

# Enacting Personal Identity Through Language: An Exploration of Some Profile Statuses of WhatsApp Messenger

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## **Abstract**

*Technology in the twenty-first century has transformed the world in multiple exciting ways facilitating the rapid flow of information, capital and services across the globe. The constant evolution of new media has spurred the growth of multimedia affordances enabling people to assemble texts that integrate language with visual, aural, gestural and spatial modes. This digital revolution has transformed language by triggering an explosion of new vocabularies, genres and styles by reshaping literacy practices (Darvin, 2016). Digitization provides the technological basis for globalization and media convergence is a bi-product of globalization. In this study, I set out to explore the linguistic elements employed on the WhatsApp statuses of individuals who use the application to communicate messages to their readers and also to establish the connection between these linguistic elements and how they portray the identity of the users. Using Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse strategies - stance and engagement markers as the analytical framework- the study comes out with conclusions that users of WhatsApp application employ three main metadiscourse elements: self-mention, realized through first-person singular and possessive pronouns (I, my) (stance), reader pronoun (you, your, we, our) (engagement) and directive as linguistic strategies to negotiate their identity on the status . They achieve this by directly focusing the message unto themselves and indicating special relationship with others to reveal to readers their (users') guiding principles and philosophies in life. Directives like imperatives, modal obligation and predicative adjectives were used to pull readers into the discourse as participants and instructing them to perform an action which ultimately leads them to appreciate and share in the user's ideas, worldview, experiences and orientation.*

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**Key words:** Digitization, Globalization, Identity, Language

### **Introduction**

Language is one of the constituent elements of personal subjunctive consciousness as well as of the awareness of collective identity (Luckmann and Knobluch, 1993). Speakers can construe their own identity and authority and choose to align and disalign themselves with potential conversation partners through their choice of words and particular grammatical constructions (Armstrong and Ferguson, 2010). Murray (2011) argues that identity provides a narrative for the self. It is not a final state of being but rather a fluid process with shifting borders and cognitive boundaries that are constantly shaped by the individual and by society. According to Thorne, Sauro and Smith (2015), research focus on language and identity has become a central theme within current applied linguistics research in part because of the ways in which it contextualizes and more holistically frames otherwise compartmentalized aspects of language use and development.

### **Operationalizing the Concept of Identity**

Identity construction and negotiation occurs every time language learners speak. In doing so, they are not only exchanging information with their interlocutors but also constantly organizing and re-organizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world (Ochs, 1993). In this study, the issue of identity construction through language is seen from the perspective of how individuals construct their identity in online communications. Personal identity is essentially the summary statement of all our individual traits, characteristics and disposition. In seeking to define their identity, people attempt to assert their individuality but also to join with others in working to sustain their sense of status or self-esteem. This is because the relevance of identity construction in society relates to the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation, and the desire for security and safety (Norton, 1997).

### **Globalization, Convergence and Digital Utilization of Social Media**

Hamelink (1995) identifies four trends in world communication; digitization, consolidation, deregulation and globalization. These integrated technologies and institutions promote the trend towards deregulated

environment and reinforce the trend towards globalization. Hamelink argues that digitization provides the technological basis for globalization thus reinforcing a social process in which the production and distribution of information evolves into the most important economic activity in a society. According to Hamelink, although it is still feasible to distinguish computer manufacturers, telephone companies, publishing houses, broadcasters and film producers as separate industrial actors, they are rapidly converging into one industrial activity. Thus technical convergence leads to industrial convergence. Media convergence is also a bi-product of globalization. As Jenkins (2006: 3) puts it, 'it is the flow of media content across multiple media platform, the cooperation between multiple media industries and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experience they want'.

Over the course of the past decade, digital television and the internet have brought radical changes for media businesses, journalists, and citizens at large. Whilst platforms distributing journalistic content have proliferated, technological advances have driven media companies to revamp their operations in the sometimes desperate attempt to remain lucrative and relevant, while journalists operate in an ever faster-paced industry and citizens have access to a cornucopia of sources of news and information (Dragomir & Thompson, 2014).

