

LEXICO-SEMANTIC EXPLORATION OF SELECTED WHATSAPP CHATS ON CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES BY HND II STUDENTS OF YABA COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of lexical features and their semantic import in WhatsApp communication. The HND II WhatsApp messages are chosen to represent the entire population of the study. The data used for the study are collected from the WhatsApp platform used by HND II students of Yaba College of Technology for discussions on classroom activities. The WhatsApp messages are analysed under the theoretical framework of lexico-semantics. The usage theory of meaning is adopted to explain the meaning of the identified lexical features in the selected chats, as it focuses on meaning based on the situational or contextual use of words or structures. It was discovered from the analysis of data that distinct lexical features (such as contracted form of words, h-full words changed to h-less words, etc.) are used in WhatsApp communication, and their meaning can only be construed based on the context of use. The lexical features used on the WhatsApp platform result from the fact that WhatsApp is a social media forum where all sorts of informal discussions take place among the platform users. As a result, the language features used by platform users are also informal. For this reason, it could be concluded based on the findings that the situation under which language is used determines the language features.

Keywords: Lexico-semantic analysis, lexical features, WhatsApp messages, context and meaning, the usage theory of meaning

1. Introduction

The greatest gift God gave to humans is language. In every human society, past and present, language has been an indispensable tool for communication. In communication, messages are usually sent through understandable codes (languages). Language is dynamic and evolves over time. The emergence of technology helps to fast-track the encoding and decoding of messages between parties in communicative settings. Communication may be spoken or written, depending on the choice of language users. Today, most people find out that electronic messages are the fastest and cheapest medium of communication in Nigeria and around the Global communities. The applications deployed by second language users today online, such as Facebook, Telegram, Twitter and WhatsApp, among others (Ajulo, 1994; Cruse, 2004; Jasim, 2023).

WhatsApp has been found to be a vital online application for effective exchange of information amongst students as learners of English (as a second Language) and also, it is an application with multifunctional parts for the ease of not only texting messages, but also for teaching and learning. Signs, symbols, graphic designs, voice messages, and pictorial descriptions as emojis are included for several purposes. Like other similar applications, one can download WhatsApp from the App Store or Google Play Store on Android or iOS mobile devices. Interestingly, all the means of effective communication on WhatsApp are done mostly by the combination of words. Linguists have, for some time, given the study of lexis relatively little attention. Until recently, the study of lexis in languages (English inclusive) has been done most often under morphology, syntax, and semantics. The common linguistic particularities of WhatsApp communication are shorthand expressions, acronyms, abbreviations and so forth (Doering et al., 2008; Cifuentes & Lents, 2011; Harrison & Glimore, 2012;

Church & de Oliveira, 2013; Norman et al., 2015; Ali & Kootbodien, 2017). The aim of this study is to:

- i. study and identify the lexical features used on the WhatsApp platform;
- ii. analyse those identified lexical features and explain their meanings based on the context of use;
- iii. Compare those features to other modes of communication (e.g. written ones), in terms of formality.

2. Review of Literature

This section reviews literature from the conceptual perspective. Some of the areas reviewed include meaning and context, empirical studies, and theoretical framework (i.e. usage theory of meaning).

2.1 Meaning and Context

Beyond the realm of intra- linguistic connections, semantic theories also perform the added function of relating meaning to the context of usage, in both word and sentence meaning. This is quite critical, because context or situation of meaning is the key to adequate interpretation of language (Malmkjar, 2002; Halliday et al., 2004; Sobola & Ogundipe, 2025). For example, the expression I saw him at the bank has different interpretations when applied to different contexts, simply because the meaning of the word bank could be:

1. Bank as a financial institution
2. Bank of a river
3. World Bank, an international organisation
3. Blood bank, a health institution, etc.

