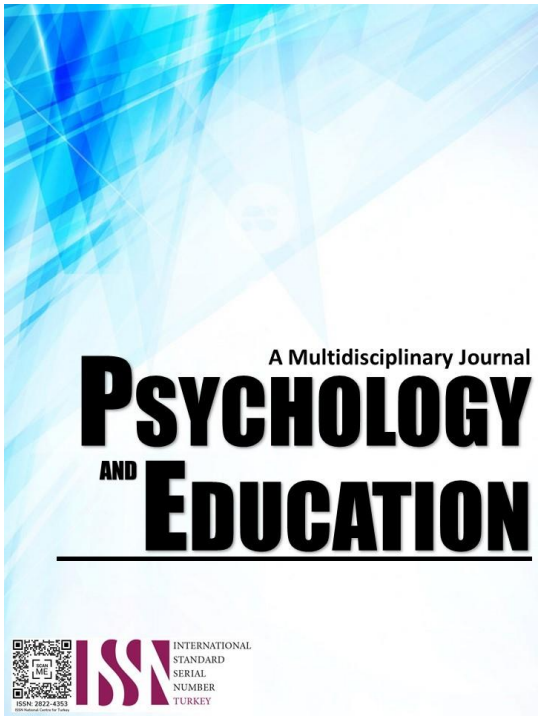
BEYOND WORDS: THREAT MESSAGES OF FILIPINOS IN FACEBOOK MESSENGER



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Research Article

Beyond Words: Threat Messages of Filipinos in Facebook Messenger

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Abstract

The paper's goal was to investigate how Filipino Facebook users in general and chat users in particular create threat chat messages. The research aimed to address the threat protocols and themes that were clear from the threat chat postings. In specifically, content analysis was used to examine the textual chat messages on Facebook for the study on threat messages in chat. 15 threat communications in all were recorded between January and March 2019. According to the study's findings, the threatener's last line of action was to send threat chat messages, and he or she chose social media as the most practical or affordable means of doing so. However, without threats, the interlocutors would be powerless. For example, the legal wife over the illegitimate wife, which is often used as a catalyst for adultery and extramarital affairs, as well as the debtor and debtee, where themes of friendship and betrayed trust may be present. The threat plays a significant role in the inversion of power together with their places and abilities. Social media became a platform for the Filipino people to quickly and easily communicate their threats as they learned how to use it a convenient setting for conflict and location where crime may be committed.

Keywords: *threat, messages, messenger, Facebook*

Introduction

In forensic linguistics, any available statements are can be used and interpreted beyond words (Adams, 2004; Warren et al., 2007; Vrij, 2000). Any statements, from Facebook post, a Tweet, a suicide note, a recorded conversation or even a text message or chat message before, during and after the crime scene is vital. With this premise, forensic linguistics, as a newly established yet powerful field is a discipline that can or may somewhat facilitate investigation and help employ justice through probable cause (Olsson, 2008; Coulthard & Johnson, 2010; li, 2013; Grant, 2008), yet still forensic linguistics has more to prove as a respected field of forensic science applied in litigation use (Fitzgerald, 2004; Coulthard &Johnson, 2007; Gibbons, 2003). One that needs understanding and deeper analysis by forensic linguist are threats. According to Spitzberg and Gawron (2016), Carter (2010) and Chung and Pennebaker (2011) threats are deliberate, carefully calculated, conscious, willful, and purposive speech acts that employ communication in conveying a strong locution or expression and carry out a coveted and sometimes dangerous transmission of notification such as fright, alarm, panic, and terror. Threating causes discomfort, unhappiness, revulsion and hostility, and this is agreeable on how individuals formulate words or sentences to convey a message of anger and frustration that may propel or lead them to commit a crime. Threats are conflictive in nature and threats insinuate to rest a primary position in message construction and dissemination, however, there is little research or study about how speakers threaten (Muschalik, 2018; Morewitz, 2008).