### **Information Technology and Language Use**

Technology in the twenty-first century has transformed the world in multiple exciting ways facilitating the rapid flow of information, capital and services across the globe and dramatically revolutionized the way we work, communicate and interact with one another. As technology continues to permeate all aspects of human life and transform the social order, it has impacted on language and identity in significant ways (Darvin, 2016). The constant evolution of new media has spurred the growth of multimedia affordances enabling people to assemble texts that integrate language with visual, aural, gestural and spatial modes. Darvin (2016) further argues that the digital revolution has transformed language by triggering an explosion of new vocabularies, genres and styles by reshaping literacy practices. As the digital provides multiple spaces where language is used in different

ways, learners are able to move across online and offline realities with greater fluidity and perform multiple identities.

Stald (2008) identifies the mobile phone as the glue that holds together various nodes in these social networks. He argues that the need to learn how to manage and develop personal identity and the importance of social networks in this process are strongly facilitated by mobiles. According to him, the constant negotiation of values and representation and the need to identify with others result in the fluidity of identity and encompass the constant negotiation of norms and values and the processes of reflection that are characteristic of contemporary social life.

Digital media networks in recent years have become embedded in our everyday lives in recent years and are part of broad-based changes to how we engage in knowledge-embedded production, communication and creative expression (Buckingham (2008). Thorne, Sauro and Smith (2015) argue that digital communication technologies both complexify and help to reveal the dynamics of human communicative activity and capacity for identity performance. They mention further that the role of computer technology and the internet in our lives provides opportunities for the creation of alternative identities and modes of self-presentation. Self-presentation online takes place primarily through social media profiles. Many of such social media sites allow users to create a profile and visually display connections to their social networks (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

### **Self -Presentation on Social Media**

Boyd and Elliason (2007) explain that social media are web-based services that allow users to connect and interact with friends, acquaintances and strangers. Examples include sites such as Facebook, twitter, Youtube, Flickr, blogs and other web-based communication forums. The two authors mention further that much of the content of social media (photographs, links and textual information) are posted to present an online self. These online self-presentations primarily take place through social media profiles as many social media sites allow users to create a profile and visually display connections to their social networks. Many sites allow users to upload and share personal information, pictures, links, music and other multimedia with their friends or followers' networks. Wang et al. (2016)

mention that social networking sites (SNSs) offer users platform to build and maintain social connections since self-disclosure helps maintain friendships and increase relationship closeness. These (SNSs) according to Yang and Brown (2016) provide one means of asserting one's self and obtaining meaningful feedback from significant others in the environment. Durante (2011) observes that young people are enabled as digital natives and social network users to co-construct the 'context of communication in which their identities will be interpreted and understood'. Similarly, Shafie, Nagan and Osman (2012) intimate that textual online identity and the visual impressions are reconstructed based on values associated with peer perception, social connections, popularity and the self domains through carefully chosen user names as well as language and profile pictures. However, in citing specific examples, Tan and Dras (2015) maintain that Facebook serves as a tool that assists people to linguistically express themselves to multiple audiences and that the language people use online provides important cues to their thought, emotional states and intentions, Paliszkievicz and Madra-Sawica (2016) also emphasize that the development of social media like LinkedIn has facilitated identity construction through the abilities to shape the information, photos and videos posted on an individual's profile in attempts to control how others will perceive them in real and internet world.

### **WhatsApp Instant Messaging**

WhatsApp Instant Messaging application is one of the numerous social media platforms that enable people to communicate in a multimodal way via their smart phones. It allows its users to provide personal information and create their own digital profile that also enables users to include a picture, a nickname and a status (a 139- character blank) where users are encouraged to describe their online persona. The blending of verbal realization with visual and even acoustic ones make WhatsApp a very rich multimodal medium of communication and that is why it is common to find that elements from different modes are naturally intertwined in most of the message exchange by its users (Sanchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya, 2015). According to the two authors, one of the most salient multimodal devices WhatsApp is that of emojis, a set of emoticons (or smileys) that can incorporate in the chunks of digital discourse produced by users.