Thus, the idea of context is crucial to meaning. Some theories of meaning include the ideational theory of meaning, the referential theory of meaning, the usage theory of meaning, the componential theory of meaning, the truth-conditional theory of meaning, the contextual theory of meaning, and the generative theory of meaning, among others. These linkages are important because they point out that a particular theory is part of a general theory of language, not just a theory of looking at certain things in a particular language. The overall

implication of these analogies is that the principles or rules specified by any theory of meaning must have universal applications. They must not only point out the workings of meaning in one language, but to the nature of meaning in all languages (Malmkjar, 2002; Adesida, 2009).

2.2 Empirical Review

Some researchers have carried out studies on the use of language on WhatsApp platform. For instance, Amadi and Mbah (2023) carry out a sociolinguistic study of WhatsApp conversations between students and lecturers through the examination of whether the language politeness principles are violated or not. It was discovered from the findings that social factors like age, gender, class, status, etc. affect language politeness between students and lecturers.

Secondly, Ogundeji (2024) explores speech acts used in WhatsApp chats among non-academic staff of the University of Uyo. The study adopts qualitative and quantitative research techniques in the analysis of the garnered data. The findings show that non-academic staff of the university used illocutionary speech acts such as directives, assertives, expressives, commissives and declaratives to call individuals' attention to certain actions, to make claims on perceived truths, to express certain information, to make promises and pledges, and to make statements respectfully.

Furthermore, Shubhura and Krisna (2024) inquire into intriguing language dynamics within WhatsApp platform. The focus of their study is language attribution – a subtle transformation in the manner languages are used in the digital age. Eclectic approach of qualitative analysis of WhatsApp conversations with a digital questionnaire survey was employed for the study.

Finally, Ogundipe (2025) investigates the morphological processes in selected WhatsApp group chats. He uses quantitative and qualitative research techniques in the analysis of the collected data. The findings of the study show that users of WhatsApp platform usually use the minor morphological processes in the formation of new words for WhatsApp communication.

Although the aforementioned previous studies have explored some relevant language aspects such as social factors on language use, speech acts, morphological features, and so on, none of them investigates the variation in meaning of lexical features used on WhatsApp platform. Therefore, this current study is carried out to fill this research gap. The purpose of the study is to explore the way the context of language use shapes meaning of words on the WhatsApp platform.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The Usage Theory of Meaning

The obtained data will be analysed using the usage theory of meaning. This theory claims that to know the meaning of words and sentences, one needs to know, not only the truth-conditions of such words, but also the conditions for their appropriate use in communication.

These conditions are in two main parts:

- i) When it is appropriate for words to occur in sentences;
- ii) When it is appropriate to use certain words and sentences in speech acts, e.g:

Request: Can you give me a glass of water, please?

Command: Will you leave at once?

Assertion/statement:

The sky is blue.

Argument:

The sky is blue to me.

The implication of these usages is that there are certain words which have their own speech acts, e.g 'good' and 'bad'

- a) That was a good performance.
- b) She has a bad way of showing gratitude.

However, not all uses of these words are appropriate.

Sometimes they may mean the opposite, for example, in sarcastic statements. Therefore, we need to know the conditions under which words are used to determine their appropriateness in utterances. The

Use Theory of meaning* was later known as the Usage Theory of Meaning, otherwise called the Contextual or Operational Theory of Meaning.

Basically, this theory holds that the meaning of a word or expression is determined by its context of use. The use or usage theory was derived from the works of a German scholar, Wittgenstein (1953). It was further developed by J. R. Firth (1957) and M.A.K. Halliday (1978). Firth came up with the idea of 'context of situation' as an offshoot of the conceptual theory. He proposed that meaning is related, on one hand, to the external world (i.e., situation), and other levels of language (such as phonology, syntax and lexis) on the other hand. Firth's view of the context of situation includes the interactions of the speaker, the hearer, their role relationship, and the situation they find themselves in. Firth's view is that language is made meaningful only in the context of situation (Halliday et al., 2004; Adesida, 2009; Ope-Davies, n.d; Ope-Davies, n.d.).

3. Research Methodology

The study employs a purposive sampling technique in the selection of the needed WhatsApp chats of HND II students of Yaba College. Sixty WhatsApp messages are extracted from the students' WhatsApp platform. The qualitative research method is used to bring out WhatsApp's peculiar lexical features. The meanings of such lexical features, based on the context of use, are written in front of the identified lexical features in a tabular form.

