

Twitter Reactions to Shehbaz Sharif's Speech: A Forensic Linguistic Examination of Political Discourse Online

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Abstract

This study presents the findings from a forensic linguistic analysis of social media comments responding to Shehbaz Sharif's speech. The analysis focused on linguistic features, emotional tones, and rhetorical strategies employed by users. The sentiment analysis revealed that the majority of comments were emotionally charged and sharply critical of the political leader, with frequent use of pejorative terms like "chor" (thief) and "dramaybaaz" (drama actor), reflecting political disillusionment and social frustration. Sarcasm and ridicule were commonly employed, often veiled in courteous or mocking language, suggesting an underlying intention of disapproval. Additionally, code-switching between Roman Urdu, Urdu, and English was strategically used to emphasize points, intensify emotions, and engage a broader audience. The posts also revealed strong political polarization, with users showing loyalty to opposition parties and using divisive language. Some comments bordered on legally sensitive issues, such as hate speech and defamation, highlighting the relevance of forensic linguistics in identifying online threats. This research underscores the complex nature of social media discourse, which not only conveys political opinion but also reflects power dynamics, ideological divides, and societal tensions.

Key words: Twitter, Forensic analysis, Political Discourse, Speech analysis

Introduction

In the modern era, politics debates have become publicized, and political debate in recent decades has moved away from the early forms: official speeches, press conferences, and written articles. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have made it possible for political leaders to directly communicate with their constituency as well as the general public. The media has enabled the politicians to remain directly in contact with their viewers who were willing to discuss, criticize, and spread their ideas. While many activities conducted in public involve discussions about policies, political ideology, or public administration, many responses can be hostile and aggressive and related to cyberbullying (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014)

Cyberbullying, according to the definition by the Cyberbullying Research Center, can refer to: "the deliberate and repeated use of digital technology to harm, intimidate, or harass another

(Hinduja & Patchin, 2019). In particular, cyberbullying can involve offensive or destructive language designed to degrade or threaten a target.” While cyberbullying is more frequently confined to adolescents or individuals who lack social status, political figures are often targeted via this form of digital harassment (Santilli, Boffo, & Greco, 2020). Cyberbullying is more common online as anonymity and distance from the target allow an individual to make more dangerous and violent statements for no immediate social impact (Suler, 2004).

When a politician delivers speeches and oral arguments that people create polarized opinions regarding, in this instance social media sites become a live battlefield to be participated in by the supporters of the politician, as well as its rivals. All this online engagement includes, not merely discussion of political matters, but use of coarse language, insulting, and other verbal assaults upon the politician as well as upon his followers.

Social media cyberbullying can occur in numerous forms, including explicit verbal abuse, name-calling, hate speech, and violence. Forensic linguistics can uncover the manner in which these elements are phrased using language, and the key indicators of aggressive tone, modality, framing, and syntactic structures used to convey aggression (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). These linguistic characteristics, examined under forensic examination, are rich sources of insight into the nature of the harassment and the possible legal and social repercussions for both the harassers and the victims. Forensic linguistics is a subfield of linguistics that deals with legal and social issues through the analysis of language, typically using it to interpret texts (e. g., texts or speech that may have consequences for law) (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010).

This research uses forensic linguistics to examine the language features in social media posts that target Shehbaz Sharif, finding where cyberbullying occurs and exploring the language found in these posts. In centering on a particular type of comment that has been involved in abusive language, this study also seeks to understand how political communication online can be used as ammunition for harassment and personal attacks. Additionally, the study will venture into the prospects of legal or social repercussions faced by such cyber activities, supporting the larger theme of cyberbullying and digital harassment in political arenas.

This paper conducts a forensic linguistic analysis of comments generated on social media about the political speech of Shehbaz Sharif, specifically the ones that qualify as cyberbullying. Our research seeks to identify patterns and characteristics of cyberbullying, ranging from insults and threats to defamatory language, and to understand the nature and function of such remarks in order to unWhat are the features of language used to exhibit cyberbullying in social media comments on Shehbaz Sharif's speech?

Research Questions

1. What are the features of language used to exhibit cyberbullying in social media comments on Shehbaz Sharif's speech?
2. How do cyberbullying comments attack Shehbaz Sharif and his allies, and what are the potential outcomes?