Whilst admitting that technology has created new styles of communication and interaction as well as providing new ways of forming identity and personhood, thereby offering communication with different aspects of the self, some challenges associated with social media and language use cannot be glossed over. As Thurairaj et al. (2015) point out, the shortcut language used and created on instant messaging on the offset seems to be drastically deteriorating students' vocabulary especially in situations where English Language users are not able to differentiate formal language from informal. Also, Eisenstein (2013) observes that as social media become an increasingly important application domain for natural language processing, we encounter language that is substantially different from many benchmark corpora.

The present study attempts to investigate how individuals use language to negotiate their identity on their profile status on WhatsApp messenger. The primary objective of the study is to explore the linguistic resources employed by users of WhatsApp in enacting their identity on their status and how such identities reveal the individual's orientation in society. A significant number of research studies have been conducted into WhatsApp application as a social media tool in interpersonal and group communication. Even though studies such as Sanchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya (2015), Herring and Kapidzic (2015), Thorne and Sauro (2015) as well as Buckingham (2008) attempt to explore some linguistic implications of the status profile of some users of WhatsApp messenger, none attempts to establish the connection between the user's choice of language and how it reveals their identity which is, in fact, the overarching objective of the current study. The present study primarily seeks to establish the connection between the language produced on the status profile of WhatsApp Instant application users and how these messages reflect their identity.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

The present study is grounded on two main theories; identity and impression management theories. A good number of scholarly works have explored on the subject of identity across disciplines especially in the fields of psychology, sociological, social psychology, philosophy, language etc. In their review of the theoretical processes that form the central mechanism

in the major treatments of identity, Owens, Robinson and Lovin (2010) draw a distinction between identity theories that focus on internalization of social positions within a self-structure and those that focus on how consensual, cultural identity meanings are implemented within situations that evoke them. Whilst the former (Stryker, 1980; Burke and Reitzes, 1991) emphasize how stable, internalized aspects of social identities are formed and affect behavior. The other theories, notably Tajfel (1979), emphasize how social contexts elicit certain identities and shape their meanings. These two broad stands of identity theories focus on how consensual cultural meanings associated with identities are imported by actors into local interactions and how situational environments shape the localized meanings of the situationally relevant identity. Yet other identity theories such as Thoites' (1983) identity accumulation theory posits that multiple role identities can be psychological resources that help reduce emotional distress and foster global self-esteem in complex selves. Burke and Reitzes (1991) identity control theory, however, emphasizes the importance of understanding identity not just as a state or trait but as a continuous process of affirmation and reaffirmation in social situations. Burke and Stets (2009) discuss a number of ideas from earlier writers that have found their way into identity theory as central pillars. First is the importance of symbols and meaning for shaping our perceptions of the world and objects and categories within it. Second is the ability of the individual to take himself/herself as an object of meaning both from his/her own perspective as well as from the perspectives of others. McCall and Simmons' (1978) concept of role identity brings into focus one's imaginative view of himself as he likes to think of himself of being and acting as an occupant of a particular social position, whilst Howard (2000) highlights the social bases of identity particularly ones based on ethnicity, race, sexuality, gender, class, age and (dis) ability as well as identities based on space, both geographical and virtual.