4. Data, Data Analysis and Discussion

This section presents the selected data for the study and analyses the data with a brief discussion under each of the analysed data.

Data Presentation

Excerpt 1: Wait amount painting class?

Excerpt 2: Confirm by me Assistant Gov.

Excerpt 3: Ok no P thanks

- Excerpt 4: But the information way I hear say na only Pt get strike
- Excerpt 5: Pls government should give us feedback on this.
- Excerpt 6: The painting lecturer said tomorrow, his going to brief us tomorrow before ceramics class.
- Excerpt 7: To does dat pay d POP we appreciate U and for does did not pay we also appreciate u. All thanks to GENERAL L Who pay fro everyone cos he pay 99% of total money
- Excerpt 8: Painting class is holding at the car park
- Excerpt 9: Ladies Vs Guys
- Excerpt 10: Wat's the topic
- Excerpt 11: Pls pay here for ur textbook
- Excerpt 12: U must be a bastard fellow u know we need plywood to do coddle for ceramics u no talk say u house near sawmill make I send money give u to buy it, but u feet go out far to help someone to buy load (bravo)
- Excerpt 13: Hi guys
Am her to tell u guyrdatwe will be having DEBATE next week
- Excerpt 14: Debate on wat?
- Excerpt 15: I mean with d lecturer ooo
- Excerpt 17: Shud we still wait?
- Excerpt 18: Class is abt to start o oo
- Excerpt 19: Hw much
- Excerpt 20: Hi guys
Pls if u know ur matric no is here dm b4 Wednesday
- Excerpt 21: For does dat are not in d group
- Excerpt 22: Hi guys
If u see ur matric number here no dat u are redoing ur leg
- Excerpt 23: Nice work bro
- Excerpt 24: For wat
- Excerpt 25: U to go nd search for it
- Excerpt 26: if u come to class u will understand so once u are not in class u can get d full details.

- Excerpt 27: The first box pls
- Excerpt 28: Hello guys is not that I can't help some people to mark attendance but HOD knows faces.
- Excerpt 29: So I will resend the attendance now if I don't help you to mark please don't blame cos is with me . . .
- Excerpt 30: XUP
- Excerpt 31: Awfa Romeo DM me a beg
- Excerpt 32: The first box pls
- Excerpt 33: Afa mark my own na
- Excerpt 34: Romeo abeg help me mark one
- Excerpt 35: HOD said you should see him
- Excerpt 36: HOD take one of your painting he said I should tell you.
- Excerpt 37: Bro abeg go chop onions and come back an check
- Excerpt 38: Na Gideon write am I just reach school and snap it an post so I will be sure that everybody as submit
- Excerpt 39: Mr. Man respect ur old age
- Excerpt 40: XUP
- Excerpt 41: if you need answer to all. DM
- Excerpt 42: Which one be dm u post question if u have answers post baba
- Excerpt 43: happy birthday bro wish you long life and prosperity in good health and wealth in Jesus name
- Excerpt 44: Is there anyone who did not partake in the project at all? Kindly respond to this
A S A p
- Excerpt 45: Bro. open your eyes and read now
- Excerpt 46: Pls can someone send the text question to the group.
- Excerpt 48: Sure DM
- Excerpt 49: Hello good afternoon guys 'Y' all that haven't submitted your STA assignment should please come along with it tomorrow.
- Excerpt 50: I stay for your front during the examination.
On wyn me sha

- Excerpt 51: Sis. Mary Walker, how was class today?
- Excerpt 52: U die for it
- Excerpt 53: The job advert is mainly for HND students
- Excerpt 54: But ma we never get certificate
- Excerpt 55: But ma is it for only those that have graduated?
- Excerpt 56: Ok ma
- Excerpt 57: Sis Mary, pls tell me course you would like to teach in YCT
- Excerpt 58: Pls house NESB 1-20 B is the same class we used for first semester abi ?
- Excerpt 59: Good evening everyone, pls those that want to school .
..
- Excerpt 60: See people way I dey look auto shey I never miss road like this.

