

Prevailing Lexical-stylistic Features in Emirati Language Learners' Digital Discourse

Caractéristiques lexicales stylistiques dominantes dans le discours numérique des apprenants en langue émirienne

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Abstract

Today's language classroom is undergoing an irreversible hyperbole and one of the most powerful drivers of this transformation is ICT. Digital classroom not only exposes the learners to grammatical language of linguistics, but rather the everyday life of the language in use (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). The aim of this study was to explore the nature of iPad based free digital discourse in a digital language classroom and capture lexical-stylistic features used in Emirati teenage language learners' online communications. This mixed method case study approach implemented sentiment detection theoretical framework on Blackboard-learn educational learning platform to identify common or unique features of digital discourse in paperless language classroom and to show how they affect EFL students' speech behaviors.

Résumé

Aujourd'hui, l'enseignement des langues est entraîné dans une hyperbole irréversible, et les TIC sont l'un des moteurs les plus puissants de cette transformation. Les salles de classe numériques exposent les apprenants non seulement à la grammaire linguistique, mais aussi à la vie quotidienne de la langue en usage (Thurlow et Mroczek, 2011). Le but de cette étude était d'explorer la nature du discours numérique gratuit sur iPad dans une salle de classe numérique pour l'apprentissage linguistique et de capter les caractéristiques lexicales stylistiques utilisées dans les communications en ligne des apprenants adolescents en langue émirienne. Cette approche mixte par étude de cas a mis en œuvre un cadre théorique de détection des sentiments sur une plateforme d'apprentissage sur tableau noir pour cerner les caractéristiques communes ou uniques du discours numérique dans une salle de classe dématérialisée et démontrer comment elles affectent les comportements linguistiques des élèves de langue maternelle émirienne.

Introduction

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, and video sharing (Thurlow, 2004). Language users do not merely reproduce the language but recreate and refashion linguistic and cultural resources in communication. Apart from casual communications, language learning interactions constitute an authentic area for investigating linguistic creativity carried out by today's language learners. Digital discourse is mostly interchanged with computer-mediated discourse (CMD) and computer-mediated communication (CMC). It involves the online interpersonal communications carried out by email, instant messaging, discussion boards, etc. (Adesanmi, 2012). This indicates that digital discourse is the process through which people communicate using networked communications systems that need decoding messages.

The interest in digital communication research is not simply to explore it as a modern information management tool, but a medium of social relations. Moreover, it is assumed that digital discourse serves as a virtual space cell within which the communications and relations of different technology users occur. This study looks at digital communication in a new linguistic domain of EFL digital classroom. Through in-class digital discourse analysis, it aims to explore what can be observed and revealed about language learners' online linguistic repertoire.

Research Question

The research question guiding this study is: What are the prevailing lexical-stylistic features in language learners' digital discourse?

Literature Review

The relationship between human needs and technological inventions dates back to prehistory. The appearance of the simplest stone tool was an act of technological innovation while the digital and mobile technology will perhaps be the greatest breakthrough of this millennium. Today's technological innovations constantly change the ways in which people communicate to express their thoughts and feelings through screen. If discourse is defined as "... a kind of language in use, for communication" (Cook, 1989, p. 6), then the human and digital screen communication is perhaps logical to call a digital discourse. To understand what it means to take a discourse analysis approach to screen-mediated communication, a detailed inquiry of several dimensions and disciplines is necessary to be looked at.

A modern way to classify various digital screens depends on the relationships among the operation, the user, and the screen. This triangular image of the digital experience directs attention away from the operation itself to the medium of communication, that is to say, interaction with the machine. The degree of abstraction enters in here, but only insofar as it affects the relationship between the user and the screen, thus, stimulating an interest in the mode of communication more than in its quality. Monaco (2000) sees a painting or even a building as a mode of discourse and explains, "a painting, for example, is both an artifact and a representation. A building is not only an artifact but also partially a representation and occasionally a

performance” (p. 30). A digital screen could be described similarly as a mode of discourse, being both a representation and a performance.