Impression management theory, on the other hand, is the behavioral strategies that people use to create desired social images and identities (Tetlock and Manstead, 1985). It is a goal-directed conscious or unconscious self-presentation technique and process that focuses on improving a person's image in the eyes of others by presenting themselves in a favorable way through the regulation and control of information in

social interaction (Tashmin, 2016; Rosenberg and Egbert, 2011). Wang (2016) states that the concept of impression management, first introduced by Goffman (1959), has its origin in social psychology and was originally focused on the behavior of individuals. Goffman believed that individuals not only try to convince others to see them as just, respectable and moral individuals but also people want to maintain established positive impressions. Tetlock and Manstead (1985) argue that people are highly sensitive to the social significance of their conduct and are motivated to create desired identities in interpersonal encounters. As a result, scholars and researchers ought to explore the motivational basis of impression management, find out whom the people seek to impress and what behavioral tactics people use to achieve desired identities. Paliszkiwicz and Madra-Sawicka (2016) are more specific and admit that the formation and management of online impressions have gained importance and become the subject of numerous studies. They maintain that in online impression management, people attempt to influence the perceptions of their image by controlling and managing information presented in social media. According to the two authors, since the importance of being recognized in a positive light has become very important in social circles, the development of social media like LinkedIn has facilitated identity construction through the abilities to shape the information, photos and videos posted on an individual's profile in attempts to control how others will perceive them in real and internet world. These two theories, identity and impression management, serve as the theoretical underpinning on which the present study is grounded. The current study thus builds on these two theories by indicating how individuals negotiate identity online via self-presentation on WhatsApp messenger platforms.

### **Related Empirical Studies**

A number of studies related to the current study have been conducted by some scholars. Sanchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya (2015) explored the most common discursive realizations in a set of WhatsApp statuses. Findings from the research showed that WhatsApp users opt for discourse choices that vary if their external discourse morphology is considered. The study identified a five-label taxonomy namely; automatically generated status, self-generated status, purely verbal status, hybrid status and purely iconic status. Kadir et al. (2012) investigated the language used by Malaysians

and observed that the language phenomenon in online communication, particularly Facebook, continues to cause vital linguistic interest. Their study, for example, showed the existence of homophones, abbreviations and emoticons for effective communication. Geertsema et al. (2011) assessed educators' perspectives on short messaging services (SMS) language and written language skills and concluded that majority of educators viewed SMS language as having a negative influence on the written language of grade 8 and 9 students in South Africa. The influence was perceived as occurring in the learners' spelling, punctuation and sentence length. Similarly, Brick (2012) assessed the potential for social networking sites (SNSs) to play a role in language learning in the UK higher education. He observed that these sites are characterized by certain features including learning materials, video and text chat facilities etc. Also, Tlelan AL-Saleem (2011) explored how online written language, specifically on Facebook, affects the identities and language of young people in Jordan. The study concluded that English is the dominant language used online whilst Romanized Jordanian Arabic was used in informal communication by undergraduate students in Jordan. Stald (2013) investigated how young people explore and exploit mobile digital platforms for creative innovative purposes especially in relation to their identity. The study concluded that identity is fluid and that adolescents are constantly negotiating who they are, how they are that identity and with whom they are that identity. Chen (2013) examined the literacy practices of two multilingual writers in social networking communities. The findings showed that the multilingual writers explored and reappropriated symbolic resources afforded by the social networking sites as they aligned themselves with particular collective and personal identities at local and global levels. Herring and Kapidzic (2015) also studied how teenage boys and girls present themselves through online social media such as Facebook, twitter, blogs and chat forums in the United States. Their research findings showed that boys' linguistic choices on these social media platforms reflect assertiveness in both style and tone while girls seem to aim to please boys and facilitate social interaction. However, both genders' choices of pictures for self-presentation can be seen to reflect sexualized media portrayal.

