

Features of language in facebook condolence messages

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Abstract

Facebook is one of the social platforms used by many people to interact and writing is one channel used. There are various categories of written text in Facebook, one of which is condolences. This paper aims to identify the language features used in composing the condolence messages in order to assess its suitability as a writing model. A total of 75 condolence messages published on a public website of Facebook was downloaded. Using linguistic analysis, the postings were tagged and then individually examined and compared. Findings suggest that Facebook condolence messages are typically short and the level of language is casual and loose. It was noted that the condolence messages were composed in ungrammatical structures, containing bad spelling and punctuations followed by some peculiar expressions. This sloppiness, it is argued, points to the lack of observation of audience awareness and editing practices. Consequently, it compromises the writer's social status and credibility. In that regard, Facebook may not serve as a good writing model for language learners but it is a good research site to study language use.

Keywords: condolence, writing, facebook, language use, audience awareness

Introduction

Writing is an important skill. Good writing skills ensure that meanings are clearly, precisely and accurately conveyed. The product of one's writing is a projection of one's identity; often it is used by others to evaluate the writer's 'quality' in terms of social and economic status, education level, political stance, authority and credibility, age, gender, and sometimes specific characters. A written text can also be used to assess the writer's level of understanding, reliability and trustworthiness. All these can be deciphered from the written text itself. Linguistic analysis is one approach to analyse how writers use language to convey what they mean while discourse analysis focuses on the ideology and power projected through the writing itself, based on a particular analytical approach.

Regardless of the type of writing one produces, the language used to perform such writing tasks must be applied with care and caution. This is because the writer wants to portray a positive image to others who may not know him/her but will read what he/she writes. Of utmost importance is to write with the reader in mind always, in other words, apply audience awareness. Next to it is the importance of editing the writing tasks before they are sent out for publication, whether as text messages, emails, letters, Facebook comments or quick mobile device replies on Whats App. Audience awareness ensures that the text is comprehensible to the reader and that it is composed in the most appropriate way possible.

It has been said that there are good writers and there are poor writers; this is interpreted as skilled and unskilled writers. Good/skilled writers focus on what the reader wants to know by always taking the reader into account when writing or drafting a written message, text, story or essay. To do this, the writer inevitably revises and edits the writing tasks until it becomes a comprehensible piece of work filed with relevant

supports and points. Revising and editing helps the writer to convey meanings clearly, coherently, cohesively, precisely and accurately. Undoubtedly, good/skilled writers write for the benefit of the reader since written texts are meant to be interactive (Dyson, 1995) ^[2] and to be appreciated by the reader. Poor/unskilled writers, on the other hand, focus on what they want to say, hence, their written tasks may end up being comprehensible to the writer but vague or ambiguous to the reader. Poor/unskilled writers also omit the activity of revision and editing, hence their writing tasks may be filled with superficial ideas which have not been adequately explored or supported. A lack of revision and editing activities suggest that the written tasks are likely to be blemished in appearance by ungrammatical structures, bad spelling, inappropriate punctuations and possibly, peculiar eccentricities unfamiliar to readers. Overlooking this importance, poor/unskilled writers develop written tasks that are not only unacceptable or below quality but also incomprehensible. Such written tests, when viewed by readers, may be construed negatively, delivering a perception of lackadaisical attitudes in writing (Gere, 1985) ^[6], hence the issue of writer credibility may arise.

Among all the language skills a language learner needs to acquire, writing is said to be the most difficult (Kurt & Atay, 2007; Latif, 2007) ^[9, 10]. Unlike listening or speaking skills, writing is a skill that requires time to be developed and honed. The mastery of writing skills require other complimenting skills such as word recognition, making sense of syntax and semantics, reading ability, putting thoughts into words, logical thinking and critical thinking skills. It also encompasses knowledge of organization, coherence, cohesion, clarity, conciseness and appropriateness. Often, the writer also needs to apply reader consciousness so that the right message is

conveyed whilst alleviating instances of offence and misunderstandings affected by a lack of sensitivity. All of these qualities are equally difficult to acquire hence, likewise, they too require time to be honed. Hence, it is no wonder that foreign language learners often struggle with writing.

It has been recommended that one way of improving one's writing skill is to learn from other writing models, i.e. follow good writing models. The social media is one popular platform in the 21st century. It caters to various classes of people to interact and exchange views and ideas. Facebook is one of the common platforms used by people all over the world of all ages to interact and the interactions are often conducted through the writing mode.

Aim of paper

This paper aims to identify the language features of Facebook condolences written by writers and posted in a public website of Facebook. The secondary aim is to use this analysis to suggest if such written texts could serve as a suitable writing model for learners. A total of 75 condolence messages posted on a public Facebook website was downloaded. Using linguistic analysis, the postings were tagged and then individually examined and compared.

