RESEARCH ARTICLE

FAILED CONVERSATION, DELAYED RESPONSE, LIST CONTIBUTIONS AND LIST RESPONSES IN FACEBOOK ONE TO ONE SYNCHRONIC CONVERSATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The paper is about synchronic one to one conversation in Facebook. The effort is to describe some possibilities in the linguistic situation connected with Facebook conversations.

Keywords: synchronic, asynchronic, failed conversation, delayed response, list contributions, list response

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to describe some aspects of synchronic 'one to one' conversations in Facebook. The paper tries to point out and illustrate some of the possibilities in terms of discourse rather than give a statistical analysis of data. The data consists of various 'chats' that the author had with his students and friends. Most of these 'chats' are synchronic, though some asynchronic data is used when it is relevant for a particular synchronic conversation (see Crystal, 2001; 11 for a description of synchronic vs. asynchronic situations). It is hoped that the paper will, along with pointing out the features of discourse that are present in both real face to face and Facebook conversations, will point out some of the features that are specific to Facebook discourse . The paper will begin by describing the general context of the one to one conversations in Facebook. Then it will describe the specific context

of the samples selected for this paper. Then it will analyze some samples to illustrate some particular features of the discourse of one to one communication in Facebook.

The social networking is relatively a recent phenomenon. For examples, in Crystal, 2001 and Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic, 2004 there is no mention of social networking, though there is a mention of online chat rooms. However, a lot of youngsters use social networking with a great frequency. For example, most of my students use Facebook, and I teach in a place that is located in a village and most of the students are from either small towns or from villages. Thus, our language users are using English in or through Facebook.

Computer Mediated Communication is not a single genre or text type, (see Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic, 2004; 31). Within Facebook, we can have different kinds of language in profile descriptions,

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testimonials, in group discussions that are asynchronic, in comments on pictures and posts etc. What we are trying to focus here is on synchronic, one to one conversation. Let us now describe the linguistic context of what we are trying to analyze. We will use some of the elements of the model proposed by Thurlow, 2004, (32) which is based on Hymes, 1974, to describe the context. We will use the following elements; the participants, the setting, and the medium. The other elements of context like code, the topic, etc. are either too obvious or are not specific to Facebook conversation.

First, let us look at the participants. One to one Facebook conversation is a conversation between two people, of whatever age, sex or location group (asl please!). These people may be online friends or friends even off line. But this conversation is not between strangers because the computer shows only those who are listed as friends in one's account. If a stranger has to chat with one, he or she first has to send a friend request, which should be accepted. Thus, some degree of familiarity is essential for these chats. (However, we may have to redefine the concept of stranger to suit the cyber world. Stranger is not one whom you may not have seen, but one whose profile you have not seen.) Further, it should be noted that both the participants may have fake profiles, and both of them may know it! This is one aspect of which it is very hard to find parallels in any other linguistic situation, either written or spoken.

The code used can be any language that both the participants are familiar with, though in the Indian context, even when both the participants have the same mother tongue, the tendency is to use English. The possibility for code mixing is also there. The setting can be anywhere in front of a computer, or a good mobile phone.

The medium is what needs an elaborate description. In this particular case, the medium is computer. When someone logs into his/her Facebook account, he/she may sign into chat, and then a list of friends who are online appears at the right hand corner of the screen. The user then may initiate conversation with any of his/her friends on the list. On the other hand any of his/her friends online may also initiate conversation. It is also possible that the user or his/her friends may opt not to have conversation at all. This is akin to two people being in the same room, but not acknowledging each other. The user may also opt out of chat altogether by disconnecting the chat and continue to use Facebook.

The particular linguistic situation that provides the samples of our analysis is like this. We are here talking about chats between my students and I, and sometimes between my friends and I. Thus, the participants are offline friends too and in all cases the offline friendship precedes the online friendship. All the users use English as a second language. I have deleted the names of my online friends and have simply written 'friend' in that place.

Let us now look at some of the samples and analyze them.

April 3 Friend wish u happy birthday sir.......   April 3 **B V Rama Prasad** hi thanku RAJESH
April 3 Friend hw r u sir....   April 3 **B V Rama Prasad** rocking!   April 3 Friend great sir.....always be like this sir... have a nice day sir....   April 3 **B V Rama Prasad** ok Rajesh bye   April 3 Friend bye sir.....