## Methodology

The objective of the study sought to: (i) explore the linguistic elements employed on the status of individuals who use WhatsApp status application in communicating messages to their readers (ii) to establish the connection between these linguistic elements and how they portray the identity of the users. For these objectives to be accomplished, the following questions were drawn: (i) which linguistic elements are produced on the WhatsApp status of users in communicating their messages to their readers? (ii) how do such elements reveal the user's experiences, worldview of life and general identity? The present study is largely qualitative in nature since the principal method is textual analysis of various statuses on WhatsApp messenger platforms. Textual analysis closely examines and deconstructs the content and meaning of texts (Givens, 2008). Even though a few tables are generated to facilitate the analysis of the text, they do not render the research quantitative in outlook. The analytical framework involved Hyland's (2005) concept of stance and engagement. According to him, writers' texts embody interaction between writers and readers where interaction involves 'positioning' or adopting a point of view in relation to both the issues discussed in the text and to others who hold point of view on those issues. Interpretation therefore needs to be presented in ways that readers are likely to find persuasive and so readers must draw on these to express their positions, represent themselves and engage their audience. These interactions, according to Hyland (2005), are managed by writers through stance and engagement. Hyland (2005) states that stance expresses a textual 'voice' or community recognized personality. It includes features which refer to the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgment opinions and commitments. Linguistic elements used to foreground stance include: hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mentions. Engagement, on the other hand, is an alignment dimension where writers acknowledge and connect to others recognizing the presence of their readers, pulling them along with their argument, focusing their attention, acknowledging their weaknesses, including them, as discourse participants and guiding them to interpretation. Just like stance, engagement devices contribute to the interpersonal dimension of discourse. Elements of engagement employed by writers include: reader pronouns, directive questions, shared knowledge and personal asides.

The study focused on analysing WhatsApp statuses from three sets of android-capable mobile phone with each containing contacts that show both the display picture (DP) and status of individuals who are in contact with the phone users. Altogether, the three mobile phones produced a total number of six hundred and fifty (650) contacts using WhatsApp application status. The sample population of the study, however, involved all statuses that have remained unchanged for at least two weeks. The rationale behind this is that WhatsApp application users often change their statuses several times even within a day depending upon some events or activities that may affect the mood or psyche of the individual. A status that remains at least for two weeks or more may point to the individuals' special likeness for the message or content of those statuses and for that matter pointing to such individuals' worldview or special attachment to issues of life which ultimately reveals aspects of their personal identity. Based on this, a sample population of 300 WhatsApp application statuses was selected for analysis. Metadiscourse elements in Hyland's (2005) stance and engagement constituted the framework within which the data were analysed. These helped in identifying the linguistic elements that enable WhatsApp application users to communicate their messages meaningfully, thereby revealing their identity. Discussions of results and findings followed the analysis of the data after which conclusions and recommendations for future directions of similar studies related to the current research were provided and suggested respectively.

### **Analysis and Findings**

As mentioned earlier, 300 status messages from three sets of mobile phones were analysed based mainly on linguistic elements in Hyland's (2005) stance and engagement. I must emphasize here that though Hyland's concept of stance and engagement was originally meant for formal academic writing, I found it necessary to apply it to an informal situation such as the messages on the status of WhatsApp application users in order to establish the communicative purpose of these messages.

The study identified that the status profile of WhatsApp users had peculiar features which are grouped into two main categories: automatically generated status (AGS) and self-generated status (SGS). The former comes with default messages such as (Hey there! I am using WhatsApp, battery

about to die, available etc.) The self-generated statuses come in three distinct forms: written discourse only, use of emojis (smileys) only and a hybrid of the two forms (written and emojis). The table below presents a clear picture of the nature of the status profile of WhatsApp application users:

**Table 1: Nature of whatsApp status of users**

Discourse Status	Number	Total	Percentage
Default (AGS)	60	300	20%
Written Only (SGS)	210	300	70%
Emoticons only (SGS)	0	300	0%
Written and Emoticon (SGS)	30	300	10%

From the table, it is evident that the total number of self-generated (SG) discourse statuses amounted to 240 out of the total 300 representing 80%. Whilst the written discourse status alone had the highest entry of 210 out of the total 300 representing 70%, automatically generated statuses had 60 entries representing 20%. However, it should be noted that the analysis of the status profiles takes into consideration written only as well as the hybrid of written and emoticon discourse which altogether totaled 240 representing 80%.

