
Grammatical consequences of the Digital on the Learning of English at Senegalese High School: The Case of WhatsApp

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ABSTRACT: *The present work refers to the analysis of grammatical consequences of digital technology on the learning of English language in the Senegalese high schools. In other words, this article deals with the grammatical consequences of WhatsApp in the learning of English in a context dominated by the implementation, by the State of Senegal, of the "Digital Senegal" strategy and the concretization of certain programs in the building of an "inclusive digital society", in order to promote a learning society. WhatsApp is a cross-platform instant messaging application that allows users to exchange text, image, video, and audio messages for free through phones. Thus, the work aims to analyze the grammatical consequences of this cross-platform application in the study of English as a foreign language. However, to collect data in order to have a corpus to treat and analyze, we have done some research, organized interviews with teachers and pupils at high school. We have also exchanged messages through WhatsApp with other pupils. This approach has helped us to point out that this method of communication has affected the learning of English at high school.*

KEY WORDS: consequences, digital, English, language, learning

RESUME : *Le présent travail est afférent à l'analyse des conséquences grammaticales du numérique dans l'apprentissage de la langue anglaise dans les lycées sénégalais. En d'autres termes, cet article traite des conséquences grammaticales de WhatsApp dans l'apprentissage de l'anglais dans un contexte dominé par la mise en œuvre, par l'État du Sénégal, de la stratégie « Sénégal numérique » et la concrétisation de certains programmes dans la construction d'une « société numérique inclusive », afin de promouvoir une société apprenante. WhatsApp est une application de messagerie instantanée multiplateforme qui permet aux utilisateurs d'échanger gratuitement des messages textes, images, vidéo et audio via des téléphones. Ainsi, le travail vise à analyser les conséquences grammaticales de cette application multiplateforme sur l'apprentissage de l'anglais comme langue étrangère. Cependant, pour collecter des données afin d'avoir un corpus à traiter et à analyser, nous avons fait des recherches, organisé des entretiens avec des enseignants et élèves au lycée. Nous avons également échangé des messages via WhatsApp avec certains élèves. Cette approche nous a permis de constater que ce mode de communication a affecté l'apprentissage de l'anglais au lycée.*

MOTS-CLES : anglais, apprentissage, conséquences, langue, numérique

INTRODUCTION

Context and Justification

The present work refers to the analysis of grammatical consequences of digital technology in the learning of English language in the Senegalese high schools. In other words, this article talks about the grammatical consequences of WhatsApp in the learning of English in a context dominated by the implementation, by the State of Senegal, of the "Digital Senegal" strategy and the concretization of certain programs in the building of an "inclusive digital society", in order to promote a learning society. These programs have enabled several Senegalese students, pupils, workers, etc. to have access to the internet and to the telephone operator networks. This facilitates the communication within the country. Taking advantage of this accessibility of the internet and networks, some Senegalese and more particularly teachers, students, pupils, etc. use platforms, some of which WhatsApp to communicate.

WhatsApp is a cross-platform instant messaging application that allows users to exchange text, image, video, and audio messages for free through phones. Thus, the work aims to analyze the grammatical consequences of this cross-platform application in the study of English as a foreign language. However, to collect data in order to have a corpus to treat and analyze, we have done some research, organized interviews with teachers and pupils at high school. We have also exchanged messages through WhatsApp with other pupils. This approach has helped us to point out that this method of communication has affected the learning of English grammar at high school.

Statement of the study

The analysis of the consequences of the digital in language learning in Senegalese high schools has created a debate around the linguistic field. Some people state that there are many advantages and others say that the digital has caused a lot of problems in the learning of languages. In these problems, one can note grammatical (morph-syntactic), discursive, phonological and lexical errors and mistakes. In some cases, it was problematic to make a clear distinction between grammatical and lexical error; there were overlaps between lexicon, syntax and semantics. However, we have focused our analysis on the following area: grammatical consequences of the digital in the learning of English language in Senegalese high schools.

By examining the written interactions of teachers and students in their WhatsApp groups, we observe that their way of communicating is, most of the time, a transfer of structures from French to English or from local languages to English. It often happens that the transfer is positive without any problem of understanding. But sometimes this transfer is negative resulting in a hybrid expression, understandable for some other pupils and teachers but bizarre for English native speakers.

Theoretical Framework

The present analysis, devoted to the study of grammatical consequences of digital technology on the learning of English language in the Senegalese high schools, is based on the theory of

the pragmatics. Pragmatics is defined as a branch of linguistics which is concerned with elements of language whose meaning can only be understood by knowing the context of their uses. It is thus interested on the one hand, in the phenomena of contextual dependencies which have their references determined by parameters linked to the context of utterance.