Significance of study

The outcome of this paper will provide some tangible evidence to demonstrate that Facebook users write to express themselves mainly. They appear to observe very little reader consciousness in their written texts. Thus, self-censorship which usually occurs in the revision and editing stages of writing was not applied. Although the condolence messages composed were typically short, (an average of between 33-40 words per written message), many of these had divorced the writing convention from traditional writing conventions. There were sufficient evidence to suggest that poor language skills, as evidenced by the casual and loose language constructions, fragments, ungrammatical structures, bad spelling, inappropriate punctuations and eccentric peculiarities were practiced by almost all the writers as seen in all the data samples. In this regard, it is implied that public Facebook postings should not be subscribed by language learners as they cannot serve as adequate or effective writing models for language learners. More of these need to be studied before it creates repercussions on language learners.

Literature Review

Knowledge, attitude and tone in writing

Flower (2000) ^[4] acknowledged that the goal of a writer is to "create a momentary common ground between the reader and the writer" (p. 139) because writers want their readers to be able to share their knowledge and attitude towards that which the writers are creating. Flower (2000, p.139) ^[4] also asserted that writers ought to aim to "close the gap between the writer and the reader" because by doing so, the reader is eventually able to see things from the writer's point of view. Flower (2000) ^[4] also recommends that writers focus on wooing their readers by taking note of two elements: knowledge and attitude. This is important for any writing task since all writing are meant to be interactive (Gere, 1985) ^[6].

Knowledge refers to what the reader needs to know, for

example, does the reader have sufficient schema to understand what is being written. Attitude refers to the conscious awareness of explicit facts and clearly defined concepts. It has been noted that conflicts may arise over the same knowledge due to attitude differences (Flower, 2000) ^[4]. In contrast, when people discover that what they read fits into their idea of understanding, there is less conflict, "many people accept uncritically anything that fits in with their own attitudes and in contrast, rejects just as uncritically, anything that does not" (Flower, 2000, p. 140) ^[4]. In this regard, it would be better for the writer to know what kind of image and attitude the readers hold so that there is no conflict in understanding what is written. The more these elements differ from the writers' own, the more the writers have to do to convince their readers to see their point (Flower, 2000, p. 140) ^[4].

A written text is a composition which carries a certain tone such as polite or sarcastic, playful or serious, formal or casual, preachy or informative and thoughtful or condescending. Tone is conveyed through the choice of words employed by the writer specifically, as a way of displaying the writer's viewpoint of a particular subject. It may also reflect the attitude of the writer. This tone as well as attitude, can invariably, affect the reader (Tone and audience awareness, n.d.) as it can lift or dampen the spirit of the reader respectively. Because of this, it is imperative for writers to focus on audience awareness during the writing process.

Formal or informal language

Written tasks can come in many forms as mentioned earlier: emails, short messages, letters, essays and so on. These can be structured in a loose, casual manner as in casual language, to show a carefree mood. Alternatively, it can be structured in an elaborate, complex and convoluted manner, called formal language, to display a more pompous nature. There are differences in the two (Formal and informal language difference, 2015) ^[5]. Formal language is more intricate and elaborated in structure. It bears no emotion and avoids emotive punctuations such as exclamations or ellipsis (incompleteness of the text). It uses full words and contains no abbreviations or contractions and it is more objective, using mainly third person viewpoints. It also tends to carry more technical terms. Informal language, in contrast, is less elaborated and more whimsical. It contains more colloquial expressions and vocabulary, much like what spoken language is about. It may comprise ungrammatical structures, slangs, figures of speech, and specialized expressions commonly used by others. It is simpler in structure and tends to be shorter, with occasional ellipsis. It uses abbreviations and contractions and is written with emotions, sometimes siding the reader's empathy. In this regard, it is synonymous to casual and loose language.

Studies on condolences

Condolences are personal messages written for someone who has just lost a loved one through death. The aim of a condolence is for the writer to express his/her grief on someone's passing. Condolences are meant to show comfort, a shared emotion or loss, pain or sympathy. Few studies actually focus on authentic condolences and of the few that have explored the area, Kuang (2015) ^[8] used a linguistic approach

to study some SMS condolence messages for their appropriateness. She noted that some of these messages carried information which were misunderstood by the recipient and this was because in composing their condolences, these writers had overlooked the feeling of the recipient. Consequently, some of the condolences were perceived as directives - telling the recipient what to do or as wishful thinking - expressing insincerity (Kuang, 2015) [8].