The analysis of the discourse statuses was, however, based on Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse elements contained in the concept of stance: hedges, boosters attitude markers, self-mention markers, as well as linguistic resources in engagement markers such as reader pronouns, directives, questions, shared knowledge and personal aside. Tables 2 and 3 below show a clear picture of the metadiscourse elements and their frequency of occurrence in the status profile of WhatsApp application users.

**Table 2: Stance**

Stance	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Hedges	0	240	0%
Boosters	24	240	10%
Attitude Markers	36	240	15%
Self-mention	180	240	75%

**Table 3: Engagement Markers**

Engagement Markers	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Reader Pronoun	120	240	50%
Directives	84	240	35%
Questions	18	240	7.5%
Shared Knowledge	12	240	5%
Personal Aside	6	240	2.5%

It is evident from the analysis of data in table 1 that Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse element self-mention is the single most used linguistic element by individuals to enact their identity on the status profile of WhatsApp application with a frequency rate of 180 out of the total 240, representing 75%. Self-mention markers refer to the explicit signals of an author's presence in a text in which the writers increase the intimacy with their readers and communicate with them clearly through the use of personal and possessive pronouns (I, we, me, our, etc.). The current study shows that there are two main types of self-mention used by individuals on their WhatsApp status profile to enact their identity. The first involves the user using personal pronouns to directly and deliberately focus the message on themselves in order to reveal their identity as in the following examples:

I am the mountain tiger. No one should mess around!

I know what I am: not what people think I am (self- belief)

This is my time to shine

Am proud of myself

My enemies are not God!

I hate it when someone tells me they care but their actions show me that they don't.

No one can make me unhappy. My happiness is found in me

No weapon formed against me shall prosper

The above examples of self-mentions clearly depict the individual's orientation and worldview of life emanating from their personal encounters and experiences which altogether gives a glimpse of their identity.

The second type of self-mention involves the individual using language (personal pronouns) to indicate a special relationship with another person or group in what I term shared identity. It indicates the individual's special relationship with a loved one as in the following examples:

My son; my pride

Yehowa my strength

Happy birthday, my dear son

Jesus I trust in you!

Mommy, may you live long for me!

God bless our homeland Ghana

May God keep you till we meet again

My God has only the final say in my life not you

The above examples show how individuals use self-mentions to negotiate identity which is linked somewhat to special people of influence in their lives. They either identify with or have special attachment to a close relative (my dear son, mommy), a deity (My God, Jesus) or an institution (our homeland Ghana).

Data analysis from table three also depicts how metadiscourse elements in engagement markers particularly reader pronoun and directives are employed on the status profile of WhatsApp application users to negotiate their identity. The purpose of a writer's use of engagement strategies include meeting readers' expectations of inclusion where readers are addressed as participants. The writer thus pulls the reader into the discourse through engagement strategies such as reader pronouns, questions and directives. In so doing, writers inevitably use language to solicit reader collusion (Hyland, 2005). Two of such engagement strategies heavily present in the discourse on WhatsApp status of users in the present study are: reader pronouns and directive. According to Hyland (2005), reader pronouns such as 'you' and 'your' are the most explicit ways that readers

are brought into discourse. It is the clearest way a writer can acknowledge the reader's presence. The data presented in table 3 shows that as many as 120 reader pronouns representing 50% were used as engagement strategy in drawing the reader to share in the users' beliefs, inspirations, worldviews and perceptions. Data from the present study shows that the use of reader pronoun as an engagement marker was realized through the introduction of direct second person singular/plural pronouns or through an ellipsis of them as in the following examples:

**You** are my source of joy.

I will never forget **your** act of kindness.

**We** are perfect lawyers for **ourselves** and better judges of others.

**(You)** don't tell me the sky is the limit when people have explored the moon.

**Your** grace is sufficient for me.

**We** live in a crazy world so we need God's protection.

If **you** think education is expensive try ignorance

In the above examples, individuals through the use of reader pronouns (you, we, your) as engagement strategy succeed in pulling the reader into the discourse and including them as participants in order to share in and appreciate the user's guiding philosophies and worldview of life (identity markers).

