"I Love You Ooh Moodle" or "How I Hate You"?

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Abstract

The study is an appraisal of employment of language learners at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) as they register their affirmation or dissidence of MOODLE learning platform. The data were gathered from 78 students via linguistic attitudinal likert scale and a blended questionnaire of closed-in and open-ended items. The main assumption is that speakers of a given language use language to register their endearment or dissidence towards a particular phenomenon be it material or otherwise. At a more practical level, Moodle platform is a new educational innovation at OUT for efficient distance teaching and learning. There is thus a need for appraising its acceptability or the contrary thereof by its users if improvement or efficiency is to be attained. This study seeks to contribute towards that end but from the angle of linguistic analysis of the affective concerns of the learners as they engage in learning using Moodle Platform. The study was guided by Norrick's (1978) expressive speech act theory and as recently applied as a formal-cognitive approach by Guiraud et al. (2011).

Introduction

Language is one of the defining capacities of human species, and its functions have intrigued scholars for many centuries. Language performs many functions such as referential, poetic, expressive and phatic. In expressive function of language, people specifically communicate emotions, choosing words pragmatically as a part of their communicative competence (Piantadosi, *et al*. 2011). Appropriate choice of words makes it possible for others to interpret the message accurately. An expressive emotional speech such as "I love you ooh Moodle" is more likely to be interpreted a positive emotion, while

"how I hate you MOODLE" is more likely to be interpreted as negative emotion. Such speech acts, as Norrick (1978: 279) suggests, express psychological conditions, and it is not beliefs or intentions, which arise to given states of affairs. Norrick (1978) has carried out an early differentiation of expressive speech acts. He defined expressive speech acts as:

> *A state of affairs X perceived as factual and judged to have positive or negative value for some person, the patient, brought about by a person, the agent (who may be identical with the patient) and just in case either the agent or patient role is not filled or both are filled by the same individual, an additional person, the observer (p.283).*

From this, Norrick (loc.cit. 284) creates the schema, where [items] are optional, and /value/ may be positive or negative: (*agent*) */value/ X (patient) (observer*). in which 'value' can stand for a positive or a negative. According to this formula, he compares nine different kinds of expressive illocutionary acts. These are

- *Apologizing*, where an agent-speaker expresses negative feelings towards a patient-addressee to appease them;
- *Thanking*, where the speaker expresses positive feelings to the addressee, who has done a service to the speaker;
- *Congratulating*, where the speaker has observed that the addressee has either benefitted from or carried out a positively valued event;
- *Condoling*, which resembles congratulating, except that the experienced event is negatively valued;
- *Deploring, or censoring*, in which the addressee is criticised for an event which had a negative impact on the speaker or a third person;
- *Lamenting*, where the speaker expresses his or her own misfortune, either at their own or somebody else's doing, the speaker is also the main observer, and
- *Welcoming*, where the speaker expresses positive feelings

   towards the arrival of the addressee

While the list may not be exhaustive in our analysis, we also made subcategories of expressive into positive, negative, and established sub typologies of speech acts for each. This is an interpretive study of expressions, which students employ to communicate their feelings about the MOODLE learning platform at the Open University of Tanzania. The recent institution of MOODLE as the main teaching and learning platform at OUT has indicated the need to urgently appraise its acceptability or the contrary thereof by its users in order to improve its efficiency. The two expressive speeches, "I love you ooh Moodle," and "how I hate you MOODLE" reveal how MOODLE is an emotional issue among the students at OUT. There is no doubt that MOODLE is a learning tool that students consider as of value in their learning endeavour at OUT. This is because it is through the MOODLE that students interact with their colleagues in discussion fora, where they access the materials to read and questions for graded assignments. MOODLE is also used to directly or indirectly interact with course tutors. Thus, their expressive speeches *facilitate their ability to articulate what they do and think about in order to provide a foundation for autonomous action*" (Fasheh, 1990: 26).