Zunin and Zunin (1991) [19] focused on how condolence messages, a difficult writing task to accomplish, should be composed so as to seem more sympathetic and kind. Mooney (2009) [12], noting the same predicament, also added that writers do not seem to know what to write and how to write them. Noting this gap, both Zunin and Zunin (1991) [19] and Mooney (2009) [12] developed their own guidelines to equip others with the knowledge of writing suitable condolences. Their guidelines came about as a result of observations. Similarly, another author (Simple Sympathy, n.d.), upon noting this difficulty of constructing condolences, began studying thousands of condolence letters. As a conclusion, the writer noted that condolence messages ought to contain certain components such as: Acknowledgement of loss, Expression of sympathy, Note special qualities of the deceased, Recount a memory with the deceased, Note special qualities of the bereaved, Offer assistance, and Close with thoughtful word or phrases. (Simple Sympathy, n.d.).

Endorsing the above guidelines, Mooney (2009) [12] further claimed that a condolence message must aim to deliver the writer's feeling, concerns, sympathy and love in a proper and well-written manner. The emphasis says "well-written". Nonetheless, the concept of proper and well-written manner was not exploited, thus it is considered an ambiguous feature to understand in this context of condolence writing. This is because recipients (bereaved) come from different backgrounds and have different cultural and religious beliefs. Consequently, it is deduced that the message needs to follow standard writing rules or conventions (Formal and informal language difference, 2015) [5]. This will ensure that the condolence message is adequately composed, adhering to the writing rules of English, therefore inoffensive to the recipient. Of the few studies that focused on condolences, Yasser and Marlyna (2013) [18] examined condolences in Facebook, focusing on strategies used by Jordanian writers in expressing themselves towards an obituary status. Other studies looking at strategies of writing condolences include Elwood (2004) [1], Farnia (2011) [3], Lotfollah and Eslami-Rasekh (2011) [7], Moghaddam (2012) [11], Samavarchi and Allami (2012) [13], Tareq (2013) [15] and Yahya (2010) [17]. Thus far, examining the language features characterized by condolences, and to a small extent, the observance of audience awareness, has not been explored. This paper will thus be able to fill that gap as

its main aim is to study the language features of Facebook condolence messages. The outcome will be used to determine if Facebook postings can be considered as adequate writing models for language learners who might be thinking of Facebook as a writing model to improve their writing skills.

Methodology

A total of 75 condolence messages were identified from a public Facebook website in January 2016. Being public and open to the society for viewing, this helps to eliminate the issue of getting permission from writers to study their written texts. In this context, the writers were offering their condolences in their capacity as fans, to Celine Dion on her recent bereavement in January 2016, after she lost both her husband and brother at about the same time. From the names indicated at the end of the postings, it can be deduced that the writers were of diverse nationalities, hence different cultures and possibly religious beliefs and values. Thus, they were likely to be of different age groups and gender with different world experiences, education level, upbringing and so on. All these variables were excluded in the analysis of this study as verifying the authenticity of these variables would be beyond the scope of this paper. The postings were then downloaded and pasted onto a Microsoft word document. These postings were then tagged with numbers according to the sequence they appeared in the postings i.e. 1, 2, 3 and so on. In total 75 sets from 75 writers were identified. All the data were read and scanned for suitability to ensure that they all fit into the condolence message criteria. Using linguistic analysis as the approach, data were then individually examined and compared for their language features. This involves looking at: formality of language (colloquial/formal, loose and casual or complex and somber), sentence type (complete/incomplete i.e. hanging or fragment, ellipses, contractions), grammar, spelling, punctuations (full stops, commas) and to a small extent, appropriateness (exaggerated expressions, exclamations, emoticons). These language features, when duly identified, can assist language programme designers in deciding what aspects of language to be taught to second language learners so as to increase their credibility as writers on social media platforms like Facebook.

Results and Discussion

For the purpose of analysis, only relevant samples were extracted to serve as evidence of claim. In the following table, four extracts were provided to illustrate the full nature and length of the construction of Facebook condolence messages. The names of the writers were included in Table 1 so as to verify their authenticity. In subsequent tables, only numbers were used to represent the postings. All examples were written in the way they appeared originally in the postings.

Table 1: Length of messages

| | |
|----|---|
| 1. | There are things we cannot change even if we wanted to, losing the ones you love is like losing a vital part of your existence. My deepest condolence to Celine Dion, I'll be sure to put you in prayers. <u>Stay strong.</u> (Maximillian Bakosi). |
| 2. | <u>Double sadness for celine Dion...</u> be strong celine and my deepest sympathy to you and your family...love you celine dion! (Cris Longoria). |
| 3. | <u>My deepest condolences to celine Dion and her family.</u> I wish you all the strength to get through these tough times, my thoughts are with you xxx (Yvette Claus) |
| 4. | <u>Very bad news for all Celines' fans that we are.</u> <u>RIP</u> to each of them and big courage to my lovely celine and her close family. Be strong..... (Arthur Pohouegbe). |

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| 5. | My heart broke into tears for you Celine dion, your husband and then your brother too...your voice has heal so many home and gave them joy during a hard time...your strength will come from the above, your sadness will turn into courage...(Andrew Nwogalanya). |
| Total of 165 words | |

As the samples illustrated in Table 1, the length of the five condolence messages is short, with an average of 33 words per written text. The writers were from diverse backgrounds as can be seen in their respective names but all used the English language as the medium of communication. Analysis begins by looking at contractions followed by superlatives, outlandish exaggerations and then the overall varied language use.