The question of whether digital technology will compromise language standards is particularly vital in light of challenges the issue has generated today. Thurlow (2004) brings examples of ‘moral panic’ expressed in press over lexical shortenings, nonstandard spelling of words or punctuation. Thurlow & Mroczek (2011) call the above mentioned as ‘linguistic transgressions’ being suppressed in danger of crumbling. Young (2010, as cited in Thomas, 2011) calls teachers against technology use in the classroom as ‘digital luddites’ who lament the need to escape the constant and disruptive interference of email or tell their students to switch off their mobile phones and laptop computers as they enter classroom. Marsh & Millard (2000) similarly alarm the awareness of changing consciousness that is more alert to the flow of ‘modern communication between the man and the machine’ (Prensky, 2011). Another author who sees today’s digital communication as a threat to language is Cunningham (1998), who caricatures the products of World Wide Web as ‘gab in, gab out’ and explains, “And to be sure, ordered sequenced and connectedness of narrative and of concept and person, the great features of classic fiction and classic Western selfhood – of the book, no less – are bound to count for less when at the touch of just a few buttons, you can swiftly cut and paste everything to somewhere else” (p. 16).

Most notable, however, is the way the digital and mobile era has changed people’s lives and relations to one another and to the communication in the world around them. In many ways, new digital language adds another dimension to linguistic shifts. As Thurlow & Mroczek (2011) mention, “Digital discourse casts a broad net regarding what constitutes discourse, including not only the anticipated fare of texting, blogs, social networking sites, or online gaming, but also other social contexts that entail exchange of ideas or information, such as tourism or performance” (p. xiv). The authors also anticipate that digital discourse will become part of the emerging canon of trusted voices regarding communication in a digital world. Schmied (2012) attempts to link digital discourse with sociolinguistics and mentions that, “... digital discourse can enrich the discussion of linguistic concepts as they pose new challenges for linguistic researchers – but they also offer new opportunities ... to show how new technical platforms can help us to expand our database to shed new light on old linguistic questions” (p. 43). He then continues and explains that modern digital discourse starts from Skype, Facebook and micro-blogging.

A major form of transduction in human and screen communication is a direct voice-to-machine interaction, which has existed for some time now. In her book *Literacy in the New Media Age*, Kress (2004) refers this as a change from a mode based on sound to a mode based on graphic substance. The assumption of the importance of language is replaced with an understanding that modes of representation are used in relation to a multiplicity of factors, such as the sign-maker’s sense of modes for representation when there is the sign-maker and the audience, which in other words will mean the user and the screen. Two distinct yet related factors deserve to be particularly highlighted here: the move from dominance of writing to the new dominance of the image and, secondly, the move from the dominance of the medium of book to the dominance of the medium of screen. Thomas (2011) sees the discourse of the digital natives as a type of technoevangelism and calls the language they speak as ‘vis-a-vis’. He explains that the technoevangelist is a person who attempts to build a critical mass of support for a given

technology in order to establish it as a technical standard in a market. Drawing on digital discourse, Tapscott (1999) sees the requirements of digital age in movement from:

- Linear to hypermedia learning
- Instruction to construction and discovery
- Teacher-centered to learner-centered education
- Absorbing material to learning how to navigate and how to learn
- School to lifelong learning
- One-size-fits-all to customized learning
- Learning as torture to learning as fun
- The teacher as transmitter to the teacher as facilitator.

Discourse analysis has the prospective of offering insights into dynamics of the lesson and team success. “Learning a language involves acquiring the necessary linguistic competence to be able to be successfully involved in different situations of everyday life” (Costa, Garrido & Escoriza, 2011, p. 346). However, lexical-stylistic features used in digital discourse do not lend themselves to traditional discourse analysis (Rosenthal & McKeown, 2013). Examples of these lexical-stylistic features are emoticons, word lengthenings, acronyms and punctuation symbols that occur in datasets, such as The Dictionary of Affect and Language, WordNet, Wiktionary and Emoticon Dictionary.