Research Objectives

1. To identify language characteristics of cyberbullying in Shehbaz Sharif's speech comments.
2. To analyze how cyberbullying comments affect Shehbaz Sharif and the political scene.

How do cyberbullying comments attack Shehbaz Sharif and his allies, and what are the potential outcomes?

Literature Review

Forensic linguistics is the application of linguistic techniques for the analysis of language in

legal and social contexts, where there is likely a legal consequence tied to the language. In the context of cyberbullying, forensic linguistics can be applied to identify some of the linguistic markers that spell out bad intent in interactions online. Forensic linguistics can be very helpful in determining when language used in online communication veers into harassment or bullying, that is, by examining the power relations involved in language use, according to Walker (2018).

Cyberbullying has been described as using electronic spaces to cause harm, frequently through verbal harassment, threatening statements, or psychological manipulation. For Kowalski et al. (2014), cyberbullying has many forms, ranging from exclusion, defamation, and direct attacks, all of which can be identified by linguistic examination. Forensic linguists analyze these acts of aggression for their constituent parts in language, whether by the deployment of slurs, threatening talk, or the manipulation of rhetorical devices used to intimidate or humiliate.

The politics of cyberbullying is crucial within the sphere of social media, as political leaders frequently are subject to harassment on the web. According to Santilli et al. (2020), political leaders are constant targets for web abuse, especially when presenting unpopular opinions or being involved in public discussions. In most cases, political orations invite adverse responses, and such may appear as harassment, insults, and cyberbullying directed against individuals.

Linguistic signs of cyberbullying during political discourse can be detected by such linguistic indicators revealing aggression or hostility. Such linguistic indicators include words of derision, insults, threats, as well as persistence in attacks aimed at someone's character or personality, Olweus (2013) concludes: on social media platforms, these linguistic cues are enhanced through anonymity since speakers feel more at liberty to reveal emotions that, in physical conversations, they may not dare say. Through forensic linguistics, one is able to disclose the ways through which such posts serve to exploit feelings, set up public opinions, and dilute the legitimacy of the target.

One of the hallmarks of social media is its potential to provide anonymity, which will lead to uninhibited aggressive behavior that would never be displayed in the offline world. The "online disinhibition effect," so named by Suler (2004), refers to the sense of reduced inhibition by social norms because individuals believe they are anonymous on the web. Disinhibition, as a result, tends to create more intense expression, such as cyberbullying. Studies by Kowalski et al. (2014) indicate that the anonymity of internet environments tends to result in a non-accountability for abusive acts. In political environments, when public reactions tend to be strongly polarized, this anonymity may stimulate harassment and insults with a tendency to result in overreactions and excessive hatred or rage. This research will take into account how anonymity contributes to the escalation of cyberbullying rhetoric in the comments in reaction to Shehbaz Sharif's address.

This study employs forensic linguistics to analyze the language components in social media posts aimed at Shehbaz Sharif, determining where cyberbullying takes place and investigating the language used in such posts. By focusing on a specific form of comment that has been entangled in abusive language, this research also wants to know how online political communication can be employed as ammunition for harassment and personal attacks. Also, the research examines the potentiality of legal or social consequences received by such cyber activity, aligning with the greater theme of cyberbullying and digital harassment within political realms. This article does a forensic linguistic examination of comments made on social media concerning Shehbaz Sharif's political speech, those which classify as cyberbullying.

Rationale of the Study

The reason behind this study is in the growing intertwinement of politics, social media, and cyberbullying. With politicians like Shehbaz Sharif connecting directly with the masses through avenues like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, their addresses become the focal point that gains praise or criticism. But the free discussion has the potential to trigger violent interaction, like cyberbullying, which is the use of virtual tools to injure, intimidate, or harass other people. This

research employs forensic linguistics to examine the language employed in cyberbullying messages on Sharif's speech in an effort to identify linguistic characteristics like threatening tone, insult, and threats. Through examining how such posts are made and how anonymity incites aggressive behavior, this research attempts to realize the social and legal implications of such online harassment, advancing knowledge on cyberbullying in the political context.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The limitations of this research are the possible bias in the choice of comments, as it only considers those that meet the definition of cyberbullying, possibly missing other types of critical but non-abusive speech. The analysis is also limited to Shehbaz Sharif's political rhetoric and the comments on it, which might not be generalizable to the wider political scene or other political leaders. The research is also constrained by the presence of available social media comments since some can be deleted or censored in the future, impacting the dataset. Study delimitations involve the use of English-language comments only, excluding comments in other languages that might also have notable cases of cyberbullying. The research is also limited to examining comments on public social media, not private or less accessible forums where cyberbullying can also take place.