Use of contractions

Unlike formal messages which avoid contractions, abbreviations and short forms, the condolence messages located from Facebook contained this language feature quite rampantly, as is evidenced by the examples shown in Table 2. Perhaps this has something to do with time and space constraint as it is understood that postings must be quickly posted for others to read and respond, if necessary. Cited examples are underlined for illustration purposes.

Table 2: Using short forms and abbreviations

| | |
|-----|--|
| 1. | " <u>I'll</u> be sure..." |
| 3. | " <u>I'm</u> so sorry Celine..." |
| 4. | " <u>OMG</u> ...Double sadness..." |
| 5. | "always sad to hear another has lost their battle whether <u>U</u> know them or not...Celine, <u>U</u> have a strong..." |
| 5. | "...and an infinite number of fans helping from <u>UR</u> family..." |
| 15. | " <u>I cant'</u> imagine how you and your family are feeling." |
| 19. | " <u>I'm</u> so sorry for her that she has to deal ..." |
| 27. | "Ah Celine... <u>what's</u> to say.... such ordeals we have to deal with in life." |
| 32. | "it was a year this past <u>Sept</u> that lost both my father & best friend within 2 weeks." |
| 33. | "may you feel the strength & love from God..." |
| 35. | "I'm so Very Sorry to read this." |
| 36. | soo sorry celine, ... <u>it's</u> a tough thing to go through..." |
| 39. | " <u>I'll</u> always remember how Rene spent time talking to ..." |
| 48. | "...and then to lose your brother in a week <u>that's</u> just so hard...." |
| 48. | " <u>RIP</u> " |
| 49. | " <u>RIP</u> to your brother Daniel..." |
| 50. | " <u>You've</u> always been a fighter Celine..." |
| 55. | "I hope that your strong energy will be your <u>rehab</u> from pain you feel those days." |
| 55. | " <u>I'm</u> so sorry Celine." |
| 56. | " <u>Omg</u> what devastating news." |
| 70. | "I <u>can't</u> imagine what you're going through." |
| 71. | "I hope it <u>isn't</u> too difficult for her..." |
| 72. | " <u>RIP</u> Rene and Daniel." |

As data in Table 2 indicate, Facebook writers clearly like short forms very much and in this context, OMG, RIP and UR were used to indicate Oh My God, Rest in Peace and Your respectively.

Using superlatives

Since condolence messages are meant to express one's emotion of sympathy, grief, sadness or pain, data clearly indicate that fans expressed their emotions by using

superlatives which, in the case of this study, may comprise superlatives ending with 'est', 'so + adverb or adjective', and also the adverb, 'very'. Zunin and Zunin (1991) ^[19] and Mooney (2009) ^[12] had mentioned that condolences must comprise a number of elements although Mooney (2009) ^[12] did not mention that the element of extreme expression should be expressed with superlatives. Examples provided in Table 3 were underlined for illustration purposes.

Table 3: Using superlatives

| | |
|-----|---|
| 1. | "My <u>deepest</u> condolence to Celine Dion." |
| 2. | "Our <u>deepest</u> condolences are with Celine and family..." |
| 3. | "I'm <u>so</u> sorry Celine." |
| 4. | "...and my <u>deepest</u> sympathy to you and your family." |
| 5. | Some of my <u>deepest</u> prayers surround Celine and her loved one..." |
| 6. | "My <u>deepest</u> condolences to Celine Dion and her family." |
| 8. | " <u>Very</u> bad new for all Celine's fans that we are." |
| 9. | " <u>So, so</u> sorry to hear this!" |
| 11. | "I am <u>so</u> sorry for you Celine and my..." |
| 15. | "I'm so saddened to hear about your husband and brother Celine..." |
| 17. | "I am <u>so</u> sad to her what Celine is going through..." |