It is worth mentioning Thomas’s (2011) explanation of digital discourse among digital natives, “Through the use of blogs and other communication tools, they demonstrate an emotional and intellectual openness to others. In Addition they demonstrate ‘free expressions and strong views,’ ‘innovation’ and, in contrast to the ‘baby boomer’ generation, net generation members emphasize their mature attitude to life and learning” (p. 6). “We see promise in the way that Digital Natives are interacting with digital information, expressing themselves in social environments, creating new art forms, dreaming up new business models, and starting new activist ventures” (Palfer & Gasser, 2008, p. 9). While the excitement that underpins various educational digital applications, the fact remains that it is also marked with stoppages and blockages. Thurlow & Mroczek (2011) state that this truly interdisciplinary field of digital discourse has been driven in large part by younger and junior scholars and has many gaps in the field of discourse analysis still to be addressed and researched. “A rich body of literature on social digital discourse sometimes addresses technology-driven characteristics of digital discourse among digital natives” (O’Connell, Grantham, Wong, Workman & Wang, 2010, p. 5). There is less rich body of literature on discourse markers and lexical stylistic features of digital discourse (e.g., Rosenthal & McKeown, 2013; Schmied, 2012; O’Connell et al., 2010).

Having identified the gap in the literature this study aimed at exploring lexical-stylistic features of language learners in their in-class digital discourse through Blackboard learn discussion board. To research the gap Rosenthal and McKeown’s (2013) study and taxonomy of lexical-stylistic features were taken as theoretical framework for this study.

Theoretical Framework

Literature review revealed previously unidentified theoretical frameworks for studying digital discourse in a technologically enhanced language classroom. Thorough analysis identified key

concepts that digital discourse would address. These were online task characteristics, information exchange platforms, lexical and stylistic features of communication and team outcomes.

While there were limited definitions of digital discourse in the field, this study was grounded in an assumption that digital discourse whether it took place in formal or informal context was defined by its cultural and social context. As a cultural and social practice language learners' digital discourse is a system of individual and collective organization of experience and act of digital wisdom (Prensky, 2012). Rosenthal and McKeown's (2013) Sentiment detection theory with proposed taxonomy of lexical-stylistic features and examples was chosen to be the theoretical framework of this study to highlight the whole spectrum of digital cues in context, accounting for their meanings and functions (Appendix A). The framework suggested that the digital content was important and domain independent sentiment systems could predict sentiment and lexical stylistic features in social media. This study implemented the sentiment detection theoretical framework on blackboard learn educational learning platform and measured the results through quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Research Methodology

This study was qualified as mixed method study for many reasons. It aimed at looking at classroom discourse between the students in a paperless language classroom and identifying lexical-stylistic features of their free digital discourse. In this study, the data was used to form concepts moving towards understanding of paperless classroom free digital discourse.

Since speech accommodation in iPad integrated classroom discourse was a problem to be understood in the context of language teaching and learning setting, a descriptive, single-case design study was chosen as a form of a mixed-method inquiry. "Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p.11). A case study allowed for examination of patterns of online digital discourse and the context was crucial in investigating the research question.

The site of the case study was a tertiary level women's college in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates. The site consisted of several major programs one of which was called an Applied Diploma degree level program. The case study concentrated on the course called English for Specific Purposes in the Applied Diploma program, which lasted for one semester. The course was designed to improve English communication skills of the students who were studying in semester two of the program. One group of 12 students was purposefully selected for the study. The students were 17 – 20 year old Emirati girls. They had finished an elementary level English proficiency course and moved to the present program. Their English level of proficiency was determined to be pre-intermediate due to the placement and diagnostic tests administered in the beginning of the program. The group was taught by the researcher. The students had three English language periods a week and each period lasted for 50 minutes.

Students' classroom was a digital one furnished with interactive white board, marker board, teacher's touch screen computer, apple TV, projector, OHP, Doc camera, printer, student iPads and student laptops. The students were observed in their usual classroom with no intervention occurring to limit their achievement, hence; minimizing the risk of harm to participants (Yin, 2009). It was a 50 minute lesson about customs and traditions in different countries. A week ago

students were introduced to the assignment guidelines and had to work in pairs to choose a country they would like to visit, conduct a research about its customs and traditions and prepare a digital presentation on their iPads. The following class after the discussion board they had to do their presentations through iPad mirroring.