In addition, it studies the use of language in communication and in knowledge. Largely dependent on cognitivism, extended pragmatics considers inferential mechanisms in knowledge, the construction of concepts, the non-literal use of language, intentionality in argumentation, etc. It also deals with the influence and consequences of language on context (how to change the world by saying something / how to act on the world by saying something) and the influence and consequences of language on context (to what extent what is said depends on the circumstances in which it is said). Thus, the study of the grammatical consequences of WhatsApp in the learning of English in Senegalese high schools constitutes the main hypothesis. In other words, the advantages and drawbacks of this method of communication are in the heart of the current analysis.

Objectives

The study aims to examine the grammatical consequences of the digital, more precisely of WhatsApp, in the learning of English in Senegalese high schools. In addition, it highlights the function of this method of communication in the Senegalese learning system. So, being based on a corpus collected from conversations in WhatsApp groups, the study targets to show the advantages and impediments of this system of communication on the education in Senegal. In other words, it is devoted to the way WhatsApp affects and/or facilitates the learning of this foreign language at Senegalese high schools.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Our research methodology is based on an observational survey which makes it possible to collect a detailed inventory of some student conversations through WhatsApp. It is inspired by direct data collected in real situations. This research is based on the analysis of a corpus of written interactions of students and teachers within their WhatsApp groups. When collecting and analyzing the data, we ensured that personal information was not disclosed. It is for this reason that the names of the participants are not mentioned in the examples provided in this study.

The data collection for the study comprised all the interactions that happened within the groups (WhatsApp groups) including the individual tasks done, such as reading books, searching in the internet as well as some questionnaires and interviews. Much research has also been carried out in some libraries, books, sources and in the internet, to collect information in order to write the article and answer all the questions related to this method of communication in the learning of English language. We have also searched on the internet for definitions and explanations of some concepts in English.

Moreover, we have done research in libraries such as the university library, the library of the English Department, the library of CLAD (Centre de Linguistique Appliquée de Dakar) and so and so forth. We have also gone to WARC (West African Research Center), IFAN (Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire) and to other centers. Besides, several interviews with some English teachers and students at high schools have been organized. The research has allowed us to have a lot of information and build our corpus. After the corpus building, we have moved on to the presentation and analysis of the data and we have ended up in some results.

Data Presentation

The collection of data has helped us to have a clear presentation, analysis and interpretation of our corpus data. The article provides new and authentic data drawn from a variety of documents, interviews, etc. that enable us to implement a new analytical approach of some operators of modality, which are different from modal auxiliaries. So, the data of the paper are composed of first-hand and second-hand data. The former are made up of some authentic documents, speeches and interviews from where some information about some operators is taken and analyzed in order to bring some contribution to the field of the current study. The second-hand data consist of some insights analyses and research findings. These sets of collected and processed data provide an overview of the grammatical consequences of WhatsApp in the learning of English in Senegalese high schools. The data are made up of sentences, paragraphs, speeches, etc. taken from interviews and conversations in WhatsApp groups, adapted, elaborated and analyzed in the current paper. The data analysis is based on various approaches, techniques and or theories of scholars or schools such as the pragmatics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In assessing some teachers and learners’ perceptions on the use of WhatsApp in Senegalese high schools, the findings show that WhatsApp is practical, popular, and preferable and is an appropriate communication tool for tele collaborative study. Regarding some interviewers (teachers and pupils) perception of WhatsApp in foreign language learning, a lot of grammatical consequences can be noticed, and the current literature only provides generalized information concerning these consequences.

However, some of them think that WhatsApp groups are not effective because interactions become sometimes chaotic and this can lead to an awkward and reserved atmosphere due to a lack of understanding on certain points and reluctance to see things from different perspectives. In addition, WhatsApp affect the learning and mastering of grammar at high schools. That being so, in the current study, we are going to deal with the advantages of this method of communication and afterwards with its drawbacks in the learning of English (foreign language) at Senegalese high schools.

Advantages of WhatsApp in the learning of grammar

WhatsApp is a cross-platform instant messaging application that allows users to exchange text, image, video, and audio messages for free through phones. According to some interviewed persons (teachers and learners), this platform helps learners by facilitating communication with

other learners and with the instructor by enhancing collaborative learning and by sharing educational information, even being distant in space and/or in time.

WhatsApp provides immediate messaging support, brings new learning opportunities and facilitates grammar exchanges between learners and teachers. It also provides flexible learning, which helps some learners to mind the English grammar rules and support multimedia learning. Furthermore, this cross-platform provides learners with essential learning methods that facilitate cooperative learning, offer exciting alternatives for developing grammar skills through exercises, conversations, experimentation and help them in learning the operating grammar rules of English and formal and informal languages.

