



CONVERSATION ANALYSIS OF WHATSAPP GRADUATE GROUP CHAT IN MARDAN

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Abstract

Numerous studies have been conducted on conversation analysis in various contexts, including online chats, online interactions, graph-based conversation analysis on social media, communication on social networking sites, and social media texts as research methods. Although Yahoo Chat has also been examined in previous research, this article specifically focuses on Paul Drew's approach to conversation analysis of WhatsApp chats. The study aims to analyze WhatsApp conversations among graduate students. It seeks to provide insight into how conversations on social media platforms can be analyzed by examining the conversational sequences in WhatsApp chats among graduate students, as well as the linguistic features employed in their interactions.

Keywords: *Conversation Analysis, Social Media, Social Networking & Communication, WhatsApp.*

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1. Introduction

Pakistan is a multilingual country, having a rich linguistic diversity (Shah, Riaz & Malik 2019; Shah, Pillai & Sinayah 2019; Shah, Pillai & Sinayah 2020).

English is the medium of instruction and official language, mainly used in academic settings and in offices for official correspondence. Urdu is the national language, used across the country by different ethnic communities, serving as lingua franca which helps to keep all the ethnic groups as one nation united (Shah, Riaz & Malik 2019, p.76).

This rich linguistic landscape has been approached from different perspectives, among which conversation analysis has been employed comparatively less frequently. The Conversation Analysis (CA) is a branch of discourse analysis that examines the composition and organization of spoken interaction. The concept of CA emerged from the works of sociologists and ethnomethodologists such as Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel, who emphasized the relationship between social interaction, identity, and institutional practices. Rooted in sociology and ethnomethodology, CA investigates the principles and dynamic structures of conversation, focusing on how participants organize and interpret interaction in everyday communication (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974).

The formal development of Conversation Analysis is primarily associated with the sociologists Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff. CA has become an important methodological approach for studying social interaction and understanding how individuals construct meaning through conversation. It examines both verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication and explores the systematic patterns that shape human interaction in different social contexts.

One of the fundamental principles of CA is the use of naturally occurring data rather than experimentally produced interactions. Conversation analysts study authentic communicative exchanges in order to examine the structural organization of interaction. Conversational structures contribute to the smooth flow of communication and help avoid misunderstandings, interruptions, and other forms of conversational breakdown (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974).

In the contemporary digital era, social media platforms have transformed human communication and interaction, playing a significant role in maintaining interpersonal relationships. Individuals communicate through various online platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Zoom, and Skype. Consequently, the study of online communication through WhatsApp and other social media applications has gained considerable importance in linguistic and sociological research.

Although numerous studies on social media communication have been conducted worldwide from different perspectives, this area remains relatively underexplored in the

context of Pakistan. Social media platforms are widely used across the country, particularly among young people. Among these platforms, WhatsApp has emerged as one of the most prominent applications for group communication, especially among students. The study of digital communication among graduate students is therefore significant, as these individuals use online platforms to interact with peers, exchange information, and maintain social relationships. Analyzing the use of WhatsApp for group communication can provide valuable insights into communication patterns, linguistic styles, social relationships, and online behavior among graduate students.

This study focuses on WhatsApp as a social media platform from the perspective of Conversation Analysis. It examines various aspects of students' interactions through WhatsApp group chats. The study specifically investigates a WhatsApp group consisting of graduate students from Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan.

The group, titled "*Dumb Linguists* 🤡 🤡," was created to facilitate communication, interaction, and the sharing of ideas and academic materials among MPhil Linguistics students. The group consists of 29 members, including 24 female and 5 male participants. It serves as an active platform where members share study materials, exchange opinions, and discuss topics related to both academic and personal life. While some participants are highly active, others remain relatively passive. The demographic diversity of the group provides rich data for examining how male and female students of similar age groups and academic backgrounds use language to establish social relationships and interactional patterns (WhatsApp Group: *Dumb Linguists*).

