

**DIACHRONIC ANALYSIS OF ORTHOGRAPHIC  
PATTERNS OF COMPUTER MEDIATED  
COMMUNICATION**



**By**

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## **Dedicated to**

Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him)

The Holy Prophet said, “None amongst you can be a true believer until his love for me is greater than the love he holds for his parents, his children and everyone else”

Bukhari & Muslim related by

Hazrat Anas (R.A.)

## Acknowledgment

First of all I would like to pay my many thanks to my creator, Allah the Almighty who bestowed upon me strength to accomplish this project. I would like to pay my special thanks to Mr. Muhammad Shaban Rafi for his mentorship, suggestions, helpful comments, patience, time, and for being a source of calmness in the moments of stress and confusion. It would not be an exaggeration if I say that Mr. Rafi is one of those rare teachers who take pain for his students. He is indeed a true source of inspiration for his students.

I am very thankful to the entire UMT faculty for illuminating me and enabling me to complete my work. Moreover, I would like to thank Mr. Hassan Imam for helping and guiding me in my M-Phil. I would also like to thank Mr. Kamal Khan for helping me in my Research project.

I would like to pay gratitude to the participants who trusted me and volunteered themselves for this research.

I am thankful to my beloved father, Muhammad Shahjahan, who is my ideal and my first institution. I express my gratitude to my siblings who encouraged me when I was a bit down whilst writing this project. Most importantly, I am thankful to my loving wife, Kiran Jahanzeb who was the most helpful in my M.Phil studies and research.

**J.J**

## ABSTRACT

Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) is emerging as a new medium – a third medium because it supposedly combines features of speech and writing alike. The increasing proliferation of CMC has also influenced the English orthography. The present research aims to explore what has been its impact on orthographic patterns of English used by Pakistani students for their Facebook conversations ‘on the wall’. The study has set out the following research questions: (a) what are orthographic patterns of mediated-communication? and (b) Has Facebook simplified the language and made it easier and faster means of communication? To address the above mentioned research questions, linguistic postings of 50 participants over the period of three years (2010-2012) were analyzed. Unlike the traditional orthography, various orthographic patterns of English have been emerging since 2010. The study reveals that there has been a rapid simplification in English orthography in these three years through CMC. It seems as various orthographic features regress towards simplification despite the proliferation of new styles of writing in CMC. Thus, we may estimate that linguistic forms would regress towards simplification with ever increasing needs of CMC. This is a process of evolution, though quite radical, which the world languages have been passing through since their inception. In a world where everything changes it would be unlikely if a language alone escapes this universal law.

Linguistic postings (collected from Facebook walls of university students) were analysed under certain classifications and parameters which provided the result that

Facebook has greatly helped in simplification of language. Results also depict that various novel patterns of orthography are emerging in CMC. These results lead this research to the conclusion that Facebook has played a vital role in changing the orthographic patterns of CMC. English language has become very compact in online discourse. Students (of University of Education, selected as sample using convenient sampling technique) exhibit through their Facebook walls that there has been a great escalation in the change of orthographic patterns. This is also expected that future will unfold many novel orthographic patterns of English.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter begins with the prevalent role of Computer Mediated Communication and its effects on the orthographic patterns of English on Facebook walls of Pakistani students. This is followed by the explanation of key terms like *CMC*, *Diachronic* and *orthography*. Subsequently some challenges are discussed along with their conceivable solutions that may emerge in this study while doing a diachronic analysis. This is followed by the statistics of Facebook users in Pakistan which illustrates persistently swelling number of Facebook users. This prompt increase has also set a rapid change in orthography being used on Facebook walls of Pakistani students. Furthermore simplification in language from Chaucerian time till present is concisely stated in this chapter. Last but not the least, certain motives are stated that seem to be sources of simplification in orthographic patterns of English language on Facebook.

### 1.2 Introduction

Computer Mediated Communication has been consistently changing contact languages since its proliferation as vital fragment of societal discourse. Among the contact languages English language holds the prestige of superstrate language, which is used as prime source of communication in non-native context. Likewise, English is used

widely as second language in Pakistan. Mostly students in Pakistan acquire English along with Urdu as academic language. They prefer to use English and Urdu in their Facebook Communication on the 'Wall'. The ubiquity of Facebook and other mediated genres are presumably changing written language – most likely script and orthographic form. The former is the case with non-roman script and the later with the contact languages across the board. For example; Urdu that is written in Nastaliq script is subject to Roman transliteration when it is used for communication on Facebook. And orthography of both the English and Urdu is supposedly prone to change.

Sergeant (2012) believes that Language change can best be speculated if measured diachronically. But diachronic analysis of language is not an easy task. The first challenge that we may confront is the tangible timeline.

Since Facebook kicked off during 2004 and became popular until the beginning of 2009 in Pakistan. It was largely exploited as medium of communication by the student community. The ubiquity of Facebook wall conversation and its proliferation seamlessly spreads over short timespan, which is unparalleled with studies which have investigated language change covering several decades. There is reason to believe that language change which used to take place over centuries or decades seem to be happening in considerably less time in the context of CMC. The assumption though arguable apparently suggest way through the first bottleneck. The second challenge which we foresee is lack of vivid variables for investigation. We may not claim to marshal relatively more tangible parameters at this stage. However, past investigations may suggest some plausible solutions. While investigating orthography of the subject

languages we may create general or superordinate parameters e.g., reduction and neologism which can be further broken down into content and functional words until we reach basic forms. The third challenge we speculate is the right population. This selection is indeed a difficult task. Apropos the population, student community is our target population as youth chiefly exploits Facebook as medium of communication. The Express Tribune confirms that Pakistan is primarily a place for the youth as **50%** of the Facebook audience lies between the ages of 18-24 while **61%** of the population is male (Haque, 2013). The fourth challenge that researcher faced is to draw a sample that uses the Timeline feature of Facebook. The collection of data from preceding years becomes challenging if sample doesn't use Timeline feature. Facebook Timeline is a radical profile page design that Facebook launched around the end of September 2011. Facebook Timeline changes the default profile from a list of your most recent updates to a complete summary of your entire life since birth. It includes photos, videos, status updates and locations you have visited etc.