Lexico-Semantic Analysis of the Collected Data

This subsection focuses on the analysis of the lexical features used in the selected WhatsApp messages among HND II students of Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, Lagos State, and identifies the semantic (meaning) of the lexis, which could be general or specific to the language of social media, specifically WhatsApp. Some of the lexical features used in the selected WhatsApp messages are phonologically, syntactically, or grammatically deviant. These lexical features are identified and analysed as follows.

The Use of a Letter or Group of Letters to Represent a Word

A letter or a group of letters is often used in the selected WhatsApp messages to stand for an entire word. This is noticed in the following excerpts shown in tables with their meanings.

Excerpt 1: Wat ..

Table 1

Lexical features	Meaning
Wat	What

Excerpt 1: Ok ... no P thanks**Table 2**

Lexical features	Meaning
Ok	Okay
P	Problem

Exerpt 4 – 9: ... Pt, Pls, govt, u, us, gov**Table 3**

Lexical features	Meaning
Pt	Part-partime
Pls	Please
Govt.	Government
Gov.	Governor
U	You
Vs	Versus
His	He is

Excerpts 12-22:... no, shud, abt, Hw, na, dm, b4**Table 4**

Lexical features	Meaning
No	Know
Shud	Should
Abt	About
Hw	How
No.	Number
Dm	Drop me message or chat me privately
B4	Before

Excerpts 23-33: ... no, nd, cos, afa, awfa**Table 5**

Lexical features	Meaning
Bro	Brother
Nd	And
Cos	Because
Afa/Awfa	How far

Excerpts 34- 44: ... abeg, an, as, ur, as, ur, Xup, ASAP**Table 6**

Lexical features	Meaning
Abeg	I beg
An	And
As	Has
Ur	Your
Xup	What's up or what is up?
ASAP	As soon as possible

Excerpts 44 – 50: ... Bcos, Y'all**Table 7**

Lexical features	Meaning
Bcos	Because
Y' all	You all

As seen in the first seven tables above, the lexical features, devised for WhatsApp messages, are different from the normal lexical features of the English language. For example, in excerpt 1, 'wat' is used to mean 'what', in excerpt 3, 'Ok' for 'okay', 'p' for problem; in excerpts 4-9, 'Pt'. for 'part-time', 'Pls, for 'please', 'govt' for governor; in excerpts 12 – 22, there is use of 'no' for 'know', 'shud' for 'should', 'abt' for 'about', 'Hw, for 'how', 'no' in excerpt 20 mean 'number', 'dm' for 'drop me message' or 'chat me privately', 'b4' for 'before'. In table 5, excerpts 23-33, there is use of 'bro', for 'brother', 'nd' for 'and' 'cos' for 'because', Afa/Awfa for 'how far?'. In table 6, excerpts 34 – 44, 'abeg' stands for 'I beg', 'aw for 'and', 'as' for 'has', 'ur' for 'your', 'XuP' for 'what's up? Or what is up?', 'ASAP' for 'as soon as possible'. Finally, in table 7, excerpts 44 – 50, 'Bcos' is used to mean 'because', 'Y' all" for 'you all"

H – Full – word – changed – to – H – less – word Vocabulary

Excerpt 38: . . . So I will be sure that everybody as submit.

Table 8

Lexical features	Meaning
As	Has

It is shown in the above table that the primary auxiliary verb 'has' is changed to 'as' through the removal of the initial letter 'h'.

Dental-consonant-changed-to-alveolar-consonant Words

In the selected WhatsApp messages, words with the initial dental consonant /ð/ but changed to the alveolar consonant /d/ are mostly used, as shown in the table below.

Excerpt 2: does, dat

Excerpt 8 : d

Excerpt 15 : d

Excerpt 21 : does, dat

Excerpt 22 : dat

Excerpt 26 : d

Table 9

Lexical features	Meanings
D	The
Does	Those
Dat	That

As evident in the above table, 'does' in excerpts 2 and 21 stands for 'those', 'd' in excerpts 8, 15, and 26 represents the article 'the' while 'dat' in excerpts 2, 21 and 22 is used to stand for the demonstrative pronoun/adjective 'that'.