The primary objectives of this study are to examine the conversational sequences in WhatsApp chats among graduate students and to analyze the linguistic features used in these interactions. To achieve these objectives, a graduate students' WhatsApp group from Mardan has been selected for analysis.

The study of graduate students' group chats is important because it contributes to a deeper understanding of online interaction among youth. Participants discuss a variety of issues ranging from academic matters to personal experiences and daily life challenges. They also provide support, guidance, and assistance to one another through digital communication.

Using qualitative Conversation Analysis, this article explores the various ways in which technology is reshaping communication, collaboration, and interpersonal relationships. The theoretical framework employed in this study is Paul Drew's approach to Conversation Analysis, which emphasizes turn-taking, sequencing, repair mechanisms, conversational patterns in informal settings, and the emotional dimensions of interaction. Through the application of this framework, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how students manage group conversations, construct social relationships, and interpret one another's ideas in online communication.

1.1. Statement of the Research Problem

During online chats, students employ various linguistic and communicative features such as turn-taking, repair strategies, editing, emojis, voice notes, and images. The present research focuses on the Conversation Analysis of a graduate students' WhatsApp group. It aims to analyze the conversational sequences and the linguistic features used in WhatsApp interactions among graduate students.

1.2. Research Questions

The study finds answers to the following questions:

1. What is the conversation sequence of WhatsApp chat among Graduate students?
2. What are the linguistic features of the contents used in WhatsApp chat by students?

2. Literature Review

Many scholars have attempted to study Conversation Analysis in various works and contexts. Mostly the theory of conversation analysis is applied on physical contexts and in digital communication to various social media apps but not WhatsApp. The researcher intends to investigate and evaluate Conversation Analysis of WhatsApp chat of Graduates' group at Mardan.

Till date, no study has been conducted on the selected group. There is enough existing knowledge and effort on Conversation Analysis and other online platforms at the moment. The technological affordances and repair strategies across other online platforms, WhatsApp usage among students in Karachi, identity construction through WhatsApp, group dynamics, and politeness strategies have all been extensively researched.

Zaferanieh (2012) examined the discourse features of online chat in which chatters use several strategies such as turn taking, repair, and adjacency pairs. But an issue was faced due to the absence of extra linguistic features. Hence some specific discourse skills were needed.

Paulus, Warren, Lester (2016) examined a systematic review regarding conversation analysis in which 89 journal articles were reviewed in peers in which they focused on the conductor of such dissertation, the settings in which CA can be utilized, and where such studies are published. The main aim was to understand the methodological development of conversation analysis. The findings declare the studies are focusing on all sorts of contexts. The data is determined as synchronous or asynchronous. The main objectives of the research were to compare online as well as face to face talk, they also comprehended how coherence is sustained, it resulted in the comprehension of dealing with issues or problems by the participants, and the focus was also on achievement of social actions.

Panyametheekul (2018) analyzed that people can have online conversation with each other regardless of social factors but they can face the issue of interruption and disruption. This study aims to analyze the conversation flow of chat room. It was analyzed that how the participants keep the topic relevant throughout the conversation. The hypothesis for this was observing relevance, flouting relevance, and violating relevance. Pantip.com chat rooms having 1859 messages was the source of data collection. Observation of relevance is used more often. Chat rooms conversations vary from that of everyday life regards such as disrupted adjacency pairs, multiple topics and dead air. For better understanding among the participants, relevance of the topic should be there. Relevance can be obtained by answering the question and proper turn-taking.

Ahmed (2018) studied WhatsApp and declared it as the social media app which is vastly used among students in Karachi. The app is used by the students for a variety of purposes including voice messages, academics, and family contacts. 18.3% respondents lacked the use of WhatsApp in Karachi. From 18 distinct educational institutes, 556 students were chosen from the city. The researcher conducted a survey through questionnaire among students. He evaluated that WhatsApp is the most widely used app for online communication among students.