I have changed only the appearance of the chat and kept all the other features intact. The participants are my student who is quite younger to me (22 year old) and me. This is an example of a very smooth conversation. It begins with a greeting, followed by an adjacency pair of thanking. It is again followed by the adjacency pair of how are you type; the first part of which is very common in face to face conversation also, but the response is quite unorthodox, particularly from a teacher and an older man. I may not have used such an informal response face to face. Probably I am trying to 'fit in'! The conversation ends with another adjacency pair of farewell, with the student adding the final bye. This is a very smooth conversation with no hiccups, with short turns and with no problem with turn taking. But not all communication is so smooth. Let us look at this one, for example:

June 19, 2011**B V Rama Prasad** hi come online   June 19, 2011**B V Rama Prasad** r u online?   June 19, 2011 Friend yes i am online i was away are you there   June 28, 2011 **B V Rama Prasad**   why do u go away looged on?

This is a conversation between an informal student of mine, who was my friend when I was doing Ph.D. in EFLU, so though he is much younger to me, as he is not a class room student, the degree of familiarity is more. This is a case of failed conversation, which I tried to correct with some prompting like, are you there? The other participant responded after I had logged off offering explanation. Then I complained again, though this time he was not online. The conversation may look like normal, till you look at the dates of contributions. This is a failed conversation, and remarkably next time we came on line there was no mention of this failed conversation. The conversation may fail because of many factors, one of which as my friend said is that a person may have logged on and went out without logging off. But one can never know whether that explanation is true or not, because one can lie more easily online than face to face. The other participant may simply have ignored my presence, which is not so easy when you are face to face, or he may have opened other windows (even this is not easy because the computer prompts you saying you have a message). But to be outright impolite, you may have to disconnect chat as soon as you get one's message. Even then one may always say that he disconnected before reading your message or that there was some problem with one's internet connection.

But sometime, the failed conversation may be repaired at a later time. Let us look at the following example. Here I am chatting with a female student of mine:

June 14, 2011 **B V Rama Prasad** how to make ths conversation private?

June 21, 2011 Friend gm sir.... hurray... fared well in all d xams sir.... this itself is a private msg sir......no one can see these msgs.... only comments on photos and sumthing that we write on the wal can be seen by al

This is what I call delayed response. The question in my contribution could not be answered because the other person had to log off unexpectedly. But the next time she came on line, even though I was not online, she could answer the question though after making a new contribution to the conversation. This is because Facebook allows you to store your conversation and revisit it. Think of a parallel situation in face to face conversation where one begins a conversation by answering the question you asked last time as soon as one meets you. What is remarkable here is that my student does not begin with something like 'a week ago you asked a question about privacy, I could not answer then, I am sorry, let me answer it now'. She makes her new contribution and immediately proceeds to answer the question I asked a week ago, fully assuming that I will understand it.

This allows another kind of possibility in Facebook, what I call list contributions and list responses. One may ask a series of questions, and the other person may respond to them very efficiently with a series of answers without fearing that he/she will be interrupted or that the addressee may not grasp all the answers. Look at this example:

June 14, 2011 u acn play games on net. nothing wrong with ur smiley i dont knoe how to enter smileys inthis box

June 14, 2011 Friend s sir... i was playing mario games alll day......nw got bored wit that also....its easy sir.... u ve to press ; and then) try it nw sir

Here you can see that I made two contributions, one saying that she can play video games on the net and another saying that I do not know how to enter smileys. She responded by addressing each of my contributions in a very orderly manner. This is because in Facebook, you have all the contributions in writing in front of you and you can go back to these contributions whenever you want to recheck. Sometime, Facebook conversation may also refer to offline conversation or lead to it, either in terms of making an appointment, or in terms of clarifying what was said online. Look at this example:

June 15 Friend.... wru nw sir......

June 15 **B V Rama Prasad** in dept where r u?

June 15 Friend well, iam in womens resource center... will come to dept nw.....

June 15 **B V Rama Prasad** ok i wil be here f til one logging off se u

June 15 Friend see u soon

Thus, Facebook conversation is something which can be described using the tools that we use to describe the face to face to face conversation. In Facebook, we can have conversations that can be completely successful, without any hiccups. But we can also have failed conversations, which may or may not be

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repaired later on. Further, Facebook allows you to revisit your conversations so that you can have delayed responses and list contributions and list responses. Finally Facebook conversation may also refer to and lead to offline conversation.

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