The growing interest of students in Facebook makes this research more fascinating. The research captures more attention because it targets more than 8 million population of Pakistan that uses Facebook. There were roughly 7 million users of Facebook in Pakistan in 2011 but with the end of 2012, Pakistan made a marked proliferation in social media. According to statistics revealed by Social Bakers, users of social networking website, Facebook, in Pakistan have crossed eight million mark with the presence of 8,008,720 users at Facebook from Pakistan (Desk, 2012). The students' community, which claims most of the total integer of Facebook users, will have

overriding interest in this research because it is the same community which, by using Facebook, is presumably changing orthographic patterns.

Students who use Facebook have set a dissimilar outlook of the orthographic patterns. This changed orthography is diachronically analyzed in this study which illustrates a metamorphosis that has transpired since Chaucerian time to the contemporary age of CMC. Chaucerian spellings tended over time to be simplified—for example: *fyssh* became *fish* and then *fish* and in CMC *fish* is replacing fish (Davidson & Upward, 2011). Simplification has interminably been there in English language in voluminous varieties. Reduction (a fragment of simplification) like ASAP, LOL, LMAO, RAM, FAQ, POP, DP (display pic) and FB (Facebook), FBF (Facebook Friends) etc. is ubiquitous' (Cavus & Ibrahim, 2009). The simplification in the orthography of CMC is subject to numerous reasons.

The first reason is giving prominence to consonants and obliterating vowels. Danet (1998) says that CMC users have started giving slightest significance to vowels whereas consonants are governing their scripts. It is because they sense that elimination of vowels doesn't upset the sound of the word and the new outlook of the words is effortlessly intelligible. For example: '*I love you* can be *I Luv Y, ILU, or luv u* etc. and *Thanks* can be *Thnx, thx, tx, or tnx*' (Crystal, 2009). Supporting the prominence of consonants, Magnan (2008) seconds Crystal's view. The second reason lies in the innovation of such gadgets that supports simple script. Facebook, at present, is not only accessed through computer but also from handsets, smart phones and i-pads that comprise numerous features to simplify the language. The third reason is people's

attempt to save the time. Adequate time is saved by means of simplified language. Bodomo (2010) approves that *gud, frnd, pryr* consumes less time than writing *good, friend, prayer* etc.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The first objective of this study is to identify the gradual change in orthographic patterns of English language because there have been abundant changes in the orthography of English language since beginning because people wanted it to be a very simple language and old scripts and orthographic patterns were comparatively difficult. The second objective is to substantiate that orthographic patterns of CMC are not obliteration of English language but an evolution because English is a living language and every living thing is subject to change and evolution. The third objective is to find out reasons why students prefer CMC orthographic patterns over standard spellings of English language.

### **1.4 Statement of the Problem**

This study intends to make a diachronic analysis of orthographic patterns of CMC. Orthographic patterns of English language as well as of CMC are observed in this research. This study makes a clear distinction between the standard and changed orthography because the linguistic postings on Facebook have a dissimilar orthographic pattern as compared to standard and formal orthography. This study also reveals that Facebook has a vital role in simplifying the language and making it easier and faster means of communication.

## 1.5 Research Questions

English Language orthography has been in process of simplification ever since. There have been different orthographic patterns in the past. CMC has developed utterly dissimilar orthographic patterns. Hence the research aims at addressing the following questions:

1. What are the orthographic patterns of CMC?
2. Has Facebook simplified the language and made it easier and faster means of communication?

## 1.6 Outline of Next Chapters

Chapter II begins with primer to English orthography and its petite comparison with German and Italian orthography. The orthographic and language change of English is then diachronically analyzed which encompasses the period of old English, the period of middle English, the period of modern English (the early modern, the great vowel shift, the reforms of spelling in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, The later modern period of English, 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards). Then Computer Mediated Communication and its effects on English orthographic patterns are described. The characteristics of Computer Mediated Communication are discussed. Synchronous communication is then elaborated. Linguistic, orthographic, grammatical, lexical, discourse, paralinguistic and graphic features of synchronous communication are discussed. Then asynchronous communication and its features are discussed. After that orthographic changes are discussed as they are beheld by linguists and users (especially youngsters). Chapter III begins with population and sample size. Selection of data is then explained. It is followed

by demographics of the sample. Ethical considerations are discussed. Then classification of data is described in detail which contains Omissions/deletions, numeric insertions and abbreviations/acronyms. Then parameters of data analysis are discussed in detail i.e. phonemic orthography, phonological orthography, morphological orthography, morphophonemic orthography and invention. After that language selection and delimitation is described. Chapter IV is data analysis which is made by analyzing three wall posts of a single user under classification and parameters of data analysis. The interpretation of data is given under certain tables. Chapter V comprises methodological conceptions, key findings, discussions, direction for future research, limitations of the study and summary of the chapter.