Farina (2020) demonstrated the merits of the usage of conversation analysis for the analysis of those interactions which occur across various social media platforms. It analyzes the interactions from an interactional perspective. It uses CA for examining the interactions between extremists and potential recruits across social media platforms. It examines the advantages of using CA for the analysis of these interactions.

Shah and Durrani (2021) analyzed that identities have been diversely studied across the globe but they emphasized on identity construction through social media chat. They studied identity construction through WhatsApp chat by investigating the WhatsApp chat of two students' group in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The data was collected from two groups of graduate students. The data was qualitative and descriptive. They interpreted that the interaction of students and teachers represent their micro and macro identities. The study discovered the dimension of identity and language.

Sikandar (2025) studied the transformation of youth communication due to social media and the impact on the usage of English language, specifically grammar, vocabulary, and syntax. Informal language features such as abbreviations, emojis, and relaxed grammar are prompted by platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. It raised concerns about academics and the use of language skills. The study was qualitative and identifies code-switching and structural language shifts. He evaluated that social media improves expressive and creative use of language but it also leads to grammatical errors and informal writing style in formal settings. Youth's opinion varies on this, some think of social media as harmful for the standard of language while others

consider it as innovation in linguistics. The recommendations included the integration of digital literacy into language education, promotion of awareness of formal writing standards, and exploring a balance between informal and formal language use.

Although much has been said about the technological affordances and repair strategies across other online platforms, WhatsApp usage among students in Karachi, identity construction through WhatsApp, group dynamics, and politeness strategies, this study focuses on Conversation Analysis of the group chat of graduates in the local context that is Mardan.

The theoretical framework used by the researcher for this dissertation is Drew's Conversation Analysis (2005) which aids in studying social interactions and conversations. Conversation analysis emphasizes on the structure and organization of conversations, it investigates how participants establish and convey meaning through speech. By emphasizing Paul Drew's conversation analysis, this study examines the conversation sequence of WhatsApp chat among graduate students, the linguistic features of the contents used in WhatsApp chat by the students, and how the females and males' responses in WhatsApp chat differ from one another.

3. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design, as it focuses on the conversation analysis of WhatsApp group chats among graduate students. Qualitative research is considered appropriate for this study because it enables an in-depth examination of naturally occurring interactions and linguistic practices in digital communication (Shah, Riaz & Malik 2019; Shah, Pillai & Sinayah 2019; Shah, Pillai & Sinayah 2020) . The descriptive nature of the research allows for a detailed analysis of conversational structures, interactional patterns, and communicative features used by participants in online group conversations.

The study is grounded in the theoretical framework of Conversation Analysis (CA), which examines the organization and structure of interaction in everyday communication. CA analyzes conversations by focusing on the sequential organization of turns and investigating how each turn contributes to the development and progression of interaction. Particular attention is given to interactional elements such as turn-taking, adjacency pairs, sequencing, repair mechanisms, pauses, overlaps, and responses. In addition, CA emphasizes the importance of contextual factors, including social and cultural influences, in shaping conversational practices.

Since Conversation Analysis relies on naturally occurring data, the research is based on authentic WhatsApp conversations rather than experimentally created interactions. The study examines how participants communicate, negotiate meaning, maintain relationships, and organize conversations within a digital environment. The analysis also explores the linguistic and paralinguistic features commonly used in

WhatsApp communication, including emojis, abbreviations, voice notes, images, editing practices, and other multimodal elements.

The primary source of data for this study consists of WhatsApp chats collected from a graduate students' group. Secondary sources of data include scholarly articles, research journals, books, and relevant online resources related to Conversation Analysis, digital discourse, and social media communication.

The participants for this study were selected from a WhatsApp group comprising graduate students. Data collection was conducted through the recording, exporting, and transcription of WhatsApp chat logs. The collected conversations were carefully transcribed and organized for qualitative analysis. During the transcription process, attention was paid to preserving the original structure and sequence of interaction in order to maintain the authenticity of the conversational data.