A checklist with digital discourse taxonomy designed by Rosenthal and McKeown (2013) was used for data collection (Appendix A). The taxonomy contained 12 lexical-stylistic features assumed to be observed during the digital discourse. The digital discourse was carried out through Blackboard-learn discussion board where students were asked to communicate with each other during the lesson and share their experience and feelings about the upcoming presentation about the country they would like to visit (Appendix C). 15 minutes were set to complete the discussion. The task was not graded and students were asked to feel free in communicating with their peers, thus asking and answering the questions or problems they were facing for the assignment and express their feelings and suggestions about it. Students were familiar with this type of digital discourse from their previous experience, as they had done discussion boards and blogs before every assignment. Moreover, students were not new to Blackboard-learn either as they used to consult their course e-books, submit homework or assignments, receive new tasks and notifications through that platform. It was believed that digital discourse of that type would help students identify the difficulties they faced throughout their assignment, seek for help, assist each other or simply share information about their work through discussion board.

The data collected from the discussion board were descriptively analyzed through SPSS statistical program to answer the research question. Then, qualitative analysis were conducted to picture a holistic view of the problem in question.

The study provided the participants with possible ethical protection. While this study did not include any risks to neither the teacher, nor students, measures were taken to provide them with anonymity and accurate representation (Yin, 2009). To anticipate the possibility of negative information drawn about the students' learning behaviors, measures were taken to keep participants' anonymity. By the help of the program called SNAGIT students names and ID numbers were removed from the Blackboard learn final discussion board.

This study followed certain steps to ensure its trustworthiness, 'The data was addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved' (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2001, p. 105). Member checks (Bell, 2010) with participant students were carried out to verify the accuracy of findings. Validity issues throughout the study investigation were minimized by referring to *Validation at Seven Stages* overview (Kvale, 1996, p.237).

Data Analysis

The data gathered through Blackboard learn discussion board was both quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed to answer the research question. The data analyzed through SPSS statistical program was cross checked through qualitative analysis of specific features taken from students' digital discourse (Appendix A).

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were run to provide the numerical representations of how the group performed on the discussion board. It depicted a simple quantitative picture of the collected data set and provided summaries about the sample and the measures. The measures of central tendency came under this category, as did data distributions. It helped the study understand the data set in detail and highlighted the required details that helped to put the data in perspective.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
capital words	12	0	1	4	.33	.492	.242
out of vocabulary	12	.00	.00	.00	.0000	.00000	.000
punctuation	12	.00	3.00	14.00	1.1667	1.11464	1.242
repeated punctuation	12	.00	4.00	19.00	1.5833	1.16450	1.356
ellipses	12	.00	1.00	5.00	.4167	.51493	.265
emoticons	12	1.00	4.00	27.00	2.2500	1.13818	1.295
acronyms	12	.00	4.00	19.00	1.5833	.99620	.992
repeated questions	12	.00	2.00	9.00	.7500	.62158	.386
exclamation marks	12	.00	1.00	7.00	.5833	.51493	.265
word length	12	.00	1.00	3.00	.2500	.45227	.205
all caps	12	.00	2.00	8.00	.6667	.65134	.424
links and images	12	.00	1.00	2.00	.1667	.38925	.152
Valid N (listwise)	12						

As shown in Table 1, 12 students took part in the discourse where 12 lexical-stylistic features have been looked at. The minimum number of all lexical-stylistic features is 0 except *emoticons*, which means all 12 students used emoticons at least once in their discourse. Lexical-stylistic features such as *repeated punctuation*, *emoticons* and *acronyms* scored 4 as maximum which means that there have been students who used those features for 4 times in their discourse. The sum of lexical-stylistic features ranges from 0 to 27, 0 being *out of vocabulary* feature and 27 being *emoticons*. This means that out of 12 students no one used *out of vocabulary* words in their discourse; whereas, *emoticons* have been used for 27 times by different students.

The means of lexical-stylistic features ranges from .0000 to 2.2500. Due to the table the arithmetic average of *emoticons* is higher than the arithmetic average of other lexical-stylistic features used in the discourse. *Acronyms* and *repeated punctuation* having both 1.5833 mean, come second after *emoticons*. This means that both *acronyms* and *repeated punctuations* have been equally popular with the students participating in the digital discourse; whereas, emoticons have been the most popular lexical-stylistic feature.

The dispersion of scores (number of times the lexical-stylistic features have been observed in the discourse) used in the digital discourse is estimated by standard deviation. As shown in the Table, the standard deviation of *repeated punctuation* is the highest being 1.16450. The second after *repeated punctuation* stand *emoticons* with 1.13818 of standard deviation. The average of the differences of all scores from the mean for all lexical-stylistic features is bigger in *repeated*

punctuation and *emoticons* than it is in other lexical-stylistic features. This means that the scores in the *repeated punctuation* and *emoticons* did not vary as widely from each other, as they did in other lexical-stylistic features.