Similarly, the use of directive as an engagement strategy was also adopted by individuals on their WhatsApp status to 'instruct the reader to perform an action or to see things determined by the writer' (Hyland, 2005). They are signaled mainly by the presence of an imperative (note, see, imagine) or by a modal of obligation addressed to the reader (ought) or by a predicative adjective expressing the writer's judgment of necessity or importance. The following are some examples of directive found on the status of WhatsApp application users to engage their audience to share in their ideals and perspectives:

(You must) Be faithful to the game and the game will be good to you.

See how far the Lord has brought me!

Open your mouth wide and he will fill it

Liberate the minds of men and ultimately you'll liberate their bodies

Never make someone a priority in your life when you are only an option in their life

Life is short. (You) Make the most of the time!

Life has no reset button. Think safely.

It is evident from the above examples of directive as an engagement strategy that the writers (owners of the WhatsApp status really want to instruct their readers to either perform an action or to see things (their perspectives and orientation of life) as determined by them.

### **Discussions**

This study sought to explore the linguistic elements employed on the statuses of individuals who use WhatsApp application in communicating messages to their readers and primarily to establish the connection between these linguistic elements and how they portray the identity of the users. The findings of the study are consistent with similar studies by other researchers as reviewed in the literature. However, new claims are made that add new knowledge to the extant literature on the subject. For example, whilst the findings of the current study identified that the status profile of WhatsApp users had peculiar features grouped into two main categories; automatically generated status (AGS) and self-generated status (SGS), Sanchez-Moya and Cruz Moya's study (2015) identified a five-label taxonomy: automatically generated status (AGS), purely verbal status, self-generated status (SGS), hybrid status as well as purely iconic status. In terms of the linguistic implications of social networking sites on users, the current study strikes a correlation with two other studies but there are points of departure. For example, a study by Kadir et al. (2012) of online (Facebook) communication of Malaysians showed the existence of homophones, abbreviations and emoticons for effective communication whilst that of Geertsma et al. (2011) study on the negative influence of SMS language on grades 8 and 9 students in South Africa indicated that the influence occurred more in the learners' spelling, punctuation and sentence length. Whilst both studies are similar to the present one in that they all explore the linguistic implications of digital online contents, the current study is different as it delves deep into areas of lexico-grammatical

implications such as the use of metadiscourse elements like reader pronouns, imperatives etc. Kadir et al. (2012) and Geertsma et al. (2011) only concerned themselves with the orthography, homophones and punctuation which though are linguistic have very little to do with grammar and syntax. Again, whilst the other studies focused on the linguistic implications of online digital communication on the education of users, the present study attached importance to how it impacts and reveals the identity of users. Thus, from the discussions, it is clear that the current study, in significant ways, is consistent with the approach of other studies as reviewed in the literature whilst establishing new claims thus contributing to knowledge in the field.

### **Conclusion**

My claim in this study has been that users of WhatsApp application employ three main metadiscourse elements: self-mention (stance), reader pronoun (engagement) and directive (engagement) as linguistic strategies to negotiate their identities on the status. Self-mention strategies enable WhatsApp application users to use personal and possessive pronouns (I, my ) to directly focus the message unto themselves and indicate special relationship with others to reveal to readers their (users') guiding principles and philosophies in life and also inviting their loved ones through language to share in these principles, philosophy and acts of common experience. Also, WhatsApp application users employ engagement strategies such as reader pronouns to enact their identities especially through the use of second and third person pronouns and possessives like 'you, 'your' 'we' and 'our' as well as directives like imperatives, modal obligation and predicative adjectives to pull them into the discourse as participants and instructing them to perform an action which ultimately will lead them to appreciate and share in the user's ideas, worldviews, experiences and orientation (identity markers). Future studies on status of WhatsApp application may attempt to investigate the ideologies in the language used in encoding the messages in the content of the status.

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