| | |
|-----|---|
| 19. | "I'm <u>so sorry</u> for her that she has to deal with two big losses like this." |
| 20. | " <u>So so sorry</u> Celine for the lost..." |
| 21. | " <u>So Sorry</u> to hear of you're the passing of two very special people in your life." |
| 23. | "This is so very sad!" |
| 24. | "My <u>deepest</u> condolences to you and your family." |
| 27. | "My sincere and <u>deepest</u> sympathy for your loss to you and your family." |
| 29. | "My <u>deepest</u> condolences to Celine and her family (in particular Claudette)..." |
| 31. | "I am <u>so deeply sorry</u> to hear this news." |
| 34. | "I am <u>really saddened</u> to know..." |
| 35. | "I'm <u>so VERY Sorry</u> to just read this." |
| 35. | " <u>soo sorry</u> Celine..." |
| 39. | " <u>So sorry</u> for your loss." |
| 41. | "Our thoughts are with you and your family at this <u>most difficult</u> time of loss.." |
| 43. | "This has to be the <u>most difficult</u> time ever for you." |
| 44. | "I am <u>so sorry</u> for the loss of your husband and your brother." |
| 45. | "Our <u>deepest</u> condolences to Celine Dion and her family..." |
| 46. | "My <u>sincerest</u> condolences." |
| 47. | " <u>So sorry</u> Celine for the heartbreak you would be feeling." |
| 48. | "...that's just <u>so hard</u> RIP" |
| 51. | " <u>So sorry</u> Celine." |
| 52. | " <u>So very sad, deepest</u> sympathy to you and your family..." |
| 53. | "Oh no <u>soo sad</u> her a husband and also her a brother too has passed away, <u>very sad</u> her one love lose." |
| 54. | " <u>So sad</u> losing 2 family members so close together." |
| 55. | "is <u>really sad</u> for Celine Dion." |
| 57. | " <u>so-sorry</u> for Celine for all your sadness you have had to deal ..." |
| 58. | "I <u>really feel</u> for you at this time..." |
| 59. | "...my <u>deepest , deepest</u> sympathy ..." |
| 63. | "...my <u>deepest</u> condolences to her and her children in this difficult time." |
| 64. | " <u>So sorry</u> for your heart broking lose your husband and then your brother..." |
| 66. | "such an awful illness and <u>so sad</u> , losing her husband and then her brother..." |
| 67. | " <u>So so sad</u> to read this news." |
| 68. | " <u>Too much</u> to comprehend dear Celine." |
| 69. | "God bless you and your family at this <u>very sad</u> and difficult time..." |
| 70. | "My <u>Deepest</u> Condolences Celine.." |

From the examples shown in Table 3, it can be seen that some writers even chose to exaggerate their emphasis through capital letters as seen in no. 35 – 'so VERY sorry', 53 – 'soo sad' and 67 – 'so so sad'.

Eccentric exaggerations

The condolence messages examined for this paper indicated that the writers, as fans, may also be overcome by extreme emotions which may be expressed by certain exclamations.

However, these exclamations, when viewed in terms of writing conventions and condolence conventions did not fit in what would have been expressed to a celebrity but yet, these eccentric exclamations were articulated in the condolence messages posted on Facebook. The features identified include exclamation marks, the acronym - WOW, emoticons, kisses shown by 'xxx' and 'XoXos' and other visuals like '@):' to denote their emotions. These examples were also underlined for illustration purposes as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Using Eccentric exaggerations

| | |
|-----|--|
| 3. | "This is beyond difficult. <u>Why???</u> " |
| 4. | " <u>OMG</u> ...Double sadness for celine dion..." |
| 4. | "...love you celine dion...!!!" |
| 6. | "...my thoughts are with you <u>xxx</u> " |
| 7. | " <u>oh np not again</u> ..." |
| 9. | "Love you!!!" |
| 12. | "O m g...be hold my idol our inspirations. <u>GOD HAS A PLAN OF WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR LIFE</u> , be strong and deep prayer we must do in everything comes to our life..." |
| 17. | "My heart goes out to you and the rest of your family and I hope that you will have some peace soon <u>xxx</u> " |
| 18. | "Love and compassion to you..." |
| 22. | "My thoughts are with you. <u>Kisses at all family</u> ." |
| 23. | " <u>Oh No! Wow!</u> This is so very sad!" |
| 25. | "My though 're with you and my heart! <u>@):</u> " |
| 26. | "I know my condolences for comment and your family <u>surely pass unnoticed</u> lost in the scourge of condolences that your family are going to receive..." |
| 27. | "Ah Celine...what's to say..." |

| | |
|-----|---|
| 27. | "Signed your favourite clairvoyant who wrote to you and your husband so many times to guide you both. I love you." |
| 35. | "Celine you most know the WholeWorld is sending you Prayers and Love to all your Family." |
| 38. | "GUD BYE THE SADDEST WORLD" |
| 39. | "We love you." |
| 41. | "Our thoughts are with you and your family at this most difficult time of loss. GOD BLESS" |
| 42. | "Havy for you after your husband, now your brothers." |
| 42. | "If i can do something I will do it. Let me know." |
| 44. | "Heaven has gained two more wonderful Angels." |
| 46. | "Love to you Celine. Xoxo." |
| 48. | "They battels hard are now cander free." |
| 52. | "RIP to both your husband and brother, may God bless you. 😞" |
| 53. | "Oh no soo sad her a husband and also her a brother too has passed aways ..." |
| 56. | "I feel for Celine and her family xxx" |
| 57. | God bless you 😞😞😞 |
| 58. | "Our Lord Jesus Christ Wrap You in His Arms... Huge Hug x" |
| 60. | "O dear you got to feel sorry for Celine Dion to lose a husband and then a brother to the big C horrible illness" |
| 62. | "GOD BLESS XXX" |
| 65. | "My prayers go out for you Celine and family , GOD will , comfort you my dear , he helped me through my sad time he will help, you" |
| 69. | "God will help you all as I cannot imagine your heart break. xoxox" |
| 71. | "this is horrible for the whole family but at least now she doesn't have to sit around waiting forher brother to die whilst trying to mourn her husband and care for and support her children..." |
| 72. | "Have no words, but I am thinking off you in this time off sorrow." |
| 72. | "Celine I am just holding you in my arms for awhile, no words could describe how sad I am for you." |