WhatsApp, according to some teachers at high school, promotes pupils autonomy and increases their motivations, making the learning experience more centered on them (pupils). Some schools headmasters even encourage teachers to create WhatsApp groups with learners and use online resources to enhance learning and provide online portals that enable pupils to submit their homework and collaborate with classmates. Furthermore, born in the age of technology, several pupils who are shy are particularly proficient in engaging with online or distant teachers and/or classmates through quick WhatsApp exchanges to develop a sense of belonging and combat the fear of missing out on popular activities mainly when it is about dialogues, conversations, interactions during English classes.

However, for some interviewers, the use of WhatsApp in their learning might interfere with their private lives and affect negatively the use of grammar rules. Focusing on our data, we specifically analyze teachers, learners and other interviews s' perceptions regarding the use of WhatsApp in or out of groups, as well as possible potential learning sequences in the areas of language (mainly the grammar of the language), culture, and inter-culturality.

Drawbacks of WhatsApp in the learning of grammar

The influence of WhatsApp on the grammar of modern English language is clearly seen and touched in various ways and means. Through the use of this cross platform some learners add or use lots of "jargon vocabulary". They provide new meaning to existing words and terms. Moreover, they produce some words on unifying the utterance of some of them all over the locality as they meet each other via this platform although they are from remote places.

Ali (2012) and Kern (2006) consider that the new changes of the English varieties caused by the effect of the internet are a threat to the standard varieties of English. These arguments are attributed to the fact that the English used in social media and mainly in WhatsApp, nowadays, often does not fit the Standard English.

Although a recent literature review concludes that technology promotes students creativity and improves language learning skills (Ahmadi, 2018: 117), WhatsApp facilitates short and frequent communications through restricted tweets and posts. It is also plausible that the incessant flow of digital information has rendered WhatsApp users to be attention deficient. WhatsApp then capitalizes on the short attention spans and provides social media conversations that evoke technology addiction. Some pupils adeptly multi-tasks digital (WhatsApp) activities

such as checking other social media, browsing websites, reading emails, sending instant messaging, listening to music, and viewing ads, all the time instead of managing to do their school work.

As some teachers state it, this constant incoming information is not conducive to learning and staying focused on the school task. According to them, a few learners admit to multi-tasking their school work with other online activities and report that online activities distract them from concentrating on academic tasks, which sometimes result in incomplete homework and missing interesting conversations with teachers and classmates. The excessive use of technology in general and of WhatsApp in particular has wrought significant changes in the daily use of the English language grammar; most of these changes are neither good nor bad and are merely different. So, people may ask about the ways technology and mainly the cross platform, under study, has changed the way they speak and write, both online and offline.

Therefore, the lure to engage in online activities leaves learners struggling and hinders their academic success. Furthermore, a few learners report feeling less inspired to use Standard English grammar which could explain their low commitment to perfect the English grammar. Let us take into account the following examples:

WhatsApp texts

- *Xaw r u?*
- *S, wi won tu liv.*

Standard English

- How are you?
- Sir, we want to leave.

In these examples taken from a conversation in a WhatsApp group, we have noticed a non-respect of the grammar rules. In other words, these sentences are ungrammatical. The enunciator does not take into account the rules that govern the grammar of the English language. In the first sentence, the use of the word "*xaw*" to designate the interrogative adverb (**how**) may mislead some readers. Similarly, in this sentence, the enunciator uses the letter "*r*" to use the verb "*to be*" or the auxiliary "*be*" conjugated in the simple present in the second person singular or plural (are).

As for the second example, it is marked by the structure and formation of the sentence. The use of the letter "*S*" followed by a comma shows an apposition. The enunciator uses this letter to designate the noun "*Sir*" which refers to the co-enunciator or the recipient of the message. They address their master or teacher to express their wish or volition to leave. Moreover, the use of "*wi*" to mean "*we*", first person plural, can be explained by a phonological influence of local languages. The enunciator writes the word as they can hear it.

As for the word "*won*" which refers to the verb "*want*", its use in this sentence is a mistake and may mislead readers, because it is a word (verb) that exists in English and whose meaning is completely different from that of the verb in question. In other words, "*won*" is the past tense or the past participle of the verb "*win*". This remark is also valid for the rest of the sentence. The enunciator makes the sentence grammatically incorrect even if it can semantically be understood.