Comprehending the intricacies and the psychology of threats require the expert ability across multiple domains be it in Forensic Science, Criminology to Legal Law (Bond & Lee, 2005; Spitzberg & Gawron, 2016). Therefore, threats encapsulate the action, cognition, sentiments, and conduct of the individual creating the threat, and it must be deeply scrutinized for the words of the sender needs to be understood by all means (Zaitsu, 2010; Warren, Mullen, & McEwan, 2014; Watt, Kelly, and Llamas, 2013). The complexity on the issue on threat is more problematic in view of that the threats made by individual is directed rightly to the intended receiver. A threat may occur across any degrees and levels, any time and any where and must be understood clearly by the forensic linguist as it occurs.

On the other hand, individuals are usually objects selected as the aim of a threat attack. Threats can be a strong variable for case-build-up in many categories of crimes, from kidnapping to murder (Watson, Rabey, and Stageberg (2013); Baumeister, Smart, and Boden,1996; Calhoun, 1998; Dietz, et.al.,1991). Legislators of civil law together with government law, public and private security agency and firms carry out a systematic or formal inquiry to discover and examine the facts of calculating the ability of the threatener to commit the crime that started as a threat either verbal or written form. Also important is the prognostication on the conduct of the said threat and the analysis of the threat that can be used as a reliable aid in establishing and associating someone closely with regards to

having strong links with the crime to be committed and with the aim of apprehending the threatener at the end (Meloy, 2000, Meloy, 2001, Meloy et al.,2004, Monahan, 1981, Gales, 2013). Meanwhile, in the advent of the new millennium, as the digital age occurs rapidly, threat mutated into many forms. One of them is through social media. Social media is prone to such form of communication. Hence, social media became a space and avenue to speedy transfer of such message of threat. This paper delved and explored on threats that occurred in Facebook that may cause harm physically, emotionally or mentally that may lead to endanger the life of the receiver, most specifically the ones that are sent through the use of chat message. The findings provided exploratory insights for forensic researchers on how threats are constructed, its conventions, forms and intended inflicted message.

Research Questions

In the light of the foregoing discussion, the paper aimed to examine how Filipino Facebook users in general and chat users to be specific exhibit threat chat messages. The research sought to answer the following inquiries:

1. What are the threat protocols evident in the threat chat messages?
2. What are the themes evident in the threat chat messages?

Methodology

Framework of Analysis

This research study tried to address the questions by dispensing an analysis on the mode and operation of the threat chat messages. To answer research question number 1, protocols evident in the threat chat messages, in the study of Spitzberg and Gawron (2016) and Gass and Mackey (200) were used. While on the other hand, to answer research question number 2 in dealing with themes evident in the threat structure, qualitative content analysis was used utilizing the study of Smith (2006) and Turner and Gelles (2003) as guide.

Data

The study on threat messages on chat utilized descriptive-qualitative method, particularly content analysis in examining the textual chat messages in Facebook. The language commonly employed by Filipino Facebook chat users are Tagalog and a bit of English language. This study limited its scope to the availability of threat chat messages. A total of 15 threat chats were documented from January to March, 2019. The study is limited to 15 for the threats on Facebook chat are very limited and seldom posted. In addition, even if the Facebook is a public domain, still names or even face avatar/profile picture of the speaker or chatter of the death threat sender was deleted or erased for research ethics purposes.

Gathering Procedure

In order to gather data for the research, the researcher downloaded screen shots of the messages posted by the receiver of the threat message. The concern of the research are the threat messages which underwent content analysis. Hence, the themes evident in the threat structure are discussed citing some researches relevant to the research that would also strengthen and fortify the study.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion section are (1) threat protocols evident in the threat chat messages (2) the themes evident in the threat structure.

The study of Splitzberg and Gawron (2016) was used in order to glean the features of the facebook messenger threats. The 15 threat chat messages were subjected to the seven categories, namely, Intentionality, Negative Valence, Implicit and Explicit Issuer Control, Issuer's Preferred Outcome, Contingency, Credibility and Willingness, and Subjunctive Mood. All the 15 threat chat messages possessed with at least one of the categories with Figure Exhibit 5, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 having only one of the above stated categories. For example, Exhibit Figure 5, "Baka gusto mo ipapatay kita kung hindi ka sumunod sa mga gusto ko ipagawa sayo" belong to Negative Valence in one chat message only.