Expressive speeches are very important to investigate as they are a window through which we can understand others' inner feelings and emotions and in the specific contexts. People express their feelings expecting that others will understand and act appropriately (Norrick1978). Several educational issues in OUT justified the need for this paper. First, OUT is in the transformation from distance learning to on-line learning using MOODLE as the major learning platform. Thus, understanding the students' emotional expressions is important in making adjustments to suit their needs and interests. Second, this paper aims at increasing the awareness among scholars and researchers about the importance of emotional expressions in research. Especially in higher education, students' emotional expressions are equally crucial input in the decisions that learning

institutions make, where students' views have been largely neglected. As a result, this negligence has costed learning institutions millions of money especially in the current competitive economy, where universities are competing to attract students to enrol in their institutions.

Research Objectives and Questions

This study aimed at appraising the employment of language by users at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) as they register their affirmation or dissidence of MOODLE learning platform. In this regard, the study focused on the following lines of inquiry:

i. What are the perceptions of language learners about Moodle as a learning platform?
ii. What type of affirmative speech acts are used by language learners at the Open University of Tanzania?

Literature Review
Moodle as a Learning Platform

In his study, Yaman (2010) studied how MODDLE was integrated as a learning platform to support the 4th grade pre-service language teachers' field experience in Taiwan. He interviewed the student teachers on the use of Moodle as a —course supporter process, and the steps used as well as the learning activities that student teachers engaged in. Yaman found that Moodle contributed a lot in enhancing meaningful learning among the users. Further, Yaman found that MOODLE helped the student teachers to be actively involved in sharing each other's field experiences. He suggested that higher learning institutions should use appropriate new learning technologies such as MOODLE to support language learning with the best content possible. Similarly, Boopathiraj and Chellamani (2015) examined the level of satisfaction using the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) among 30 post graduate student teachers in their Research Methods in Education course offered online. They found that PG Student teachers were very interested in learning

through the MOODLE. They suggested that the university should extend the e-platform for all other courses in teacher education programme. Additionally, Kalogiannakis (2015) studied the use of the Moodle in secondary education in Greece. He interviewed students on their perception of the effectiveness of MOODLE in the submission of written projects, the receipt of relevant feedback, facilitating collaboration, and open discussions. Kalogiannakis found that the students were able to familiarize with the platform and benefit from its incorporation to the educational process. He suggested that MOODLE platform are important tool for learning from the educational and technological point of view.

Affirmative Speech Acts

Although the topic of emotions and their relation to language and language use has not been central in linguistic studies of the past, it has not stayed out of the picture altogether either. For example, Bloom (1993a, 1993b) did research on the question of how language is acquired in the second year of life in relation to the system of affect expression that is already in place at that time. She dedicated in the figure by the arrows directed at cognition, which represent the input from different sources, including emotions.

Carretero *et al*. (2014) explored the presence of expressive speech acts in a corpus of e-forum history logs derived from the online collaborative writing activity of three groups of undergraduate and postgraduate students in a tertiary education setting. The study included qualitative and quantitative analyses, which covered the similarities and differences, found across the sub corpora corresponding to each of the three groups of students involved, in terms of subtypes of expressive and their linguistic realisations. The results suggest that expressives play a crucial role as rapport building devices in the online interaction, smoothing and complementing transactional language. Ronan (2015) surveyed different types of expressive speech acts based on three categories of spoken Irish English of different levels of formality: broadcast discussion, classroom discussion and face-to-face interaction. The data were

extracted from the pragmatically tagged SPICE-Ireland corpus, a member of the International Corpus of English—family of corpora. The aim of the current study was to offer an overview and classification of expressives in the corpus material. Eight distinct subcategories of expressive speech acts are identified in this study. These categories are agreement, disagreement, volition, offering thanks, apologies, exclamations, expressions of sorrow and greetings.