As can be noted in the table, some expressions clearly seemed excessively inappropriate, for instance, no. 4, 12, 23, 25, 27 and others. It seems obvious that the writers did not heed how Celine Dion (if she does read) would feel about the construction of the messages. It also seems very clear that the writers did not edit their written text as they were also filled with many features of writing which could have been corrected easily. For instance, no. 42, 48, 53 and 71.

Varied language use

Besides some inappropriate manner of constructing the messages, there were also numerous ways the language was used to compose the condolence messages. In this section of analysis, data provided will include the way language was used in terms of colloquialism, grammar, spelling, punctuations (including capitalisations) and eccentric expressions. Table 5 illustrates the varied language use.

Table 5: Varied language use

| | |
|-----|---|
| 1. | "I'll be sure to put you in prayers." (Colloquia language) |
| 4. | "Double sadness for celine dion..." (Colloquial language, Uncapitalised Proper noun, Ellipsis) |
| 5. | "some of my deepest prayers surround Celine and her loved ones..." (Uncapitalised first word of a sentence, Ellipsis) |
| 5. | "I have prayed that the Higher Ups will embrace them now and always..." (Vague reference, Ellipsis) |
| 5. | "My third year struggleing with this nasty disease...(Ellipsis, Bad spelling) |
| 6. | "My deepest condolences to Celine Dion and her family, I wish you all the strength to get through these tough times, my thoughts are with you xxx" (Switches from third person to second person, Poor punctuation skill) |
| 7. | "oh np not again heart goes out to celine dion and all her family be strong celine us fans will help u through this difficult time sendin big UK hugs to u and the children take care celine hugs (Run-on sentence, Bad punctuation skills, Bad spelling, Uncapitalised proper name, Colloquial language) |
| 8. | "Very bad new for all Celine's fans that we are. RIP to each of them and big courage to my lovely Celine and her close family.Be strong..." (Poor spelling for news, Colloquial language, funny expression of 'big courage', switches from third person to second person for Celine, Poor punctuation skills) |
| 9. | "Celine Dion you are as beautiful inside and out Praying for you, your boys and family!! (Poor comparison, Poor punctuation skills, Unnecessary exclamation marks). |
| 10. | "My heart broke into tears for you Celine dion, your husband and then your brother too..." (Uncapitalised proper name, Ellipsis). |
| 12. | "...my condolence to your husband and brother is in you celine..." (Inappropriate expression, Uncapitalised proper name) |
| 13. | "May the love we send you now comfort a little bit your soul." (Ungrammatical structure.) |
| 14. | "Celine, in these difficult days for those who are going through please do ask you to be very close to God , go to the Bible and there you will find the comfort and temperance that a woman as unblemished as your need , God bless and strength you to" (Run on sentence, Poor punctuation skills, Ungrammatical structure, Colloquial language) |
| 15. | "I'm so saddened to hear about your husband and brother Celine, I can't imagine how you and your family are feeling." (Colloquial language) |
| 17. | "I am so sad to hear what Celine is going through and I do understand , I lost my husband to cancer, but mine was a young age, My heart goes out to you and the rest of your family ..." (Switching from third person to second person) |
| 18. | "Now me and my family send our deepest sympathy to you ,," (Colloquial language) |
| 19. | "Continued prayers for Celine and her family. (Fragmented structure) |