Two categories for Figure Exhibit 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7. For example, Exhibit Figure 1, "Tang-ina mo (name of the receiver) papatayin ko talaga ang anak mo" for Intentionality Maliit lang ang mundong ginagalawan natin, mahahanap ko yang anak mo, (name of the receiver) for Credibility and Willingness. Intentionality and Credibility and Willingness all

belong to only one threat message.

Three to four categories for 14 and 15 in just one threat message. In Exhibit Figure 14, "Mabait ako alam mo yan dapat di mo inistafa ung pera bigyan mo lang ako ng isang paliwanag na maganda cge kakalimutan ko yan" for Contingency, "Alam ko na kung san ka ngayon magulat ka nlang pupuntahan kita" for Credibility and Willingness and "Mag ingat ka" for Subjunctive Mood. Contingency, Credibility and Willingness, and Subjunctive Mood all belong to one threat message.

It is noteworthy in the threat chat messages, a threat can be in one category but possess two or more forms. Like for instance Exhibit Figure 15, one is "Pag kami bumagsak isasama ko kayo", second "Gusto ko na yang basagin kung may pambayad lang ako nabasag ko na yang mukha mo" and third "Wag na wag lang kita makikita pag hindi ako nakapagpigil titirahin kita dyan!" fall into one category which is Issuer's Preferred Outcome, done by a single person in just one message. The threatener used three forms of Issuer's Preferred Outcome in one threat chat message. It can be surmised then that a Filipino threat chat message may belong to one category but can be composed into multiple forms.

The shortest among the 15 threats is Exhibit Figure 10 with "Papatayin kita!" with two words. While Exhibit Figure15 is the longest with 78 words in one threat paragraph. As compared between the two, Exhibit Figure 15 is more detailed as compared to Exhibit Figure 10, but the details in Exhibit Figure 15 is not sufficient with information like the specified exact date will the threat be executed as well as the time, duration and others. According to Turner and Gelles (2003), a detailed threat gives the impression of being first hand and strongly operational. Also, in concern the detailedness of threat, a threat is consciously incomplete by nature to give the element of surprise as a form of terror (Shen and Dillard, 2014; Bean, et. al., 2014; Reisenzein, et. al., 1995). Surprise in the field of Psychology originates by expectancy contradiction for it gives struggle and hardness of explanation (Tops and Boksem, 2012; Mellers et. al., 2013). With the studies cited, it is safe to say that the stress upon receiving a threat is aggravated, because of the unexpectedness in the lack of detail, it gives the receiver incapacity to presume and unfold the threat in addition with the intensification delivered by the surprise element of the threat as a fear. Inflicting fear is a characteristic of a threat and fear is described as negative valence form of surprise (Vrticka et al., 2014; Laukka, et.al.,2013).

Threat Protocols

Based on the data gathered on the threat chat messages there are two evident protocols that surfaced, namely cursing and violent words. In criminal law, as defined, a protocol is an established set of rules that dictates how to format the communication of information (Huda, 2011; Williams, 1983; Fletcher, 1998). However, in linguistics, for Gass and Mackey (2000) protocols are what is happening within the individual minds. Existence of such protocols on threat chat messages describes at the same time actualizes the threat. The threat protocols are established crime evidences in a linguistic set-up.

Curse Words

In the book of Why We Curse: A Neuro-Psycho-Social Theory of Speeh (2000) by Dr. Timothy Jay, people curse as a result of strong emotional intensification particularly vulgar expletive language. Cursing implicitly is considered an impolite conversation (Culpeper, 2011; Hajare, 2018) and curse words express a very dangerous idea (Jing- Schmidt, 2019). This can be seen also in threat chat messages on the gathered research data.

The appearance of such curse words in threat messages can be found at the beginning, middle or either at the end of the sentence and the most common of them all is the variation of "Putang-ina" which can appear as "tang-ina", "tang-ina ka" and "ina mo" and is one of the common curse words used by Filipinos (Muntinlupa, 2017). According to Wajnryb (2005) and Hughes (2006) cursing is the word actions of evoking harm and inflicting horror to an individual, by use of words, the actions are cascaded mentally and emotionally to the receiver thus may inflict discomfort and stress.

