Discursive Functions of Monosyllabic Responses in Online Friendly Conversations

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Abstract. This paper employed the qualitative research approach to explore discursive functions of monosyllabic responses in friendly online conversations. It was underpinned by Gordon Pask's Conversational Theory (1975). Data was purposively extracted form friendly chats on two social media platforms – Facebook and WhatsApp. The analysis was done with the aid of corpus-based computer software – AntConc 3.5.9. The findings revealed a preponderant use of monosyllabic responses in the friendly chats such as you, yes, no, how, hi, hey, cool, sup. It was also discovered that these monosyllabic responses are used to perform many functions such as greetings, topic initiation, imperatives, questions, assertions, summarizing, make conversations concise. The usage equally gives the interlocutors a sense of in-grouping in the social community. Interestingly, monosyllabic responses were also discovered to be used to show lack of interest in a conversation and therefore employed as a polite way of "telling the other interlocutor off" in a conversation event.

Keywords: Discourse, Discursive function, Syllabification, Conversation theory

1. Introduction

Man as a social being has the innate desire to communicate, converse, interact, dialogue with other members of his community. Language is the most viable means through which he achieves this. Language, one of the means of communication, can be verbal or non-verbal. Whether man uses verbal or non-verbal mode in communication, turns are taken by interlocutors when conversation is going on and the choice of syllabification in the response of each interlocutor at a time is highly determined by the mood and disposition of the respondent.

The important component of natural conversations is monosyllabic words. Monosyllabic words are not just used as responses in discourse; they also have connotative discursive implications which aid understanding. Hence, every social interaction has a discursive component, and the tools that are used often serve discursive purposes or play roles that go beyond what they express (Jones & Jones 1985). These discursive components must be well-packaged in the syllabification patterns in order to maximize the realization of the intended goal in the conversation event. As a result, each communicative component has a unique discursive function for the proper interpretation of the message.

2. Discourse & Discursive Function

Discourse, over the years, has been referred to as a learned discussion, either spoken or written, on a philosophical, political, literary or religious topic. In modern linguistics, it denotes a "stretch of language" larger than a sentence. Lately, the term discourse has acquired much wider meanings and implications. Basically, discourse is understood as an utterance and thus involves subjects who speak and write – which presupposes that there are listeners and readers who, in a sense, are "objects" (Cuddon, 1999). Therefore, discourse may include any mode of utterance as part of social practice.

Furthermore, discourse is a general term for language that has been produced as a result of an act of communication. According to Richard et al (1992), whereas grammar refers to the rules of a language used to form grammatical units such as clause, phrase and sentence, discourse refers to larger units of language such as paragraphs, conversations, and interviews.

Discourse, in a broad sense, refers to a dialogue that includes any collection of statements (Byers, 2016). Discourse is undertaken by participants who contribute to a communicative act by making statements about the topic under discussion. Raja (2021) corroborates this by asserting that any assertion made inside a discourse that is required for reliable comprehension is considered

discursive. Expressions that are made within a particular discourse are shaped by the context of the discourse. The use of expressions may differ according to the context of the conversation. This phenomenon is known as the discursive *function.*

Discursive function explains the rhetorical aim of an utterance (Rossari et al., 2018). A variety of these functions are utilized in the exchange of ideas and information. In the virtual world, language users have options which allow them to hide their identities. Some discourse functions include greetings, topic initiation, imperatives, questions, assertions, off-topic, empathic, warning. Themes in conversation are often highlighted by clefts, pseudo-clefts, and rhetorical inquiries; extraposition phrases and sentences with sentential adverbs are frequently used to indicate author comments (Sotillo, 2000). Thus, a good criterion for categorizing these phrase patterns in English is discourse function. One functional class in discourse is made up of clefts, pseudoclefts, and rhetorical questions, while another functional class is made up of extraposition sentences and phrases with sentential adverbs. As a result, it is very important to take discourse function into account while creating a typology of grammatical constructs.

3. Syllabification

The syllable is important in phonological descriptions of languages, models of language acquisition, and theories of language processing. It is very important because it provides a basis for prosodic distinctive features and accounts for constraints on possible phoneme sequences (Al Solami, 2021).

Monosyllabic refers to a single syllable. According to Hansen (2013), monosyllabic poetry lines are the most memorable, their pronunciation most adaptable and its stress flexibility allows the massage to be understood in a variety of ways. As a result, it is a very effective tool in poetry. Monosyllables are easy to remember and naturally flow in conversation. They can be direct, succinct and terse, cutting to the chase like a knife. Monosyllables have a distinct charm. They sway, sing, and dance. They are used to convey emphasis (Hansen, 2013).