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| 20. | “So so sorry Celine for the <u>lost</u> ...” (Bad spelling , Ellipsis) |
| 20. | “My condolence thoughts wishes and prayers are always with you and your family. (Run on sentence, bad punctuation skills) |
| 20. | “Have to be <u>more strong</u> Celine. (Poor comparative adjective used, Colloquial language) |
| 22. | “My condolence to your husband and your brother. (Inappropriate expression) |
| 24. | “I am especially thinking about your children, your mother, your <u>sisters</u> , your <u>brothers</u> and you...” (Inappropriate expression , Ellipsis) |
| 25. | “Celine, you’re a <u>women</u> very strong. My <u>though</u> ‘re with you and my heart @:” (Bad grammar, Bad spelling, Incoherent expression) |
| 26. | “My heart is bruised loss successive you made today the object.” (Incongruent construction) |
| 26. | “I know my condolences for comment and your family surely pass unnoticed lost ...” (Ungrammatical construction, Incoherent sentence) |
| 28. | “Death is not a thing to go through alone especially if you <u>loose</u> two loved ones so close after <u>ease</u> other.” (Bad spelling) |
| 30. | “Sending you loving thoughts along with my condolences to you and your family...” (Bad spelling, Ellipsis) |
| 38. | “...my heart <u>go’s</u> out to you and your family.” (Ellipsis, Bad spelling) |
| 39. | “This <u>time</u> is a difficult and sad time for celine!” (Uncapitalised proper noun, unnecessary repetition) |
| 39. | ”Celine dear take heart the world and ur fans loves you. And ur family also loves you.” (Poor punctuation skills) |
| 42. | “Celine <u>condoleances</u> with your brothers. <u>Havy</u> for you after your husband, now your brothers.” (Bad spelling, Inappropriate expression) |
| 47. | “They <u>battles</u> hard are now cancer free.” (Ungrammatical construction) |
| 48. | “ <u>There</u> battles have end and now Cancer free and <u>out</u> pain.” (Ungrammatical construction) |
| 50. | “Thoughts and prayers go out to you and your family” (Colloquial language) |
| 51. | “ So sorry Celine, Too much for anyone.” (Colloquial language) |
| 53. | “...very sad her one love <u>lose</u> ” (Colloquial language, Ungrammatical verb) |
| 54. | ”Prayers and thoughts go out to you and your family Celine “ (Poor punctuation skills) |
| 55. | “is really sad for Celine Dion. (Uncapitalised first word of a sentence) |
| 58. | “I really feel for you at this time <u>and so</u> to your family...” (Ungrammatical construction, Ellipsis) |
| 58. | “To have to part from you Husband and a brother...”(Incomplete sentence, Unnecessary capitalisation) |
| 59. | “ To lose a loved one is devastating but <u>twoloved</u> ones within days of each other I have no other words to explain will <u>ptay</u> for u <u>celine</u> my deepest, deepest sympathy god bless (Run on sentence, Poor punctuation skills, bad spelling) |
| 61. | “may your husband and your brother rest in peace <u>condoleance</u> for your <u>lost</u> my prayers to you and your family god bless you all (Run on sentence, Bad spelling, Uncapitalised first word of a sentence, Uncapitalised proper name) |
| 62. | “I Pray you are <u>given</u> strength to battle through these tragic times.” (Inappropriate capitalization) |
| 63. | ”My heart breaks for her my deepest condolences to her and her children in this difficult time...(Run on sentence, Poor punctuation skills) |
| 64. | “So sorry for your heart <u>brokinglose</u> your husband and then your brother <u>prays</u> are with you and the kids and family and my condolences (Run on sentence, Poor punctuation skills, Bad spelling) |
| 65. | “My prayers go out for you Celine and family , <u>GOD</u> will comfort you my dear , he helped me through my sad time he will help you (Run on sentence, Poor punctuation skills, Inappropriate capitalisation) |
| 69. | “God bless you and your family at this very sad and difficult time your family is going through God will help you all as I cannot imagine your heart break.” (Run on sentence) |
| 70. | “My deepest <u>Condolences</u> Celine.....(Inappropriate capitalisation, Ellipsis) |
| 70. | “Only hope you have a lot of support around you. “ (Colloquial language) |
| 71. | ”Now she can let it all out and try to salvage a life for what family she has left...(Ungrammatical construction, Ellipsis) |
| 71. | “I hope it <u>isnt</u> too difficult for her and I hope the media leaves her and the kids alone to do it (Poor punctuation skills) |
| 72. | “Have no words, but I am thinking <u>off</u> you in this time <u>off</u> sorrow.” (Bad spelling) |
| 73. | “To lose your husband and a brother within a week my heart goes out to you and the family I will pray for you and your family to deal with the hurt and pain (Run on sentence, Poor punctuation skills) |
| 74. | “May God bless you and <u>give</u> you strength <u>for you</u> and your family “ (Ungrammatical construction and poor punctuation skills) |
| 75. | “This is soooo heartbreaking, I lost my parents, they died 2 weeks <u>apart</u> from each other but to lose your partner and then brother within a week, toooo sad...(Bad spelling, Ellipsis, Colloquial language) |

As the above examples illustrate, the language features prominent in the construction of these condolence messages were varied but the section below will attempt to highlight the specific features of the language by providing relevant examples and then discussing these with some elaboration. It was clear that these condolences were characterized by the following:

- No ‘Openings’ which should be accompanied by appropriate address forms and minimal ‘Closings’ which should encompass some kind of statement suggesting that the end of the message is approaching like ‘Please take good care’ or ‘God Bless You’.
- Contractions: Note the use of “RIP” and “OMG” or variations of it as well as “O” for “oh” in the examples and “UR” for your and “re” for are.
- Exaggerations: The use of “!!!” as depictions of emotion

as well as expressive terms like “Oh my God”, “Oh No” and “Wow” were also applied.