Ethical considerations were also taken into account throughout the research process. The identities of all participants were kept anonymous to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Names and other identifying information were either removed or replaced with pseudonyms during data analysis and presentation. Furthermore, the collected data was used solely for academic purposes.

4. Data Analysis

The data was collected directly from the chat of the WhatsApp group. The WhatsApp group belonged to the graduates of MPhil Linguistics at Abdul Wai Khan University Mardan. Several messages from the WhatsApp group chat were selected and examined for the purpose of this study. The data was collected directly from WhatsApp Messenger followed by manual transcription and translation. The analysis was conducted in accordance with the main objectives of the research. The researcher analyzed the selected messages by focusing on their conversational sequences and linguistic features. Particular attention was given to interactional patterns such as turn-taking, adjacency pairs, responses, and the use of digital linguistic features in online communication (Drew's Conversation Analysis, 2005).

Through close observation and detailed examination of the conversational sequences within the group chat, the researcher identified a complex network of interactions characterized by multiple conversational threads, rapid responses, and a distinctive blend of formal and informal language. The analysis demonstrates the adaptive nature of online communication, where the boundaries between formal and informal discourse are often blurred.

The conversation began when Participant A shared an informative message regarding a departmental gathering at the university:

A: *Assalamualaikum. Taso agha department get together ta da tlu khabara kare wa. Nu che sok kol ghwary nu pa Thursday bya agha organizers ta cash payment oky ya Easypaisa bandi wrta um koli shy k kol ghwary.*

(Assalamualaikum. You had discussed attending the department get-together. Those who wish to participate may submit the payment to the organizers on Thursday either in cash or through Easypaisa.)

Participant A then added another message:

A: *The students asked me to communicate this message.*

The initial message received responses from several participants, reflecting cooperative interaction and active participation within the group. The responses are presented below:

B: *Kh jee*

(Okay.)

C: *Okay. Do you know how much payment is required?*

Participant C's question initiated a question-answer adjacency pair. Participant D responded immediately, thereby taking the conversational turn:

D: *1000*

C: *Okay. Kha da khu kmi di.*

(Okay, this is quite reasonable.)

I wasn't expecting this.

D: *Nu dona dere kho na v.*

(It is not that much.)

Khorak y dase khas na v zka 🤔

(The food is not very special, that is why 🤔😅)

At this point, Participant E reacted to Participant D's message with the emoji 😊, indicating amusement and emotional engagement within the interaction.

In the WhatsApp chat of graduates, the adjacency pairs were observed when one of the participants asked a question and other participants responded to it by answering the question. In the group chat, the researcher observed that the participant D asked a question about the occurrence of class tagging a specific participant, the participant C.

D: *@C sba class shta?*

(@C! Is there any class tomorrow?)

Here the participant D tagged the participant C and she gave a positive response to the participant D as shown below:

C: *Yes*

The participant D reacted 👍 to the participant C, and it ended here.

The above adjacency pair sequences i.e. question-answer pairs show that the participants show a cooperative behavior towards each other in the group conversation. This suggests that they follow the norms and ethics of interaction in online communication.

In addition, adjacency pair sequences like greeting-response were observed as well in the group chat. For instance, when the participant C sent a greeting message in the group to initiate the conversation, distinct participants gave different responses as mentioned below.

C: *Salam friends!!!*

Sba Insha Allah umri la zm taso hm duagano ki yad sathy mata ba hm yad ye Insha Allah tol.

Life sa pta nlgi bs sa ghlti shwe we ya me sok khfa kre nu (ya me sok da kasta exam na yarawali we☐) Nu plz Mafi kway 🙏🙏🙏🙏

(Salam friends!

Tomorrow InshaAllah, I'm going for Umrah. You also remember me in your prayers and I'll also remember all InshaAllah.