Violent Speech

Violent words generate stress and perpetuated stress is an agent of physical and mental harm, hence violent speech can be a form of violence (Apressyan, 1998; Somerville, 2011; Benesch, 2012). Violent speech can be a strong element protocol for threat chat messages. Violent speech evokes a strong message of hate and anger, or hate and anger put together for the receiver of the threat chat message. The threat chat messages are not just characterized as insulting, rude, hurtful, and wounding but can be considered to be provocative or may provoke physical harm. The threat chat messages can be seen as in any form may inflict the desire to silence the receiver that leads to murder or

physical injury. Violent words can have a strong outcome and consequence on the nervous system that may also be a form of criminal aggression (Barrett, 2017; Bihari et. al., 2014; Beaver, Nedelec, Schwartz, 2014) not only physically as actualized in the posed threat.

On the other hand, with the presence of verbs in the violent speech like "papatayin", "banatan", "aabangan", "ipapatay", "ikamatay", "sinapak", "yari", "ipapatay", "tirahin", and "basagin" is associated or linked to both as a threat and violence. On the research of Green and Stonner (1971) that the presence of verbs connoting violence are considered an indicator of aggressiveness or aggressive behaviour. In addition, the immense and extreme grammatical use of descriptive verbs is a nature character of a serious threatner (Hermann, 2003; Fraser, 1998; Shuy, 1993). The lists enumerated in Table 2, such as "Papatayin kita", "Aabangan ka naming seryoso", "Makikita mo ang kinakalaban mo", "Ipapatay kita", "Pag sinapak kita", "Yari ka sa Monday", "May kalalagyan kayo tandaan mo yan", "Huwag kang papakita sa daan" and "Titirahin kita dyan" are in future tense form. According to Hamblin (1987) and Austin (1962) one character of threats are formed in commissive verbs and is usually grammatically constructed in future-tense form.

Themes of Threat Chat Messages

In the dissertation of Smith (2006) on assessing risk of threatening communications, threats that frequently remark or state themes about love affairs, marriage problems, or romance relationships may aid and support to establish the level of purpose to injure the targeted victim. Stating such themes in threats can be utilized as gauge for probable and possible violence (Turner and Gelles, 2003). Basically, this paper will not only enumerate the themes, but tried to establish the relationship for establishing the relationship of the threatened and the threatener is important for the two share and create the theme as well as they both provide the context.

In studying threats, it is imperative to understand that a threat is considered to be a real threat if it is put in full context because such threat declaration would be elucidated or explicated clearly by the threat itself (Fein et. al, 1995). Threat resulting to violence may be founded and sprout from vast arrays of emotions (Beller, 2002; Al-Ameedi and Mohammed, 2012) this emotion comes from formed relationships between the threatener and the threatened.

Because the 15 threat chat messages are screen shots and downloaded, only three threat chat messages provided fortified evidence to have a theme. Some of the chat message conversations are cropped by the receiver so it would be hard for the researcher to decipher the themes of each. In forensic linguistics, an investigation should be factual, based on evidences, and resides on empirical data and research (Warren et. al., 2007; Gibbons; 2003, Olsson, 2008; Adams, 2004) and going beyond such is fallacious as well as unethical. So, with that argument, it is safe for the research study to work on the limited but available facts rather than fabricating findings on having a theme. Hence, available data in forensic linguistics are sometime hard to access (Grant, 2008; Fitzgerald, 2004; Coulhard and Johnson, 2007; li, 2003).

One evident theme can be seen is love which leads to betrayal, as exhibited in Exhibit Figure 1, phrases like "ginagamit ka lang ni" and at the end would lead to "peneperahan ka lang nya", this would suggest that the person sending the threat want the receiver also to realize that the affair is not merely about love but the receiver is just being used for financial and monetary purposes. In addition as continued from Exhibit Figure 1, the phrase "ako ang mahal nya" and "Hindi ikaw ako ang gusto nya" clearly it is established that there is rivalry of love between the receiver and the sender, between the "ako" (me) and "ikaw" (you). The relation between the two are now established by the word and phrase because of "ako" and "hindi ikaw" as it generated conflict between the two.

