

FORMAL VS INFORMAL LANGUAGE IN ENGLISH DIGITAL COMMUNICATION: A PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

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Annotation: With an emphasis on social media engagement, this thesis examines the pragmatic elements of formal and informal language in digital English communication. It looks into how people use language on social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, analyzing how they balance formality with informality. The study emphasizes how online interactions influence and mirror more general socio-linguistic norms, drawing on discourse analysis and pragmatic theory.

Keywords: English language, pragmatics, social media, digital communication, and informal register

Аннотация: В статье рассматриваются прагматические особенности официального и неофициального языка в цифровом общении на английском языке, особенно в социальных сетях. Анализируются примеры из Twitter, Facebook и Instagram. Исследование основано на современной теории прагматики и подчеркивает влияние цифрового дискурса на языковые нормы.

Ключевые слова: цифровое общение, английский язык, социальные сети, прагматика, неофициальный стиль

Annotatsiya: Ushbu tezisdagi ingliz tilidagi raqamli muloqot, ayniqsa ijtimoiy tarmoqlardagi rasmiy va norasmiy til shakllari tahlil qilinadi. Facebook, Instagram va Twitter kabi platformalarda kuzatilgan til xatti-harakatlari misollar asosida o'rganiladi. Maqola zamonaviy pragmatika va diskurs tahlili asosida yozilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: raqamli muloqot, ijtimoiy tarmoq, ingliz tili, norasmiy til, pragmatika

Introduction. Digital communication refers to the transmission of information through digital channels such as the internet, mobile networks, and various multimedia platforms. It encompasses text, images, video, audio, and multimodal content exchanged through platforms like email, messaging apps, social media, and collaborative workspaces. According to David Crystal, digital communication is “a new linguistic ecosystem” where language evolves in real time due to user creativity and technological affordances [4;118].

The emergence of digital media has led to the development of new communicative norms and linguistic strategies. In digital spaces, communicators often rely on visual aids (*emojis, gifs*), abbreviations (e.g., “*BRB*”, “*LOL*”), and non-linear interaction patterns. As Herring notes, digital discourse exhibits a high degree of interactivity, fragmentation, and informality, which challenges traditional models of language use [2;612].

In digital spaces, both formal and informal registers are used — often interchangeably. For instance, a LinkedIn post from a researcher may adopt a formal tone to maintain professional credibility, while their comment section may shift to casual banter. This register-switching is a form of digital code-mixing that reflects audience expectations and platform affordances. Linguist Susan Herring emphasizes that digital platforms are not linguistically neutral; they influence how users write and talk. Twitter’s character limits, for example, encourage abbreviations, while email platforms allow for more detailed, structured correspondence [2;634]. According to Locher and Graham, digital communication requires contextual politeness awareness - the ability to judge when to be formal and when informality is socially appropriate [3;5]. This skill is now recognized as part of digital literacy.

Understanding the theoretical distinction between formal and informal language is crucial for English learners navigating the digital world. Many learners develop strong informal communication skills through social media but struggle to adapt to formal academic or professional contexts. Therefore, language instruction must not only teach grammar and vocabulary but also how to appropriately shift registers based on context.

Educators are increasingly encouraged to introduce genre awareness tasks, such as writing the same message in formal and informal tones, or analyzing different platform styles. This aligns with Levinson’s call for teaching pragmatic competence alongside linguistic knowledge. The emergence of digital technology, particularly social media, has significantly changed how people communicate in English. As social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter become more prevalent in daily conversation, the line between official and informal registers has become less distinct. People modify their language on these platforms to conform to audience expectations and platform rules in addition to social roles. This thesis focusses on how users balance formality and informality and how pragmatic methods show themselves in social media conversations.

Social media interaction showcases a wide spectrum of formality. Users often begin with informal expressions (“*Hey guys!*”, “*LOL*”, “*ikr*”) even when addressing

large audiences. Yet in posts related to academic or professional branding, more formal structures are used (*"I'm pleased to share our new publication"*). This duality illustrates Goffman's theory of face and performance. A key finding is the role of linguistic creativity and indirectness. Hashtags function both as metacommentary and self-branding tools. Posts combining academic jargon and colloquial language exemplify code-switching between registers.

The Maxmudov study supports this dynamic: students and educators increasingly rely on hybrid registers in educational chats. While these spaces encourage collaboration, they also risk diminishing linguistic precision and promoting overfamiliarity [6;159].

Social media users' flexibility in digital environments is demonstrated by the way they combine professional and casual terminology. These days, pragmatic competency necessitates that users read audience familiarity, platform expectations, and contextual cues. This is in line with frameworks for digital literacy, which emphasize the capacity to change modality, register, and tone.

One practical solution is integrating register-awareness into English language teaching—showing learners how to shift between *"Dear Sir/Madam"* and *"Hey prof!"* depending on context. This mirrors broader efforts to include digital pragmatics in EFL curricula.

Conclusion. The ambiguous limits of contemporary English language are exposed by digital communication, especially on social media. These platforms facilitate collaborative, artistic, and expressive forms of communication, but they also call for sophisticated practical judgement. Effective communication requires an understanding of the dynamics of linguistic norm negotiation, which takes place in real time. In order to create a digital culture that is both expressive and contextually aware, educators, researchers, and users must work together.

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