Life is unpredictable. If I've committed any mistake, or offended someone (or if I've falsely scared someone from exam☐)

So please, forgive me 🙏🙏🙏🙏.)

The participant C received different responses from distinct participants in a timely manner as exhibited below:

The participant D reacted ❤️ to the participant C.

D: *W.salam allah. Pak d pa khoshalo boza or rwala or munga ta dere dere duagani oka ❤️*

(W.salam! May you go and return with happiness and pray a lot for us ❤️)

The participant C reacted ❤️ to the participant D and then replied to her as follows:

C: *Ameen*

Ao Insha Allah

(Ameen.

Yes, InshaAllah)

F: *W.salam umbarak sha ALLAH d pa khair buza*

(W.salam! Congratulations! May you go safely)

The participant C reacted ❤️ to the participant F and replied to her as shown:

C: *Thank you and ameen.*

The participant F reacted ❤️ to the participant C.

In the same manner, the other participants also replied to the initial message of the participant C in the group chat and the chat carried on, as soon as the participants saw the initial message, they replied to it.

The analysis of WhatsApp chat data showed that the graduate students often used a question or a statement to initiate conversation. The direct question acted as the conversation opening. It depicted that the participants wanted to seek information from each other by sending a message in interrogative form hoping that any of the participants would answer. It was evident from the WhatsApp chat of graduates' group when the participant F sent an initial message in the form of a question to inquire about the semester fee.

F: *Fee suna d???*

(How much is the fee?)

The participant F got a quick response from a fellow, participant C.

C: *70k*

(Rs.70k.)

F: *N last date?*

(And what about the last date?)

C: *Two days after Valentine's day 😊😊*

16th Feb

F: *Hahah pa 16th sunday da mean agh na makhki submit kol d*

(Hahaha! It's Sunday on 16th, it means that it is to be submitted before that?)

G: *Friends taso k sok zama id office na raghaste shai ? Zo ho Saudi Arabia k yam no 6 pa time rara Id melaw she 6 fee submit kom*

(Friends! Can anyone among you receive my ID from the office? I'm in Saudi Arabia, so when I get the ID on time so I'll submit the fee.)

The participant C reacted 👍 to the participant G.

C (replied to F): *Yes bs Thursday ao Friday di*

(Yes, you've only Thursday and Friday.)

Khu pa Friday ma razay uni ta 😊

(But don't come to the university on Friday 😊.)

F: ☐

The topic changed with the message of the participant G who did a request for receiving her ID from the university.

Abbreviations were used to shorten the long words or phrases to deliver the messages to one another conveniently and efficiently. It is very common in digital communication and can be used formally or informally. The evidences from the WhatsApp chat of graduates' group are given as under:

C: *Ao taso ado bia ranghly dpt ta.*

(And you people did not even come to the department.)

In this message, *dpt* is used as an abbreviation for *department*.

C: *Mng khu parun wo Dr Liaqat office ki wo. Bs msg kway nu dmra ba mlawego.*

(We were there yesterday in Dr. Liaqat's office. At least send a message so that we may meet.)

Here, *Dr.* is used as an abbreviation for *Doctor*, while *msg* is an informal abbreviation for *message*.

D: *BS students vale che 1000 d.*

(The BS students said that it is Rs. 1000 per head.)

In this context, *BS* refers to *Bachelor of Studies* (more accurately, *Bachelor's degree students*).

H: *CR awo GR taso ta request de che taso sir ta owayiii che zmng result declare ki , zka di waji zmng GSC awo SRB late keegy*

Plz

(CR and GR! It is a request to you that ask Sir to declare our result because of this our GSC and SRB is getting delayed. Please!)

Here *CR* is used as an abbreviation for *Class Representative*, *GR* is used for *Girls Representative*, *GSC* for *Graduate Studies Committee*, *SRB* for *Studies and Research Board*, and *plz* is used as an informal abbreviation for *please*.