WhatsApp text	Standard English
➤ <i>I hv dn my xmwk</i>	<i>I have done my homework</i>
➤ <i>Wat obwt u?</i>	<i>What about you?</i>

The examples show the ungrammaticality of WhatsApp texts. These sentences, taken from a conversation through this cross platform, testify a difference between Standard English and WhatsApp English texts. The WhatsApp language has some features connected to speech and writing in the grammatical, morphological phonetic and phonological levels. In addition, it is seen a fully formed language style, with its own vocabulary, abbreviations, spelling and punctuation, grammar, slang and all other features that define a real language style.

The first sentences of the examples above shows the non- respect of the grammar rules and writing. The use of “*hv*” to refer to “*have*”, of “*dn*” for “*done*” and of “*xmwk*” for “*homework*” is irrelevant in Standard English grammar, for it has non- sense. The enunciator resorts to them to send, maybe, quick messages to other members of the group or to their teacher. Thus, what is more noticed here is the lack of vowels. They (enunciator) have written a whole sentence without using vowels; which can affect the learning of the English language grammar and makes the sentence understood by native speakers or other learners who are not used to this kind of English text writing.

As for the second sentence of the example, it is marked by the lack of verb, but the real problem is in the way the words are written. The use of “*wat*” to designate the English interrogative adverb “*what*” can lead other learners to errors, for both terms exist in English but do not mean the same thing. The first one (*wat*) refers to a Buddhist monastery or temple, while the second one (*what*) is an interrogative adverb used when the enunciator misses an element that they want to get from the co-enunciator.

Thus, as Crystal (2001) states, the internet users have the ability to communicate faster and send short text messages to each other. All the abbreviations, acronyms included in, generally, internet and, specifically, WhatsApp language make up most of its vocabulary along with lists of coined words and phrases. In particular words, the new vocabulary manipulated in the electronic communication provide a fascinating insight into how quickly new words can be appeared and then abandoned. The examples below do illustrate it.

WhatsApp text	Standard English
➤ <i>Du yo exos bfo going.</i>	<i>Do your exercise before going.</i>
➤ <i>Z teacher wil ask kwechenz</i>	<i>The teacher will ask questions</i>

The examples show the appearance of new words and through these words the enunciator wants to convey a message. But the meaning of this message is not easy to understand by English native speakers and maybe by teachers and/or other pupils. For the first sentence, the referral to “*Du*” to mean “*Do*” can be explained by the influence of local languages in the learning of foreign languages. In local languages all the letters are pronounced according to their writing

in a word. In other words, there is no (or rarely) gliding vowel in the pronunciation of words. “**D**” is pronounced /**d**/ and “**u**” is pronounced /**u**/, hence the use of “**Du**” to designate the verb or auxiliary “**Do**”. The second sentence also shows the non-respect of the English grammar rules and the interference of local languages. So, faced with problems of comprehension or expression, some learners resort to local languages or French in the writing of English words; which affects the grammar, the morphology and the phonology of this foreign language.

CONCLUSION

The learning of grammar and more specifically of English grammar is often impacted by certain communication methods or cross-platforms instant messaging application that allow users to exchange text, image, video, and audio messages through phones such as WhatsApp. The latter has been used by several teachers and learners at high school, through groups, conversations, discussions, text exchanges, etc. Thus, the referral to this cross-platform has grammatical consequences in the learning of English in such level. WhatsApp is a suitable platform for tele-collaboration and for tele-learning as it is one of the communication tools prioritized when multiple platforms are proposed.

The study has shown that there are potential learning sequences on different levels: grammatical, cultural, and intercultural. But as it is stated above, the main focus of the study is on the grammatical consequences of this cross- platform. So, some teachers and learners perceive WhatsApp as a practical, popular, and preferable application, which can help in the learning of English or other foreign languages. It provides immediate messaging support, brings new learning opportunities and facilitates grammar exchanges between learners and between teachers and learners and gives them learning methods that facilitate cooperative and tele-learning. It also helps users to have flexible learning, which helps some learners to mind the English grammar rules and support multimedia learning.

However, the results have proved that WhatsApp has negative grammatical consequences in the learning of English in so as some learners have the notion that European and local languages are almost identical and it suffices to substitute one linguistic system for another in order to build their language repertoire in any of them. WhatsApp is not conducive to learning and staying focused on the school task. According to certain interviewed actors, a few learners admit to multi-tasking their school work with other online activities and report that online activities distract them from concentrating on academic tasks, which sometimes result in incomplete homework and missing interesting conversations with teachers and classmates. In addition, through this platform, several learners tend to resort to coined words and/or abbreviations. We have also noticed an interference or influence of local languages in the learning of English through WhatsApp.

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