The Use of Code-mixing

Excerpt 60: . . . Shey I never miss road like this

Excerpt 50 :Onwyn me sha

Apart from using Yoruba and English languages together in the selected WhatsApp messages, there is use of pidgin and English together in the same context. Examples are drawn from the following excerpts.

Excerpt 4: ... Why I have say na only pt strike.

Excerpt 12 . . . make I send money give u to buy it.

Excerpt 33: Afa mark my own na ...

Excerpt 37: Bro a beg go chop onions and come...

Excerpt 38: Na Gideon write am ...

Excerpt 42: Which one bedm . . .

The identified pidgins in the above excerpts are used together with normal English variety in each of the excerpts.

Table 10

Lexical features	Meanings
Onwyn me sha	You are probing or making jest of me
Shey I never miss road...	Have I not missed a road...?

There is the use of code mixing in excerpts 50 and 60 where both Yoruba lexis 'O nwyn' and 'sha' is used with the English word 'me' to mean 'You are trying to find out what I will say' or making jest of me. The second code-mixing means I hope I never miss a road like this.

Table 11

Code-nixing	Meaning
... why I have say na only pt strike	Why I have said (that) it is part-time that strike.
... make I send money give u to buy it	Let me send money to you to buy it.
Afa mark my own na...	How far? mark my own now.
Bro a beg go chop onions and come...	Brother, I beg. Go and eat onion and come...
Na Gideon write am ...	It was Gideon that wrote it.
Which one be dm...	Which one is dm?

In excerpts 4 and 38, the pidgin 'na' is used with English words. Its meaning in the two excerpts is *it is* and *it was* respectively'. In excerpt 12, the word 'make' is used as pidgin to mean '*let*'. The pidgin 'na' is used in excerpt 33 to mean '*now*'. In excerpt 37, the pidgin 'chop' is used with English words to mean '*eat*'. Furthermore, the pidgin 'am' in excerpt 38 mean '*it*'. Lastly, 'be' in excerpt 42 means '*is*'.

The Use of Contracted Form of Words

Table 12

Lexical features	Meaning
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Haven't	Have not
Y' all	You all
Can't	Cannot
Don't	Do not
Didn't	Did not

The use of contracted form of words is a general feature of language used and it is used in informal setting like speech, conversation among participants and even WhatsApp conversation among interlocutors, as can be seen in table 12 where 'Y' all' stands for 'You all', 'haven't' for 'have not', 'can't' for 'cannot', 'don't' for 'do not' and 'didn't' for 'did not'.

5. Findings/Conclusion

As identified and illustrated in the tables analysing the selected WhatsApp messages of HND II students at Yaba College of Technology, there are differences between normal English lexical features and those used in WhatsApp messages. For instance, a letter or group of letters is sometimes used in WhatsApp messages to represent a word. Short forms of words are also derived or realised through what we can call intrusion, whereby letters that are not in the original words are combined with the letters of such words to form new words. Examples of such words are 'A beg' for 'I beg', 'Afa / Awfa' for 'how far', 'bcos' for 'because', 'Xup' for 'What's up' or 'What is up', 'd' for 'the', 'does' for 'those', 'dat' for 'that'. In addition to this, a figure (number) is added to a letter or group of letters of a word to stand for the original word, e.g. 'b4' for 'before'. The mixing of two languages is also a feature of WhatsApp messages selected. This is seen in excerpts 50 and 60 where there is use of 'o nwyn'... and 'sha' with the English word 'me', and 'shey' with the English words 'I never miss road like this'.

We can conclude based on the findings that: first, WhatsApp platform users adopt certain lexical features to accomplish effective communication among themselves. Second, the lexical features used on Whatsapp platform are informal. Third, the informal nature of those

lexical features makes them dissimilar from the lexical features of language that are used in formal communication, such as written communication, speech delivery and so on.

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