The group chat under study demonstrated that the participants of the group used different non-standard orthography in their chat which include the following:

F: *N last date?*

(And what about the last date?)

Here *n* is used for *and* to represent informal tone.

C: *Same to u*

(Same to you.)

Here *u* is used for *you* to reveal a relaxed and casual tone.

C: *I knw dwe sa nki*

(I know they don't do anything.)

Here *knw* is used for *know* to depict informal tone.

Zaferanieh (2012), in "*Conversation Analysis of Online Chat*," examined various discourse features such as turn-taking, repair mechanisms, and adjacency pairs in online interaction. Similar interactional features were observed in the present study. In the WhatsApp group chat, turn-taking occurred naturally as multiple participants responded to the initial message in sequence. Furthermore, adjacency pairs, particularly question-answer structures, demonstrated the cooperative nature of interaction among participants.

These patterns suggest that the participants adhered to the norms and conventions of online communication.

The analysis of linguistic features revealed a wide range of creative and informal expressions, including abbreviations, acronyms, emojis, and local phrases. Such linguistic elements contributed to maintaining smooth and efficient communication within the group. Additionally, these features facilitated self-expression, emotional representation, and identity construction within the online community.

Sikandar (2025), in *“The Impact of Social Media on English Language Use among Young Adults: Linguistic Transformations, Challenges, and Implications for Formal Writing,”* explored the influence of social media on grammar, vocabulary, and syntax among young adults. The study highlighted the increasing use of abbreviations, emojis, and informal grammatical structures on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. Similarly, the present study identified the frequent use of abbreviations, acronyms, non-standard orthography, emojis, and informal expressions in the WhatsApp chats of graduate students. These linguistic features reflected the participants’ familiarity, solidarity, and informal relationship with one another within the group setting. Consequently, the dominant mode of communication in the selected WhatsApp group can be characterized as informal digital discourse.

In digital communication, the use of abbreviations, non-standard spellings, emojis, and multimodal elements has become increasingly common. Emojis, in particular, play an important role in expressing emotions, tone, humor, and attitudes that may otherwise be difficult to convey in text-based interaction. The use of such features enriches online communication and compensates for the absence of face-to-face cues in digital settings.

This study contributes to the growing field of digital communication research by providing insights into how graduate students interact, negotiate meaning, and maintain social relationships through WhatsApp communication. The findings highlight the importance of context in shaping online interaction, linguistic choices, and social norms within digital communities.

Despite providing valuable insights into WhatsApp group interaction among graduate students, the study has certain limitations. The sample size was limited to a single WhatsApp group, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research may benefit from examining larger and more diverse samples across different educational institutions and social contexts in order to gain a broader understanding of digital communication practices.

5. Conclusion

The present study is based on the Conversation Analysis (CA) of WhatsApp chats among a group of graduate students. The primary objective of this research was to

analyze and examine the interactions conducted by participants within a social media group, particularly the WhatsApp group titled “*Dumb Linguists* 🤡 🤡.” The study focused on understanding the conversational sequences and linguistic features used by the participants during online communication.

Due to time constraints and the extensive volume of group conversations, the research was limited to six months of WhatsApp chats, specifically from December to May. Through the application of Conversation Analysis, the researcher investigated various interactional patterns, including turn-taking, adjacency pairs, responses, and repair mechanisms, as well as linguistic features such as abbreviations, emojis, acronyms, and informal expressions commonly used in digital communication.

The findings of the study demonstrate that WhatsApp group interaction among graduate students is characterized by cooperative communication, rapid conversational exchange, and a blend of formal and informal language practices. The analysis also highlights the significance of digital linguistic features in maintaining interaction, expressing emotions, and constructing social relationships within the online community.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing field of digital discourse and social media communication by providing insights into the conversational organization and linguistic behavior of graduate students in online settings. It further emphasizes the importance of Conversation Analysis as an effective methodological framework for examining naturally occurring interaction in digital communication platforms.

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