Facebook first post telling

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Abstract

In recent years Facebook (FB) has received increasing attention from scholars of different disciplines including ethnomethodology, sociology, education and communication. Despite the interest in FB, very few studies have investigated FB from a linguistic perspective. Moreover, none of these studies has applied Conversation Analysis (CA) to analyse FB status updates. This paper argues that, by adopting a CA-informed approach, status updates can be examined as tellings. In addition, it also claims that tellings can have five different formats: textual messages only, combinations of textual messages with either photos or hyperlinks, photos only or hyperlinks only.
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1. Introduction

In recent years FB has received a lot of attention from scholars of different disciplines including ethnomethodology, sociology, communication and education, in particular within the field of second language acquisition (Blattner and Fiori, 2009; Cheung et al., 2011; Golder et al., 2007; Hew, 2011; Kabilan et al., 2010; Lampe et al., 2006; Sheldon, 2008a,b; Zhao et al., 2008). However, when it comes to linguistic studies of FB, very few have focused on the messages (status updates) that open FB Home interactions. The only notable exceptions appear to be West (2013), Page (2010, 2012), Lee (2011) and Bolander and Locher (2010). West (2013) made a sociolinguistic analysis of a telling occurring in both FB and a dedicated blog and she claims that FB status updates are like small stories, ''tellings that can be [. . .] about very recent ('this morning', 'last night') or still unfolding events'' (p. 2). This is in line with what is affirmed by Page (2012), who argues that FB status updates are like small stories, fluid, open-ended tellings posted when an event occurs. Although Lee (2011) does not use the term 'small stories' to describe FB status updates, she suggests something similar when she compares them to micro-blogging ''short messages [. . .] designed for self-reporting about what one is doing, thinking, or feeling at any moment'' (p. 111). Bolander and Locher (2010) applied speech act theory to analyse FB status updates and claim that updates consist of speech acts; more specifically assertives, expressives and commissives.

In summary, it seems that previous research into FB status updates has focused only on the initial updates and not on the messages that come after them. However, as clearly shown by the analysis of example 1, FB Home interactions consist of status updates and the messages that respond to them.

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Example 1 [Claudio's early dinner]
→   1   Claudio: Cazzo! Sono le 18:40 e sto cenando! Peggio di mio nonno O_o
     A 2 persone piace questo
     2   Aleandro: sei un vecchio!
     3   Claudio: fossero tutti così i vecchi. . . (tiè:P)
     4   Esteban: I[1] guess you're talking about Berlusconi [the former Italian Prime Minister],[2] everyone does!
     5   Claudio: I'm different ☺ Didn't you recognize this yet????;P I'm just saying. . . "Fuck, It's 6:40 pm and I'm
          having dinner. Worst than what my grandfather does O_o"
     6   Aleandro: Berlusconi is dead. Forever.
Translation:
→   1   Claudio: Fuck! It's 6:40 pm and I'm having dinner! I'm worse than my grandfather O_o
     2 people like this
     2   Aleandro: you're an old man!
     3   Claudio: If only all the old people were like me. . . (tiè:P) [exclamation which normally accompanies hand
          gesture used to ward off evil]
     4   Esteban: I guess you're talking about Berlusconi [the former Italian Prime Minister], everyone does!
     5   Claudio: I'm different ☺ Didn't you recognize this yet????;P I'm just saying. . . "Fuck, It's 6:40 pm and I'm
          having dinner. Worse than what my grandfather does O_o"
     6   Aleandro: Berlusconi is dead. Forever.

The interaction in example 1 consists of six posts,[3] an initial update and five messages that follow it. At post 1 Claudio publishes an update that contains an initial expletive (*Cazzo*), an intended humorous telling, where he says that he is having an early dinner (*Sono le 18:40 e sto cenando!*), and a comment oriented to the telling, where Claudio tells Friends[4] that even his grandfather generally eats later (*Peggio di mio nonno O_o*). At post 2 Aleandro responds to Claudio, he mocks Claudio by ironically agreeing with his telling, when he says that Claudio is old (*sei un vecchio!*). Post 2 stimulates Claudio's message at post 3. In this contribution Claudio is ironically responding to Aleandro's mocking insult (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012) at post 2. He in fact posts another humorous comment about elderly people (*fossero tutti così i vecchi. . . (tiè:P)*).

At post 4 Esteban publishes another response to post 1. He shows a problem in understanding this update. Esteban, who as indicated by his pseudonym, is apparently not a native speaker of Italian, guesses that post 1 refers to Silvio Berlusconi, the former Italian Prime Minister (*i guess you're talking about Berlusconi, everyone does!*). This message stimulates another two messages, posts 5 and 6. At post 5, after seeming to mock Esteban, Claudio responds to him with the English translation of post 1 (*I'm different ☺ Didn't you recognize this yet????;P I'm just saying. . ."Fuck, It's 6:40 pm and I'm having dinner. Worse than what my grandfather does O_o*). At post 6 Aleandro publishes another message which responds to post 4, probably an ironic comment on the political career of Berlusconi; he says that Berlusconi is dead (*Berlusconi is dead. Forever.*).

The first three posts are posted in Italian by Claudio and Aleandro, both of whom are Italian native speakers. However, the next three posts are in English. At post 4, Esteban, identified above as most probably not being a native speaker of Italian, uses English to request explicitly that Claudio clarifies post 1. At post 5 Claudio switches to English to resolve the communicative problem that Esteban raised at post 4. Therefore, here we have Claudio seeming to use code-switching as a strategy to explain post 1 (Rubino, 2014). On the other hand, at post 6 Aleandro probably switches to English to avoid other potential problems and make sure that his ironic comment is understood by Esteban. Therefore it appears that, similar to spoken conversation, FB users use code-switching as a strategy to resolve communicative problems.

The analysis of example 1 suggests that FB Home interactions consist of status updates and the messages that follow them. This article therefore will address the following research question: what happens when we analyse FB status

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[1] In this paper orthographic and grammatical mistakes in the data have been kept unaltered.

[2] In this paper information in square brackets and italics have different functions. Information in square brackets describes non-textual materials added by FB users using the *Aggiungi Foto/Video* (Add Photos/Video) and *Condividi* (Share) buttons, gives information relating to syntactic and other errors that appear in the original data and gives information added by the researcher to clarify the meaning of specific posts. Italics, on the other hand, are used to mark when a FB user utilises the *Mi piace* (Like) button (that is available under every post published on the Home) to respond to a post on a thread. For example, in example 1, the square brackets contain the information added by the researcher to clarify post 4, italics indicate that two Friends have read Claudio's post and used the *Mi piace* button to respond to it. This is in addition to anyone else who may have read post 1 and not responded to it, and potentially in addition to Aleandro and Esteban who responded through the dialogue box *Scrivi un commento* (Write a comment).

[3] In this paper the term 'post' refers to a single contribution published by a FB user in a thread. A thread, on the other hand, is an interaction which occurs on the FB Home and may consist of one or multiple posts.

[4] In this paper the term 'Friends' refers to people who share a *friendship status* on FB.