However, monosyllables can be monotonous, cultural-bound and geographically-influenced. Lameli's (2022) study on the variation in syllable structure across Germanic dialects notes that while the South tends toward stronger sonority dispersion and a clustering of obstruents, the North tends toward more straightforward CVC syllables. Using Markov chain models, he concludes that regional variation is the likelihoods of transitions between segments within monosyllables in German dialects.

On the misuse and errors associated with monosyllabic words, Fleisch et al. (2017) specifically coded mistakes on three-letter monosyllabic words and discovered three distinct linguistic error patterns. The first part involves the misuse of the vowel grapheme (e.g. "bad" instead of "bed"). This may be the rationale behind Hansen's (2013) association of monosyllabic words with ambiguity in interpretation. The second pattern involves the typical error which occurs when transferring grammatical and orthographic patterns from L1 to L2 and the third pattern reveals the problem associated with the basic phoneme-grapheme connection.

Similarly, Lyu's (2021) investigation on mono/polysyllabic words in Shanghai Chinese states that if the onset is voiceless, the rising contour has a higher initial pitch value. This is because the voiced onsets are not always voiced with a negative VOT, but instead are produced with a breathy voice. Mousikou et al., (2017) in their work *Moving beyond the Monosyllable in Models of Skilled Reading: Mega-study of Disyllabic Nonword Reading* discover that nine hundred and fifteen monosyllabic words with key similarities to English words were read aloud by 41 proficient adult readers. They assert that as conversations typically involve the audible vocal exchange of information, monosyllabic words are therefore more akin to conversations than polysyllabic words. Again, in examining the structural alterations in Romanian loanwords that are monosyllabic in Hungarian, Both (2018) reveals that the nucleus and the coda of the syllables are the most impacted parts and are easily affected in a phonological process than the onset.

In the same vain, Yamazaki's (2016) examination of a phenomenon known as Monosyllabic Circumflexion reveals that long vowels and diphthongs in monosyllabic words exhibit a circumflex tone instead of the expected acute tone, and Fogerty & Humes, (2010) findings emphasize that context, culture, geography in one hand and the mode of delivery such as face-to-face, online/virtual and written/spoken on the other hand, mediated vowel contributions with sentence contexts making greater contributions to understandability.

4. Rationale behind the Study

A cursory search for scholarly works which focus on discursive functions shows that not much has focused analysis on Facebook and WhatApp

friendly conversations. Some of the works carried out on discursive functions include the following:

Malghani (2019) examines the discursive functioning of parts of speech in political parties' manifestos using corpus-based methodology and the Tajfel & Turner social identity approach (1979) and the Van Dijk socio-cognitive model (1998), He found that Pakistani political parties used different parts of speech as a discursive strategy to frame positive images of their own party and negative images of the other parties. Similarly, Taiwo (2020) investigates the discursive function of coinages and abbreviations in online discussion boards. He used information from several areas of the well-known Nairaland Forum in Nigeria. Taiwo's found out that Nigerian internet users have been able to produce actual writings by using coinages and abbreviations that discursively construct their social experiences, worldviews, and responses to political governance.

Varying in methodology, Rossari et al. (2018) investigate the discursive functions of a set of French modals in both the written press and encyclopedia. They used correspondence analysis to discover that despite the fact that the core meaning was context-free, their employment was highly dependent on context. Nicolle (2014) also scrutinizes the discourse functions of demonstratives in Eastern Bantu. Narrative text and its distal, referential, and proximal functions are the main discourse functions of these texts.

Abuseileek & Rabab'ah (2013) study on the discursive functions and vocabulary use in synchronous computer-mediated communication between language learners shows that gender significantly influenced the quantity of discourse, including the total number of words, the lexical variety, and the linguistic output. It also demonstrates how the unique characteristics of regional social structures impact the discourse functions that participants develop.

Oishi (2017) analyzes the discursive functions of Japanese personal pronouns. On the basis of Austin's Speech Act Theory and Kaplan's theory of indexical, she affirms their discourse function as identifying the participant of an illocutionary act in informal conversation and the social status of the hearer relative to the speaker.
To determine the pragmatics and discourse functions in Jenifa's Diary, Bamgbose & Ehondor (2021) use Joseph Mey's pragmatic acts and Meyer's functions of humor. Their study reveals that the discourse functions of social and moral consciousness deal with issues such as rudeness, domestic violence, bad manners, lying, and indecent dressing. The strategies of caution, education, enculturation, and counseling, as well as the communication chores referred to as "enforcement" are used to carry out these discourse roles.