Exhibit Figure 4 also dwells on the same elicit love affair theme but in a different context. The phrase "dahil lang sa isang lalaki" and if connected to "Daig mo pa ang original kung makaasta" it can be inferred that the source of conflict is a man, and the following phrase suggest that the receiver is not the original, as put into context, not the legal wife. In dealing with threats, context of threats must be put in person-specific analysis observed in communicative scenarios (Wunderlich,1979; Trosborg, 1995). This encounter and confrontation is between two women of different position placed in a conflicting love affair relationship. This extramarital involvement can be a probable cause for a person to commit crime or execute such threat propelled by strong emotion coming from infidelity and a close encounter of hate to the other party (Allen and Atkins, 2005; Leeker and Carlozzi, 2012; Allen, et. al., 2005; Shackelford, et. al., 2000).

However, Exihibit Figure14 surfaces a different theme, "dapat hindi mo inistafa ang pera ko" these dwells on money as strengthened by the word "estafa" as it

appears. By definition of law, estafa is a criminal and civil offense that caused loss to an individual either by swindling or fraud or deceit specifically money and is punishable by law (Balleisen; 2017; Cohen, 2006) as the word estafa provided a theme and context already. But before this, there was a prior message "(name of the threat receiver) ano may balak ka pa bang magpakita?" this will tell that the sender has not seen the receiver or the receiver has not been able to appear or meet the sender. It can also be inferred that the receiver purposively does not intent to meet the sender for any reasons. Still at the end the sender establishes a chance of forgiveness but with a valid and acceptable reason that still subject for acceptance from the sender. "Mabait ako alam mo yan" this entails that sender is putting into account this character of being a good person to the receiver, it can be established further that the sender and receiver of the threat knows each other for a long time. Knowing such character of being a good person takes time which is also supported by "bigyan mo lang ako ng isang paliwanag na maganda sige kakalimutan ko yan" which sounds forgiving and understanding having a condition still that is for the sender to decide. It can be established that the sender and receiver might be friends, co-workers or neighbors. On threats, it is vital then that the threat and established relationship must be put into context that may be found in prevailing themes, as threats are considered a semantic occurrence that are exhibited and communicated in manifold contextual situations (Halliday,1973). Also, as context in the involvement of money, money is the most common source of crime leading to fraud or by simple means of false pretenses such as lying and breaking trust to someone (Oberwittler and Wikström, 2008; Wikström, 2011; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997).

Conclusion

According to Book 2 on Crimes and Penalties under the Philippine Laws, quoting in verbatim "Threats: Declarations of an intention to inflict a future wrong upon the person, honor or property of another or the latter's family. The acts or words must be so efficacious as to amount to moral pressure and thus produces fear, or mental disturbance." But the question is how are these threats articulated by interlocutors and are put in to wide context and deep perspectives. In dealing with threat analysis, there is serious call for forensic linguistics to establish the legitimacy of the threat, to conceptualize its nature and character and how it appears in social communication in all sorts whether digital or in a form of a handwritten letter. Also, the research contribution of forensic linguistics is not hurdled alone to the field but to the field of linguistics as a whole. From the results of the study, threat chat messages are the end course of action for the threatener and the threatener used social media as an economical or cheapest tool to deliver it. However, with the non-existence of threats, the interlocutors would be ineffectual of power, like for instance, the legal wife over the illegitimate wife themed as a source of infidelity and elicit affairs, and the debtor and creditor where themes of friendship and broken trust might dwell. Side by side with their positions and powers, the threat becomes an important element of inverse of power. Because of the threat posed to the life of the illegitimate wife and creditor, the threat will be used against the legitimate and the debtor based on the Miranda Warning (Cicchini, 2012) that "everything you will say will be used against you". At this juncture, the legal wife and the debtor, because of the posed threat may be considered a criminal.

In another point, how threateners compose their treat is a manifestation, representation and attestation of themselves and can be surmised into two, one as a person in context whether a husband, wife, legal wife or a friend, second as a possible criminal that will be subjected before the law. This study as mentioned in the introduction is exploratory and a glimpse of how Filipinos threat for there is much more forensic research study to be done and this research is considered research in progress, primal research on how Filipinos threat utilizing social media. Thus, parallel studies are recommended or this study might also be replicated. As Filipinos equip themselves on harnessing social media, it became a space for them to deliver their threats rapidly and easily. An easy way and ready place for confrontation and a place to commit crime as well.

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