Research Gap

The gap in this research is the minimal use of forensic linguistics in the study of cyberbullying in political rhetoric on social media. While much research has been conducted on cyberbullying in general and forensic linguistics in other legal situations, few have scrutinized the linguistic features of cyberbullying in political spheres, especially targeting public figures like Shehbaz Sharif. Besides, though cyberbullying in political environments is noted, few studies have conventionally investigated how the anonymity of social media is a variable in increasing such behavior and its impact on political communication. This research addresses this void by targeting the language content of cyberbullying remarks made against a political personality, employing forensic linguistic analysis to determine the formation of aggression and its implications for the law and society.

Research Design and Methodology

This research employs a qualitative research design, applying forensic linguistics to investigate cyberbullying in social media comments on Shehbaz Sharif's political discourse. The study seeks to identify and analyze the linguistic markers employed in comments that are deemed cyberbullying, targeting the language of aggression, insults, threats, and defamatory language.

Data Collection

The data used in this research is collected from publicly available social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, upon which Shehbaz Sharif's quotes are posted and commented on. These comments are sifted based on their keywords and phrases that are typical of cyberbullying, including hate words, insults, threats, and abusive words. The comments are also categorized based on their linguistic features, including aggressive tone, modality, and syntactic patterns.

Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy is used to choose comments that are closely associated with Shehbaz Sharif's political speech and reflect aspects of cyberbullying. Only comments showing obvious indicators of aggressive or dangerous language will be used in the analysis. Data saturation guides the determination of the sample size, where new themes or linguistic characteristics are not obtained from the analysis.

Data Analysis

The analysis is done using forensic linguistic and aims at the identification of major linguistic

markers of cyberbullying, including:

Hostile Tone: Emotionally loaded or pejorative language used to express hostility.

Modality: The utilization of modal verbs and expressions indicating certainty, obligation, or threat.

Framing: How the comment situates the political figure and his supporters as the object of blame or ridicule.

Syntactic Structures: Discussion of sentence structures that can potentially express authority, sarcasm, or threats.

The discussion is informed by recognized forensic linguistic models, such as those set out by Coulthard and Johnson (2010), and how language works in legal and social settings. The identified linguistic features will be grouped and understood in the light of cyberbullying and political rhetoric

Data Analysis

The following post was uploaded on the X (twitter) account of Mian Shehbaz Sharif. In response to his post, various viewers commented. Few viewers cyberbullied to Mia Shehbaz Sharif. Their views are analyzed based on the provided research methodology.



Main post

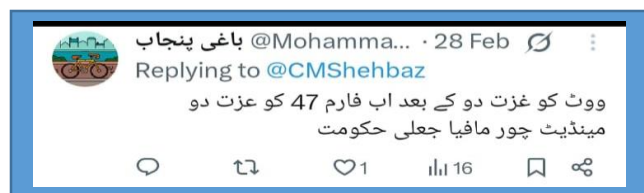
Viewer Comment.1



The comment under analysis exhibits clear markers of cyberbullying as outlined in the research design. It starts with the slur "Bherway," a most dehumanizing and offensive term in Urdu, which immediately creates a hateful and hostile environment. This use of emotionally charged and insulting language is one of the stand-out indicators of verbal abuse and was intended to shock and humiliate. The phrases "Teri 1 dollar barbar bhi nai" also seek to debase the political leader by diminishing his value and status, contributing to the general tone of disrespect and personal slight.