Handayani (2015) described kinds and forms of expressive speech act in *Hannah Montana Session 1.* The data source was utterances, which contain expressive speech acts in the film *Hannah Montana Session 1.* The researcher used observation method and noting technique in collecting the data. In analyzing the data, descriptive qualitative method was used. The research findings show that there were ten kinds of expressive speech acts in *Hannah Montana Session 1*, namely: expressing apology, expressing thanks, expressing sympathy, expressing attitudes, expressing greeting, expressing wishes, expressing joy, expressing pain, expressing likes, and expressing dislikes.

Participants and Methods

The study involved 78 OUT students randomly chosen from their willingness and availability to take part in the study during official visits/consultations to their centres in 2016/17 academic year. This randomization was irrespective of sex, age group, or year of study. The researcher developed an attitudinal inventory of expressive utterances and the students were asked to indicate whether they always, sometimes, rarely or have never used each of those. Some of those utterances were of positive evaluation to Moodle platform while others were negative. Having filled the questionnaire, the respondents gave them to colleagues who acted like research assistants to the researcher of the current study. The responses were posted and run into SPSS software for frequencies of occurrences. The responses were put into thematic categories for analysis.

The Findings

Respondents Profile

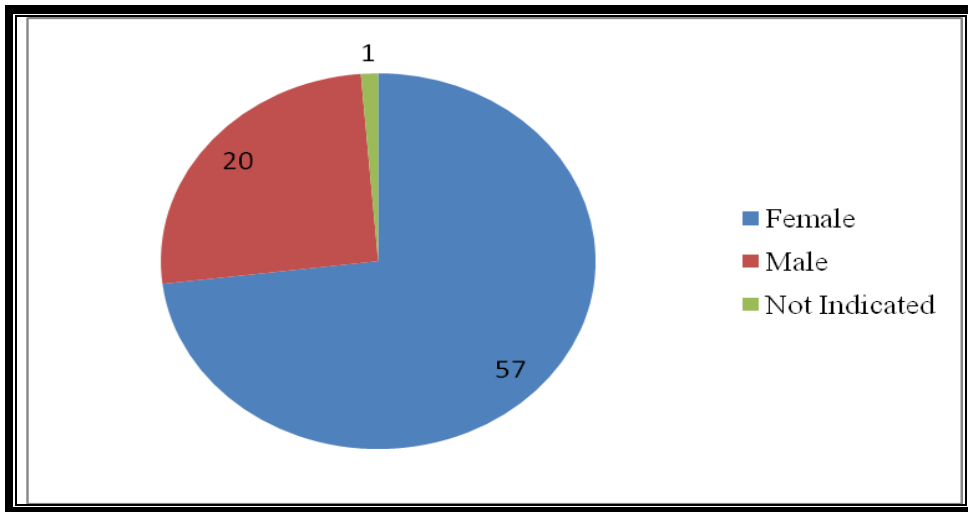The respondents included men and women as indicated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Respondents' Distribution by Sex

Figure 1 above shows that the majority 57(73%) were females while the rest 20(25.5%). except one (1.3%) who did not indicate his/her sex, were males. In other words, there were more female respondents who were willing and proved cooperative in filling up and returning the questionnaire.