5. Research Question

This study sets out to provide answers to the following questions:

- What monosyllabic responses are used in Facebook and WhatsApp friendly chats?
- What are the discursive functions of monosyllabic responses in Facebook and WhatsApp friendly chats?

6. Methodology

This qualitative study employs the conversation theory in the analysis of monosyllabic friendly conversation in the social media. Through the purposive sampling technique, 10 friendly chats each on two social media platforms – Facebook and WhatsApp were selected for this study within the month of November, 2022 (Taiwo, 2020). The participants' chats contained conversations on divers themes. This study adopts the AntConc version 3.5.9 software (Malghani, 2019) to account for all instances of data elements use in this study (discursive features) and their context (discursive functions) across the corpus to enhance objectivity in the analysis.

6.1 Conversation Theory

Conversation theory, developed by Gordon Pask (1975), is a cross-disciplinary field that has been influenced by a number of disciplines, including cybernetics, linguistics, computer sciences, cognition, and learning theory (Schmitz, 2019). It is used to comprehend how individuals' actions and reactions affect how other people react. The theory claims that (a) people believe that it is necessary to reduce uncertainty in conversational situations through observation, interaction, and questioning (the uncertainty reduction theory) and (b) the way a communication is conducted determines the expected response through context, interlocutors' characteristics and interpersonal characteristics (the expectation violation theory). Pask maintains that any logical deduction possible about a conversation is part of the conversation theory (Scott, 2001). The theory is best applicable to understanding conversation within a given subject matter.

7. Analysis and Discussion

The prevalence of monosyllabic responses in conversations on Facebook and WhatsApp is studied using a corpus-based methodology. Using

AntConc 3.5.9, the frequencies of monosyllabic responses were determined, and concordance lines were examined. Based on the discursive function of monosyllabic responses in Facebook and WhatsApp friendly interactions, data interpretation is conducted.

The Analysis is in two parts – Facebook and WhatApp.

(a) Facebook

Question 1: What monosyllabic responses are used in Facebook and WhatsApp friendly chats?

Table1: The frequency of monosyllabic responses in Facebook friendly conversations

	RANK	FREQUENCY	MONOSYLLABIC RESPONSES
1	5	52	Hi
2	15	44	Dear
3	17	43	Good
4	18	41	Great
5	23	39	Thanks
6	30	37	Waw
7	31	36	Yes
8	80	36	Sap
9	82	34	Sure
10	83	32	Guy
11	85	31	Kk
12	87	29	Hey
13	91	28	Nice
14	95	24	Sup
15	98	18	Bam
16	101	14	Cool
17	104	12	Yeah

Monosyllabic words are frequently used as conversational responses, but this is not by accident and is supported by sound justifications. The aforementioned is an excerpt from monosyllabic comments made by some Facebook interlocutors using the AntConc program. These responses were used by the speaker and the hearer to avoid conversation, build rapport for conversation, offer a friendly greeting to start a conversation, and in other cases, to make the conversation succinct and clear.

The following excerpt is from the data:

Excerpt 1
  A: SAP
 A: Hi
  A: HI
 B: Hi
  A: Hi
 B: Hey
 A: How are u doing
 B: Cool. You?

The monosyllabic response "SAP" is used by speaker A to alert speaker B to a conversation in the excerpt. Speaker A raised the unique monosyllabic response, "Hi" when there was no response from B. Then, speaker B gave the same response, "Hi" opening the door for more conversation. It is important to emphasize that the responses were crucial and thus required to build rapport before any further interaction. This is clear from the chart where A continued to use a variety of responses *SAP*, *Hi* and *HI* until B responded.

Excerpt 2
> A: Dear
> B: Hey
> A: Sup
> B: Good
> A: Great
> B: Kk
> A: Will u show up?
> B: What?
> A: D party tonite
> B: Yeah
> A: Nice
> B: Yes!

Again, monosyllabic responses were used by the two friends above to carry carryout their conversation. They used them to greet each other, ask questions and make assertions.

Let us examine yet another conversation between three friends:

Excerpt 3
A: Hi,
guys
B: Guy?
A: Yeah, How bi?
B: Sup
C: Hey, guys. She's out. I saw her.
B: Wow
A: Waw
C: She looks amazing. Guys, she's not in our league oo! Lols
A: Speak for yourself. Me, I full ground remain.
B: Sure. Hahahahahahahaah
C: Bam!