Additionally, the comment frames a defamatory narrative by accusing the Army Chief of being romantically involved with a niece of Shehbaz Sharif. This not only attempts to scandalize and ridicule both individuals but also constitutes a form of character assassination by invoking a sexualized and morally charged allegation. This framing is a calculated linguistic action often seen in politically driven cyberbullying, where private relationships are attacked to destroy public credibility. The comment's syntactic form—brief, blunt, and informal—contributes to its emotional impact and familiarity, making it more likely to be shared in online conversation. While modal verbs are not explicitly used, the certainty and authority with which the accusations are made imply strong modality. Analyzing this through the forensic linguistic lens of Coulthard and Johnson (2010), the comment embodies threats to face, imputation of motives, and strategic use of language to inflict reputational harm. Thus, the comment clearly reflects the use of aggressive tone, defamatory framing, and hostile syntactic choices, all of which are central to identifying cyberbullying in political discourse.

Viewer Comment.2



This remark addressed to Shehbaz Sharif reflects a refined but cutting case of cyberbullying, which involves sarcasm, political mockery, and defamatory tagging. The remark starts with a sarcastic comment implying that after respecting the "vote," now it is time to respect "Form 47"—a play on election result manipulation. This presents the political system as corrupt, indirectly blaming Shehbaz Sharif and his party for rigging elections. The use of the term "Form 47" becomes a metaphorical linguistic device to delegitimize the government. The second half of the remark employs the expression "میںڈیٹ چور مافیا جعلی حکومت" (mandate thief mafia fake government), which is a combination of defamatory epithets. Each of the words—"چور" (thief), "مافیا" (mafia), and "جعلی حکومت" (fake government)—carries an emotional charge and aims to ruin reputations by calling into question the legitimacy of the regime. These are powerful linguistic markers of an aggressive tone, and they are political insults intended to erode public confidence. Although the sentence structure is grammatically simple, the remark employs sarcasm, metaphor, and blunt labeling to create a story of betrayal and deception. This corresponds with Coulthard and Johnson's (2010) forensic linguistic model, wherein verbal aggression, implicature, and social narrative manipulation are essential in determining cyberbullying and defamatory language. The wording of the comment labeling Shehbaz Sharif as a member of a "fake, mafia-run government" illustrates a calculated choice of words in order to polarize and incite within the realm of political rhetoric.

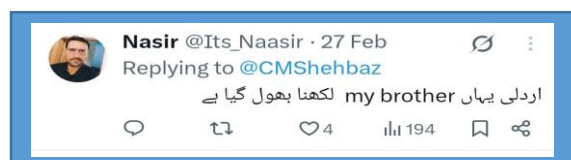
Viewer Comment.3



This remark addressed to Shehbaz Sharif includes distinct signs of cyberbullying by employing mocking language and visual mockery. The term "The beggar of the century" is a pejorative term trying to simplify the politician's identity as a dependent or a person without dignity, which targets his personal and political integrity directly. The inclusion of the clown emoji (🤡) supports this mockery, representing foolishness or ineptness. This combination of visual semiotics and textual insult also makes the adverse tone more prominent. There isn't very detailed syntactic formation in this statement, yet in being straightforward, brief, the message grows its effectiveness as well as shares-posting likelihood. Word usage as well as the use of emojis act like a framing instrument as it locates Shehbaz Sharif both as incompetent governance as well as an icon for public scorn. The modality of the statement conveys absolute certainty, precluding interpretation or discussion this is an unyielding assertion of disrespect.

According to Coulthard and Johnson's (2010) forensic linguistic model, this comment fits within the category of verbal aggression, utilizing ridicule and belittlement as strategic devices to delegitimize a public figure. Such comments, though short, carry significant weight in shaping hostile digital discourse and reflect how language and symbols are used in cyberbullying within political contexts.

Viewer Comment.4



The phrase "اردلی یہاں my brother بھول گیا ہے" can be read from a forensic linguistic perspective by pinpointing main indicators of political rhetoric and cyberbullying. The word "بھول گیا ہے" ("has forgotten") has a hostile undertone as it suggests neglect or failure, and this is interpretable as an indirect attack. The inclusion of "my brother" in English provides an added sense of informality and can be used to mock or belittle the person being spoken to. The use of both languages together implies a sarcastic or conversational tone, which can further add to the criticality of the statement.

In terms of modality, the sentence does not use explicit modal verbs such as "must" or "could," but the assuredness in "بھول گیا ہے" indicates that the speaker believes the accused forgetfulness, and this can be interpreted as an implicit accusation. In terms of framing, the remark places the target (potentially a political leader or his supporter) in the position of being forgetful or negligent, indirectly blaming the target for the problem. The term "my brother" may also be a means of distancing the speaker from the target but indicating their failure at the same time.