To provide a sense of how often specific lexical-stylistic features occurred in the observed digital discourse, Frequency Analysis was run on SPSS statistical program (Appendix B). Frequency analysis of all lexical-stylistic features determined the frequency of scores that fall under 12 variables which we have called lexical-stylistic features in this paper. The three lexical-stylistic features *repeated punctuation*, *emoticons* and *acronyms* having higher sum, mean and standard deviation showed high frequency in frequency analysis too. Table 2 shows the most number of times the three features have been used in the observed digital discourse. 66.6% of the students used *repeated punctuation* and 83.4% of the students used *acronyms* once or twice in their discourse. 16.6 % used *repeated punctuation* three or four times and 8.3% used *acronyms* for four times. 16.7% of the students did not use *repeated punctuation* at all and 8.3% of the students did not use *acronyms*. 83.3% of the students used *emoticons* once, twice or three times and 16.7 % used it for four times in their discourse. *Emoticons* have been the only lexical-stylistic feature that all students used while communicating.

Table 2
Frequency Analysis

	Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Repeated Punctuation					
.00		2	16.7	16.7	16.7
1.00		4	33.3	33.3	50.0
2.00		4	33.3	33.3	83.3
3.00		1	8.3	8.3	91.7
4.00		1	8.3	8.3	100.0
Total		12	100.0	100.0	
Emoticons					
1.00		4	33.3	33.3	33.3
2.00		3	25.0	25.0	58.3
3.00		3	25.0	25.0	83.3
4.00		2	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total		12	100.0	100.0	
Acronyms					
.00		1	8.3	8.3	8.3
1.00		5	41.7	41.7	50.0
2.00		5	41.7	41.7	91.7
4.00		1	8.3	8.3	100.0
Total		12	100.0	100.0	

Qualitative Analysis

Computer mediated communication has, as Castells (2000, as cited in Murthy, 2012) argues, created a new ‘social morphology,’ which is dominated by networks. It also has represented interesting dialogic spaces where a seemingly individualistic interlocutor is actually being listened to by the larger virtual community. Such construction of communication and information sharing environment on Blackboard learn discussion board platform represented a particularly interesting case in comparison to other forms of in-class information sharing activities such as oral discussions, presentations or debates in a language learning classroom. It is worth mentioning that unlike the digital discourse through the discussion board where students were usually asked to feel free in writing the way they felt comfortable to communicate and share information, students used only academic English with their peers as well as teachers while in class. The data collected from this sample digital discourse revealed that students not only used the lexical-stylistic features put together by Rosenthal and McKeown (2013) in their digital discourse but also terminology related to digital communication.

Emoticons, repeated punctuation and acronyms were the three lexical-stylistic features statistically analyzed to prevail in students’ digital discourse. If looked at them from qualitative perspective they would seem even more interesting in their verity and meaning. Emoticons that the whole group used in their discourse illustrated that students had a shared knowledge about the forms of emoticons they used and relied on that knowledge to determine where they placed particular emoticons within an utterance. Examples of emoticon use in students’ digital discourse were the following: “Wow ☺” meaning “I am surprised”, “Sooo interesting ;)” meaning “it is very interesting and I am thinking”, “I would talk about Saudi Arabia *_*” meaning “I am open to suggestions”, “LISTEN ALL SAUDI??? SOOO interesting ::)” sarcastically meaning “really?”, “Tooo much to write about. I have :0 sources if you need” meaning “good”, “CHECK about it in library e-cook books, they are \;)” meaning “neither good nor bad”, “I have pictures if you need 4 your pp :)(” meaning “both positive and negative”, “Yummyy *_*” or “^^” meaning “I am really interested”, “NO INTEREST ☹” meaning “sad or not interested”. Another example worth mentioning is simply “:)))))” without any text, which would mean “no comments.” “In instances where the emoticon appears “alone”, the nature of the emoticon clearly allows it to function as an utterance on its own” (Garrison, Remley, Thomas & Wierzewski, 2011, p. 123). Examining the emoticons as a meaningful linguistic unit revealed that individual uses of emoticons not only had stylistic significance but also served as meaningful sentiment detection unit in digital discourse.

