f. The lack of Ed-pp after 'have' in perfectives:

-Through extractive data literacy bootcamp, ihave learn a lot.sply fusion table.

-I have enjoy it being part

(Net: 5)

Such grammatical deviations may be resorted to for different reasons:

- a. The writers are not well-qualified language learners. They are using what has been described by Widdowson (1979) as 'approximant systems' of L2.
- b. Some writers attempt to save time by deleting some inflections or function words that can be understood from the context.

### 4.2 Orthographic Deviation

Data analysis indicates many examples for this kind of deviance. It seems that this deviation aims to achieve two things:

- i. Group-identification: This is related to virtual community creation. Some websites or chat rooms administrators would like to distinguish their own identity from other web groups(cf. Fought, 2006: xi).
- ii. Speed: This is a technical reason. Some sites or chat rooms admins prefer the use of different word form such as abbreviations and acronyms in order to save time. Generally, chatting on the net needs speed and time-saving.

Here are some examples for orthographic deviations with their meaning:

?4U            I have a question for you.

^^             Read line above

121            one-to-one

<3             Love

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2	To	
2mrw	Tomorrow	
4	For	
AFK	away from keyboard	
AKA	also known as	
ASAP	as soon as possible	
BBS	Be back soon	
BF	Boyfriend	
BFF	best friend(s) forever	
BRB	Be right back	
BTW	by the way	
CMB	Call me back	
CMIW	Correct me if I'm wrong	
CU	See you	
CU L8R	See you later	
CUZ/COS	Because	
CWYL	Chat with you later	(Net: 1)

As one can see in these examples, different styles and ways have been used to stand for words:

- a. The use of acronyms: HBD, GG...etc. These letters are taken from the beginnings of the words they stand for.
- b. Using letters that are homophones for the words which they stand for: IC, How r u...ETC.
- c. Using numbers that are pronounced like the words they stand for: 4 (for), Gr8 (great, 2 (to, too)...etc.

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d. The use of speech-like tokens such as interjections to stand for a word or phrase: hhhhhh (very funny)...etc.

### 4.3 Sociolinguistic Deviation

This kind of deviation is important because it is currently used in the net. Its stylistic value is related to its role in self-identification. It reflects the identity or personality of the speaker or writer. Some web chatters resort to it to distinguish themselves in multi-national talks or rooms. It is mainly represented by code-switching, i.e. the use of more than one language in the same discourse by single speaker (Jourdan & Tuite, 2006: 155). The following examples illustrate the case:

-En menos de diez minutos, después de publicar esta oración te Señor, que en este momento JFMG está pensando en mi FARR queriendo a toda costa estar a mi lado queriendo verme. (French) (Net: 5)

-18 saalki age kafikhtrnakhoti he..just kidding hahaha. (Hindi)

(Net: 4)

In the last instance, the writer apparently explains the reason for his use of mother-tongue. It is merely for kidding (joking). This proves that the reasons for sociolinguistic deviations are unlimited.

### 4.4 Lexical Deviation

Different types of lexical deviation have been found in data analysis. Some examples are as follows:

a. The use of nicknames or even no-names to stand for real names:

-Anonymous says: ○

(Net: 5)

-Hero Fighter (Expendable) m - (Net:2)

#### -silentmode m

Nares u have job wht u do dear (Ibid)

It seems that they use such names to hide their gender (male to female, or female to male), or to hide some aspects of their identity such as ethnicity, religion and the like because these may be reflected in real names.

b. In a chatroom one cannot see the other people. Sometimes it helps to send "faces" (also known as "smileys" and "emoticons") to help explicate our feelings and emotions, for example whether we are serious or joking. These symbols stand for lexical items. Here are some typical faces.

:-) Happy

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:-( Sad

#:~0 Ahh!

\* :-o Alarmed!

(|:-# American football player

%-} Amused

0:-) Angel

:-@ Angry (Net:2)

Moreover, these ways are used for saving time as well. Additionally, such symbols are used to emphasize the identity of the whole group or community on the internet, or merely to distinguish them from others websites.

### 5.Conclusions

This study has come up with the following concluding remarks:

1. Linguistic deviations in virtual discourse have some stylistic values because they imply some kind of purpose and intention for the receiver.
2. Grammatical deviation in virtual discourse can be seen as a result of the writers' goal to show brevity, speed and familiarity. They deviate grammatical rules since they indicate their specialized use of certain varieties of English.
3. Orthographic deviance is resorted to as some websites owners or chat rooms administrators would like to distinguish their own identity from other web groups; besides, they seek speed in writing as well.
4. Sociolinguistic deviation reflects the writers and speakers' self-identification with some colouring idiosyncratic features of their cultural and social positioning. Such a deviance indicates kinds of code-switching that implies the producers' origin and/or accommodation.
5. Lexical deviations are utilized to hide the producers' identity, name, religion or some aspects of ethnicity.

### ملخص البحث:

يدرس هذا البحث الانزياحات اللغوية في النص الافتراضي الالكتروني. يعد هذا المضمون من البحث من احدث انواع البحث في علم اللغة المعاصر وعلم النص

خصوصاً. يهدف البحث الى سبر غور انواع الانزياح اللغوي على عدة مستويات نحوية وكتابية واجتماعية لغوية ودلالية في النصوص الالكترونية كمواقع التواصل الاجتماعي ومواقع الكتاب الثقافية والدردشة وغيرها. واستتج الباحث بعد تحليل نماذج من مواقع الكترونية مختارة ان الانزياح اللغوي له قيمة اسلوية لأنه يؤشر هدفا للكاتب في هذا الموقع بأبعادونوايا مختلفة. فالانزياح النحوي مثلاً ينتج من رغبة الكاتب لبيان لهجته واصله الحضاري او المناطق الجغرافي. كذلك استعمال الانزياح الاجتماعي اللغوي فانه يشير الى رغبة الكاتب ببيان صورته الاجتماعية وهويته الاثنية او اتجاهه الديني او باخفائها.

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