From extract 3, we can see that monosyllabic responses were used as a greeting: "hi", "hey", and "guy"; it was also used as a question: "sup" (social media version of "What is up?"); it was used as imperative: "wow", "waw" and it was also used as an assertion: "sure" and "bam".

(b) WhatsApp

Table 2: The frequency of monosyllabic responses in WhatsApp friendly conversations

	RANK	*FREQUENCY*	*MONOSYLLABIC RESPONSES*
1	3	57	You
2	5	27	Yes
3	6	24	No
4	10	24	How
5	18	23	Hi
6	23	22	Good
7	52	20	Sure

8	54	20	Thanks
9	58	18	Why
10	91	17	Dear
11	131	17	Waw
12	133	17	Well
13	136	16	Wow
14	166	16	Bye
15	186	16	Cool
16	205	15	Eii
17	222	14	Fool
18	239	13	Hmm
19	292	13	Same
20	327	12	Sap
21	328	11	Yo
22	329	11	Cul
23	330	11	Vim
24	331	10	Sup

Like Facebook, monosyllabic responses are also used intensively in WhatsApp conversations. Perhaps, this may be as a result of their high level of informality and the need to demonstrate an intimate relationship. The table above reveals the rank and the frequency of monosyllabic responses in WhatsApp. Just as found in Facebook, monosyllabic responses in the WhatsApp platform demonstrate such functions as refraining from conversation, achieving precision, using salutations or greetings to initiate conversation, and establishing a report to seek attention and a time for conversation.

Question 2: What are the discursive functions of monosyllabic responses in Facebook and WhatsApp friendly chats?

The extracts below give insights to the discursive functions of monosyllabic responses in the data.
Consider the following extract of charts from WhatsApp wall of two friends:

Excerpt 4
A: Tonight I will send your check.
B: Cul.
A: They paid you in dollars?
B: Yes
A: I think it's reasonable
B: Yes
A: So you have picked up $400 I sent last week?
B: Yes.
 A: My wrist feels better
B: good

The extract indicates a continuation of a conversation between A and B about a kind of transaction and delivery. However, B appears unprepared/uninterested in the conversation as evidenced by his repeated use of the monosyllabic response "yes". Speaker A from all indications is very much interested to carry on with the conversation as supported in the chat where she introduces two different themes (payment in dollars, picking up $400 and her wrist) to keeps the conversation going, but B manages to close up the chat with "good", the summary and concise response.

The monosyllabic response is employed to set the tone for the conversation and can be abandoned as the conversation progresses. This is because the interactants contribute adequately in the speech events, showing their readiness for the conversation, bringing in new ideas, themes and information which keep tempo going. In so doing, they are made to put down their monosyllabic responses which could lead to a monologue and

consequently end the interaction. This is realized in the extract below:

Excerpt 5
A: Hi, how are you today?
B: Good
A: Great! Do you have a favorite food? Mine is rice!
B: Well. My favourite food is cake, I just bought one because I got promoted at work.
A: Congrats!
B: Thanks so much
A: Just want to make my parents proud. I am an engineer.
B: Sure, they will be very proud of you.
A: What type of engineering do you do?
B: Environmental engineer. What is it like to work in software?

As can be seen above, both speakers abandon their initial use of monosyllabic responses to start the conversation. The initial monosyllabic words paved the way for further conversation and their application prepares A to stretch the conversation into new aspects – asking for B's favourite food, informing her how he wants his parents to feel about him and his occupation etc.

As indicated earlier, being concise as most communication situations demand, is also the reason for the deployment of monosyllabic words. In communication, interlocutors turn to grammatical resources such as elision which require good inferences for adequate comprehension.
Consider the following extract:

Excerpt 6
A: have a good day
B: Same

In the extract above, B's use of monosyllabic response is to avoid unnecessary repetition. The use of the monosyllabic response "same" has condensed the length of the inquiry into the well-being of the speaker's counterpart, which is best received by inference.
Again, overt greetings can be replaced by the use of a monosyllabic response. In the response below by speaker A, the monosyllabic response serves as a greeting. Consider the opening of the chart below:

Excerpt 7
A: Hi, how are you today?
B: Sup? I thought you had left already.
A: I couldn't. They haven't brought the tickets.