- Superlatives: Fans were using several types of exaggerated speech forms such as like ‘soooo’ and ‘tooooo’.
- Bad spelling: Fans did not seem to check how they write as is exemplified by the use of ‘Havy’ for heavy, ‘there’ for their, ‘childrens’ for children.
- Mechanics: Proper nouns were not capitalised, names were jointed without space or no full stops or even commas to complete a thought written within a sentence.
- Ellipses: this was used via to indicate pauses or thoughts
- Colloquial language: language use was of the conversational kind even though data were supposedly written for a celebrity.

- Ungrammatical structures: Clearly some constructions were badly written without thought for consistency as in the third person to second person pronoun use or as in phrases depicting a lack in predicate or run on sentences with completely no punctuations used.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine the language features portrayed by Facebook condolence messages written by diverse writers and posted on a public website. The outcome of this paper was expected to be able to illustrate whether or not fans writing on Facebook considered audience awareness in their writing and if so did they apply the activity of revising and editing their written tasks. The identification of the various language features noted from the examples of Facebook condolence messages suggest that these writers were brief as their messages were short and they were probably fast writers since much of their written text were filled with contractions, inadequate punctuations as well as bad spelling. Considering these as the writer's sloppiness, it was thus deduced that Facebook postings of this nature do not serve as good writing models for language learners. The lack of adequate writing skills, in this instance, a good application of the language suggest poor or unskilled writers who neglected their readers or audience and they did not engage in any form of self-censorship prior to publishing their written product on Facebook. Consequently, these writers committed many faux pas of writing or unnecessary writing errors. Their writing product indicate that they were using loose language which also tend to illustrate a loose and casual image of the writers themselves. Their written text displayed their writing style and the level of their consideration for their readers and in the case of this paper, they seemed to not respect their readers nor did they even consider audience/reader importance. This implies then that the writers were writing merely to express their own feelings first and to convey their condolence second. Their writing style depicted their low mastery of language use, henceforth, their low level education and social standing as language users (see Gere, 1985) ^[6]. Clearly, the fans had compromised their individual credibility and respectability by omitting audience importance as well as some aspect of self-censorship through editing or revising their written text.

By separating data into a number of levels for analysis, data were able to demonstrate a few things. First even though condolences were meant to be serious and somber in nature, data of this study did not reveal this aspect very much although data did disclose the writer's sympathy as expressed. Second, Facebook writers were not serious when writing in their capacity as fans to their Idol (Celine Dion). They may have expressed their sympathy but they did this in a very unpolished manner as indicated by the many unconventional writing and language features seen in the data. Third, even as they write, they were also unable to write in complete sentences as seen in the ellipsis of the data. This suggests that Facebook postings are time-constrained. Four, Facebook writers do not edit their written text hence they depict a poor image of themselves and as mentioned earlier, this could be due to the time-constraint laid down by Facebook postings. Tone and mood of the written text were not matched because

the nature is somber and serious but the written text did not reveal this. Moreover, Facebook writers, as fans, were inclined towards making exclamations, causing ellipses, omitting punctuation marks and using bad spelling unnecessarily. Consequently, they came across as immature or less proficient users of language and so as a result of their written texts, they appeared distinctively sloppy and thoughtless. They also seem to be engaging in 'lose casual language' to create their texts, almost as if unconcerned with how they would be viewed. This is attributed again to the time constraint of Facebook postings, inevitably. As fans, the writers also seemed emotional but these emotions were not necessarily expressed for the benefit of the bereaved. It is deduced that fans were actually expressing themselves so as to be 'heard' by others as can be seen in some of the examples where the writers were actually sharing their own experiences with losing their husband, parents or even best friend.

Although minimal, fans also commit the minor social faux pas like conveying their condolences to the deceased (Rene and Daniel) rather than to the bereaved (Celine Dion). Fans eulogized the bereaved, Celine Dion, instead of the deceased as is seen in 'You are a strong women', 'We love you' and so on although one fan did thank Rene for talking to her at one event (eulogizing).

Based on the outcome of this paper, it is thus recommended that language teachers make more emphasis on reader or audience awareness when teaching writing regardless of the genre as this can encourage writers to give focus to the proper format of writing. When the proper format is emphasised and applied, writers will be able to demonstrate the adequate respect for their readers. This can also increase their social standing in the eyes of the reader. When writing with audience in mind becomes a habit, all written texts will be constantly edited and revised and they will eventually become easy for the readers and proper language use is preserved for future language learners.

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