Manipulation of grammatical markers, such as punctuation in forms of repeated exclamation or question marks were used by the students to add stress or modify the tone of a lexical item. Examples of repeated punctuation use in students’ digital discourse were the following: “I would like to visit Spain so I chose this country. WAU people????”, “PLEASE GIVE INFO ABOUT THE RECEPIE IN THE SLIDES, WILL U????” or “What do you think????” In those examples students tried to stress the problem in question by overusing the question marks. Moreover, using repeated question marks with a question sentence written in capital letters was supposed to highlight the importance of the statement even more. Besides repeated question marks excessive use of exclamation marks were also observed in the discourse, such as; “Soooo nice!!!”, “Check it in MoBlog!!!” or “SURE!!!!” Repeated exclamation marks emphasized the tone of an utterance and helped students to convey the importance of their discourse. They mostly stressed

excitement, like; “Soooo nice!!” or “Wow Robust!!!!” and stated a purpose or confirmation; “SURE!!!” or “Check it in MoBlog!!!”

Acronyms as abbreviations were viewed as subtype of blending in this digital discourse. An example of it is, “lol” meaning “laughing out loud”, “DK about Pakisatn” meaning “don’t know”, “WA culture or ...??” meaning “what about”, “cio in forums” meaning “check it out”, “SH” meaning “same here” or “Any1” meaning “anyone”. It must be specified that some of the abbreviations were identified to be whole sentences, such as; “WA GIF???” meaning “what about graphic interchange program?” Also, quite a limited number of abbreviations could be considered as polite markers in this discourse. An example of that would be; “ty” meaning “thank you” or “pls” meaning “please”. Abbreviations for computer mediated terminology constitute a considerable body of this digital discourse. The inputs are as follows; “GIF” meaning “graphic interchange program”, “CO Podcast” meaning “gaming podcast called The Co-Optional Podcast, formerly known as the TGS Podcast”, “pp” meaning “power point presentation” or “Did you use key note or WIKI?” WIKI meaning “World Internet Knowledge Index.”

Students shared knowledge and understanding of computer-mediated terminology and were quite fluent in using and decoding those terms in their discourse. Examples of that would be; “We’ll see your PREZI soon” where “PREZI” is an online presentation tool that can be used as an alternative to traditional slide making programs, “Can I tag it pls?” where “tag” means creating a link on somebody’s timeline, “Did you use keynote or WIKI?” where “keynote” is an Apple iPad application for creating cinematic presentations and “WIKI” which is usually called WIKI Pages, is a web application for information sharing and presenting, “WDY flip it and use e-books for URDU?” where the word “flip” means converting text files from one to another format and “e-books” stands for electronic books or books that can be accessed online, “Hi crew” where the word “crew” is usually used for a group of friends in the virtual room or “Wow robust!!” meaning “great.”

The quantitative and qualitative data analysis within a corpus of authentic digital discourse indicated that the emoticons were a largely conventionalized feature of digital discourse and more integral to the communicative act among the group of 12 language learners than any other lexical-stylistic feature in Rosenthal and McKeown’s (2013) taxonomy. Similarly, the data showed that discourse participants preferred emoticons to full print-linguistic utterances.

If teachers recognize emoticons as key semiotic units within a digital discourse, they will view emoticons as contributory to the discourse itself.

Limitations of the Study

This research study explored 15 minute iPad based digital discourse between pre-intermediate level 12 language learners in a technologically enhanced classroom and looked at the lexical-stylistic features of students’ digital discourse through Blackboard learn discussion board. Since it was only limited to one sample of discourse with a particular age group language learners of particular English proficiency level, generalization to other age groups, English level of proficiency and digital discourse platforms is limited. To account for limitations of data

decoding, member checking with participant students was done to confirm that their discourse patterns were accurately captured and decoded.

While this study must have exposed some sensitive areas of linguistic perspectives in digital discourse, it is suggested by such scholars in the field as Adesanmi (2012) and Taiwo (2012), that various education policy-makers and institutions of learning should begin to incorporate the internet language into the English language teaching strategies in the schools. Though this study looked at lexical stylistic features in language learners' communication using the skills of shared language and knowledge of the world skills, it did not look into the ways this type of communication could enhance language learning skills. It would be a big contribution to the field to observe paperless lessons where digital discourse is directed towards language achievement goals.