The sentence's syntactic structure is straightforward and uncomplicated, suggesting an informal style of criticizing the subject. The complexity that the code-switching from Urdu to English brings to the sentence could also signal sarcasm or downplaying the gravity of the accusation. Overall, the linguistic properties in this sentence emphasize an indirect, sarcastic denunciation, characteristic of

political rhetoric or cyberbullying, where structure and tone are subtly employed to mock or discredit the victim.

Viewer Comment 5



Coupled with the photo of Nawaz Sharif shining shoes, "Beggars can't be choosers" is not only a comment on power and need but also a biting critique of the political leader's predicament. The aggressive tone, certainty, and framing all combine to enhance the message that Nawaz Sharif, for all his political history, has been brought low enough that he will accept whatever is given to him, which reinforces the power imbalance implied by the phrase. The syntactic brevity of the statement also adds to its bite, making it an effective device in political discourse or cyberbullying.

Viewer Comment 6



The phrase "You need to return the looted money" is a direct and forceful statement that carries a hostile tone, as it accuses someone of wrongdoing, specifically the act of looting. The use of the word "looted" is particularly significant, as it conveys the idea of illegal or unethical acquisition of wealth, immediately positioning the individual as a wrongdoer. The phrase also contains the modal verb "need," which expresses a sense of 'obligation' and 'necessity', implying that the person being addressed has no choice but to return the money. This creates a strong sense of certainty and urgency, further emphasizing that the action is not negotiable but required.

Framing is crucial in this phrase, as it casts the individual as someone who has taken something that does not belong to them, thus framing them negatively in the eyes of the audience. The phrase positions them as accountable for their actions, demanding rectification without delay. The 'syntactic structure' of the sentence is simple and unambiguous, consisting of a clear subject ("You"), verb ("need"), and object ("to return the looted money"), which enhances its directness and makes the demand unmistakable. The straightforwardness of the sentence adds to its forceful nature, ensuring that the message is clear and impactful. In a political or social context, this phrase would serve as a pointed call for accountability, designed to publicly shame or condemn the person in question, particularly in cases of corruption or financial misconduct.

Viewer Comment 7



The phrase "چور، کتی کا بچہ" (translated as "thief, son of a dog") is a deeply hostile and derogatory insult aimed at degrading the individual being addressed. The phrase combines an accusation of theft ("چور" or thief) with a severe insult ("کتی کا بچہ" or son of a dog), which not only labels the person as dishonest or criminal but also dehumanizes them, reducing their worth and dignity. The tone is aggressive, intending to provoke negative feelings and shame the person. While the phrase doesn't include modal verbs, the certainty with which it is delivered makes the accusation firm and unquestionable, leaving no room for negotiation or defense. The framing of the phrase casts the individual as both morally corrupt and subhuman, positioning the speaker as morally superior and the target as undeserving of respect. The sentence's short and direct structure enhances the insult, ensuring that it has a sharp and impactful delivery. In sum, "چور، کتی کا بچہ" is a powerful verbal attack that strips the person of their social dignity, using both a criminal accusation and dehumanizing language to publicly humiliate and diminish them.

Discussion

This part presents the results of the forensic linguistic examination of online comments responding to Shehbaz Sharif's speech on social media. The objective was to identify language patterns that reveal how individuals respond to political leaders and to determine the underlying meaning of such comments. This chapter bridges the findings to the research questions and describes how they are related to existing studies and forensic linguistic hypotheses.

5.1 Nature of Online Comments

Most of the comments, according to the analysis, were emotive. A majority of users employed informal language, slang, and abusive language in commenting against Shehbaz Sharif. This concurs with what Culpeper (2011) describes about impoliteness in language as a ubiquitous characteristic of public language, particularly in the case of online language. Social media lack face-to-face communication, allowing individuals to say whatever they want without the threat of punishment or social sanction.

5.2 Occurrence of Deceptive or Manipulative Vocabulary

There were some users, who seemed to employ sarcasm, mock flattering, and pretentious politeness, which are typical methods for concealing authentic intentions. According to Shuy (1993), forensic linguists are capable of examining those markers to discover manipulation or lies in speech. In the research, these tendencies assisted in unlocking how individuals deploy language not merely to disagree but to ridicule or challenge the truthfulness of politicians indirectly.