The selection of monosyllabic responses may overlap. For a specific monosyllabic response, there is typically no clear-cut slot. The same monosyllabic response can be used in various contexts during a conversation. Here is an example:

Excerpt 8
A: I felt like a princess, very special yesterday.
B: Yes
A: Do you vote?
B: Yes

The same response "yes" is used as a response for a declarative statement and a question.
Furthermore, the choice of a monosyllabic response is dictated by the already-established structural function of the preexisting conversational structure. Consider the excerpt below:

Excerpt 9
A: Do you vote?
B: Yes
A: Do you live alone?
B: No
A: How's your wrist today Sweet mother...?
B: My wrist feels better
A: Good

It is clear that speaker B's responses are as necessary as speaker A's responses. In the first two conversations, A's questions required monosyllabic answers of "yes" or "no". The same was true of the later conversation from B, which was a statement that needed to be acknowledged by A.
Furthermore, because the interlocutors are friends (peers), they use monosyllabic responses for fun. Consider the conversation below:

Excerpt 10
A: Yo
B: sup
A: How be
B: cul
A: meetn at the pub tonight?
B: Yh gonna be lit
C: Aswear
A: vim
B: see ya
A: sure

This role of monosyllabic responses is observed to deviate from the English lexicon to coinage. Their usage offers the users a kind of joyful feeling and a sense of belonging.

Again, the use of monosyllabic responses in friendly conversations is useful to make conversations concise, sort of summarizing responses for diverse reasons. In many cases, the interlocutors are probably occupied with work, in a hurry to attend to things and yet had to respond to chats from friends. Interestingly, monosyllabic can be used to show lack of interest in a conversation

or a polite way of "telling the other interactant off" in a conversation event. Consider this exchange from WhatApp:

Excerpt 11
A: Hey Babe
B: sup
A: Cool. Would you come as planned?
B: Have you send the money?
A: But I told you I can't now. Got a lot going on with cash at the moment. But I'll soon.
B: Hmmmm
A: So when should I expect you?
B: Yo
A: You say?
B: Yes
A: I didn't get you. Should I wait?
B: No
A: Why nah?
B: Yo

In the above excerpt, B is politely showing lack of interest in the conversation, obviously because she did not receive the expected answer from A about money. Therefore, instead of being rude or getting upset and ending the conversation, monosyllabic words were employed to show A that she is no longer interested in the conversation.

Avoiding conversation is a crucial application of the monosyllabic response. By using monosyllabic responses, a speaker conveys his disregard for dialogue. This response saves him/her time by not being overly verbose while persistently withholding the other crucial details to make a request for a break in the conversation.
Consider the following excerpt:

Excerpt 12
A: Dear
A: Happy birthday
B: thanks
B: How long have you been working with this MNC?
A: 8 years.
B: Wow that's nice.
A: Are you free today?
B: Yes!
A: Let's meet today?
B: Sure!
A: So where would you like to go?
B: TDI mall
A: The one which is at Rajouri Garden?
B: Cul
A: So what time?
B: Sap
A: When?
A: ??
B: Yeah!
A: I didn't get u. When do I pick u?

B: Sure

The extract begins with a monosyllabic salutation that is used to begin a friendly conversation. However, B's response to A's birthday congratulations indicated that he is not keen in carrying on the conversation. As the conversation progressed, B showed lack of interest in the conversation by not responding to A's question "when" and by giving unrelated monosyllabic responses. The continued use of the monosyllabic responses, "yeah" and "sure" subsequently which compels A to end the interaction, is another illustration of B refraining from the conversation.

8. Conclusion

This study has examined the discursive roles of monosyllabic responses in friendly chats on Facebook and WhatsApp using Pask's Conversation theory (1975). It was revealed that monosyllabic responses accurately depicted the informality of friendly charts and the nature of the relationships between the interlocutors. The findings also show that users of Facebook and WhatsApp are familiar with the sociopsychological factors that contribute to the in-grouping of people, in line with Malghani's (2019) findings. It therefore concludes that social media users use monosyllabic responses for greetings, summarizing, amusement, initiating a topic, showing familiarity and politely, for fun, imperatives, questions, assertions, and for "telling other interlocutors off". In any case, the use of monosyllabic responses gives the users joy and a sense of belonging to the community. The ability to establish rapport, accuracy, and silence were other significant discursive functions of monosyllabic responses.

Thus, it is concluded that both Facebook and WhatsApp charts share similar monosyllabic types, which may serve various discursive purposes in various communicative events.

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