Pedagogical Implications

Knowledge of computer mediated communication may help language teachers to more fully understand students' literate practices. Criticism targets the linguistic features of today's digital discourse, including lexical-stylistic features that look different from the features of language evident in standard and academic English. However, digital discourse is an active medium and presents variety of areas to investigate. This study concentrated on a small sample and started the conversation rather than concluding it. For example, an area not researched here is censorship, a subject that has been invoked in reference to educational applications, blogs and other platforms of digital discourse. Clearly, digital discourse has social, educational and cultural effects in a digital language learning classroom and the multitude of specific cases could never be captured in a small scale study like this. Ultimately, it is a communications medium and if managed and supervised in class, its perception and use will be educationally constructed.

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Appendix A: List of Lexical-stylistic Features

Table 3
Blackboard Learn Discussion Board

Feature	Examples from Students' Discussion Board
1. Capital Words	I Can't;
2. Out of Vocabulary	NA
3. Punctuation	;;?;
4. Repeated Punctuation	???. !!!;
5. Ellipses	Oh, if you can do it I can too.
6. Emoticons	☺; *_*; ::); :))))); ☹
7. Acronyms	WA GIF; Any1; lol
8. Repeated Questions	What? What did you say?
9. Exclamation Marks	!; !!
10. Word Lengthening	Soooooooo, veeeryyyy
11. All Caps	PREZI; SURE; PLEASE GIVE INFO ABOUT THE RECEPIE IN THE SLIDES, WILL U
12. Links/Images	Prezi.com

(Rosenthal and McKeown 2013, p. 480)

Appendix B: Frequency Analysis

Table 4
Frequency Table

	Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Capital Words					
	0	8	66.7	66.7	66.7
	1	4	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	
Out of Vocabulary					
	.00	12	100.0	100.0	100.0
Punctuation					
	.00	4	33.3	33.3	33.3
	1.00	4	33.3	33.3	66.7
	2.00	2	16.7	16.7	83.3
	3.00	2	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	
Ellipses					
	.00	7	58.3	58.3	58.3
	1.00	5	41.7	41.7	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	
Acronyms					
	.00	1	8.3	8.3	8.3
	1.00	5	41.7	41.7	50.0
	2.00	5	41.7	41.7	91.7
	4.00	1	8.3	8.3	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	
Repeated Punctuation					
	.00	2	16.7	16.7	16.7
	1.00	4	33.3	33.3	50.0
	2.00	4	33.3	33.3	83.3
	3.00	1	8.3	8.3	91.7
	4.00	1	8.3	8.3	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	
Repeated Questions					
	.00	4	33.3	33.3	33.3
	1.00	7	58.3	58.3	91.7
	2.00	1	8.3	8.3	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	
Emoticons					
	1.00	4	33.3	33.3	33.3
	2.00	3	25.0	25.0	58.3
	3.00	3	25.0	25.0	83.3
	4.00	2	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	

	Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Exclamation Marks					
	.00	5	41.7	41.7	41.7
	1.00	7	58.3	58.3	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	
Word Length					
	.00	9	75.0	75.0	75.0
	1.00	3	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	
All Caps					
	.00	5	41.7	41.7	41.7
	1.00	6	50.0	50.0	91.7
	2.00	1	8.3	8.3	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	
Links and Images					
	.00	10	83.3	83.3	83.3
	1.00	2	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	

Appendix C: Discussion Board (Sample)



RE: To travel or to stay at home?

why dashboard??? Check it in MoBlog!!! :)))

21 hours ago

Overall Rating: ★★★★★



RE: To travel or to stay at home?

:0

21 hours ago

Overall Rating: ★★★★★



RE: To travel or to stay at home?

sooooo interesting. BTW did u write about food??

21 hours ago

Overall Rating: ★★★★★

[▲ Hide 1 reply](#)



RE: To travel or to stay at home?

food podcast will be good to check or FB. WA GIF????

21 hours ago

Overall Rating: ★★★★★

[COLLAPSE](#)

[Reply](#)
[Quote](#)
[Edit](#)
[Delete](#)
[Email Author](#)

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