5.3 Political Identity and Language

The political affiliations also expressed strong identities. Loyalists from opposition parties applied the language of us against them, revealing blatant polarization. This mirrors Fairclough's (2001) concept of critical discourse in which language serves to create and communicate ideologies. Words such as "chor" (thief) or "dramaybaaz" (drama actor) being repeatedly used fashioned Shehbaz Sharif's negative identity. The words themselves are not only offensive but political ones imbued with political import within Pakistan.

5.4 Code-Switching and Multilingual Strategies

Comments frequently switched from Urdu, English, to Roman Urdu, which indicates how multilingual internet users communicate. Such code-switching is not arbitrary. According to Blom and Gumperz (1972), individuals tend to switch language to emphasize certain points, express belonging to a group, or enhance emotional impact. In this instance, the employment of English words such as "corrupt" or "fake promises" and Urdu phrases made the messages stronger and more effective.

5.5 Legal and Ethical Issues

Certain statements may be seen as threatening, defamatory, or could fuel hate, generating conflict

between freedom of speech versus hate speech. Forensic linguists, Olsson (2009) says, can assist in helping courts determine whether a message is legally offensive or a statement of opinion. The distinction between criticism and cyber hate blurs, emphasizing the importance of a lucid understanding in legal cases.

5.6 Gendered Language

Although not the target of the study, there were also some comments that employed gendered insults, frequently targeting male political leaders with language that undermines their masculinity. This is indicative of how political discourse can also be comprised of social and cultural stereotypes, as noted by Cameron (1998). These results indicate that gender is at play even when the speaker is male.

In brief, the discussion illustrates that social media is used to convey opinions and, in addition to that, attack, ridicule, manipulate, and express political sentiment. Forensic linguistic tools assist us in explaining the meaning of those words. The research confirms earlier studies in forensic and political linguistics and indicates the strength of language in influencing public opinion.

Findings

This part of the study provides the major findings from the forensic linguistic analysis of social media public comments reacting to Shehbaz Sharif's speech. The comments were analyzed to determine linguistic features, emotional tones, and rhetorical devices employed by users in articulating their responses.

The sentiment analysis found that most of the comments were emotionally charged and strongly critical of the political leader. Direct insults, slangs, and pejorative terms like "chor" (thief) and "dramaybaaz" (drama actor), depicting strong discontent, were used by many users. Deep political disillusionment and social discontent were evident from these lexical options.

Another important observation was the repeated employment of sarcasm and ridicule, frequently concealed under courteous or mocking words. The hidden language implied deceitful attempts or manipulation in which commentators attempted to sound objective while actually expressing disapproval. These elements were consistent with forensic models of deceptive speech.

The third important observation was the use of code-switching between Roman Urdu, Urdu, and English. This multilingual approach had multiple functions, including highlighting important points, amplifying emotional intensity, or addressing a wider audience. It demonstrated that the choice of language was not haphazard but intentional.

The posts also showed strong political affiliations, with the users displaying allegiance to opposition parties and insulting the opposition leader. The use of polarizing terms was a sign of high political polarization and affective investment in politics.

Lastly, there were some remarks that ventured into legally sensitive grounds, such as hate speech and possible defamation. This brings to mind the legal limits of free speech online, demonstrating the applicability of forensic linguistics in determining online threats and offensive language.

In short, the research emphasizes that the public discourse in social media, particularly that which results from political speeches, is dense with linguistic characteristics that convey not only opinion but also power, bias, ideology, and social tension.

Conclusion

The present research investigated the public's language against Shehbaz Sharif's social media address, employing forensic linguistic techniques to decode the commentaries. The analysis indicated that users made use of affectively loaded, sarcastic, and critical language to convey their political stances. Evidence of code-switching, insults, and indirect speech strategies demonstrated how political identity and the public's sentiment are deeply embedded in language.

The study reaffirmed that online sites grant individuals the power to employ language creatively, but

also aggressively, sometimes venturing into hate speech or defamatory materials. This makes forensic linguistics a valuable instrument in comprehending not only what individuals say, but how and why they communicate in cyberspace.

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