Knowledge of Moodle

We were first interested to find out whether the respondents felt they know the use of moodle platform. Their responses are summarized in Figure 2.
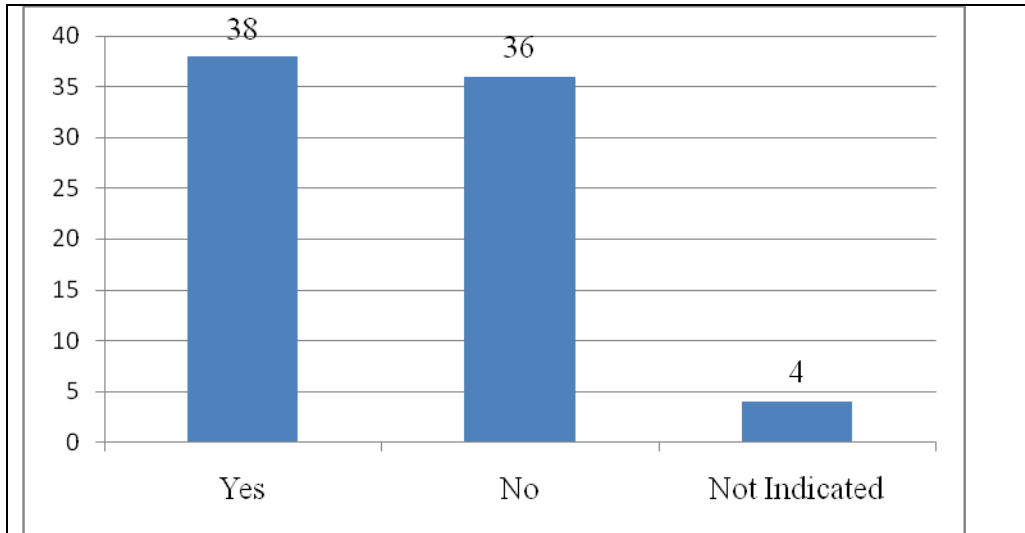
Figure 2: Respondents' Perceived Knowledge of Moodle Platform

As it has been shown in figure 2 above, there was almost equal number between the respondents who felt that they knew the Moodle and those who felt they did not. In other words, 38 (49%) respondents felt they knew the Moodle while 36 (46%) admitted their ignorance of this educational media. Only 4 (5%) did not indicate their position.

The Respondents' Attitudinal Expressives towards Moodle Platform

These were divided into two categories; one communicating affirmation and another communicating aversion.

Affirmative Expressives

Affirmative expressives refer to a cluster of speech acts that communicates the assertion that something exists or is true; they serve as statements or propositions that are declared true. In other words they serve as confirmation or ratification of the truth or validity of a prior judgment or decision (*www.dictionary .com /browse/ affirmation*). In this study, the respondents were asked to agree and

rate the extent to which they have used a given set of emotive sentences or phrases that were showing their affirmation or positive appraisal of Moodle platform. They were also asked to provide their own additional emotive sentences and/or phrases beyond the list provided. Table 1 summarizes their responses.

Table 1: Respondents' Affirmative Expressives

Expressive	Responses			
	I always say this	I sometimes say this	I rarely say this	I have never said this
I feel lucky that I know how to use it	21 (26.6%)	13 (16.5%)	11 (13.9%)	9 (11.4%)
This is delightful	14(17.7%)	16(20.3%)	19(24.1%)	4(5.1%)
Moodle is eloquent and vivid	21(26.6%)	8(10.1%)	14(17.7%)	9(11.4%)
It is illustrative	20(25.3%)	13(16.5%)	12(15.2%)	8(10.1%)
I can be anywhere and study	16(20.3%)	16(20.3%)	12(15.2%)	11(13.9%)
Ooh how wonderful this technology is	15 (19%)	13(16.5%)	15(19%)	11(13.9%)
I love you my Moodle!	17(21.5%)	16(20.3%)	8(10.1%)	13(16.5%)

According to Table 1, the self-referring outburst expressive 'I love it' dominated all other expressives by 24 (30.4%) and 11 (13.9%) respondents indicating they always used it and they sometimes used it, respectively. The affirmation that the respondents felt lucky to

have known how to use Moodle and in appraising Moodle as eloquent and vivid which was indicated to be 'always' was said by 21 (about 27%) respondents. Even though the former was indicated to be sometimes said by 13(16.5%) unlike the latter, which had only 8 (10.1%) respondents indicating the same. However, some of the affirmative expressives were not as popularly used. The least used in the category was an interjective expressive, '*Ooh how wonderful this technology is'*, which was indicated as being always said by 15 (19%) and sometimes used by 13 (16.5%) respondents. This was followed by those who affirmed its being useful in making learning accessible anywhere by a total of 32 (40.6%) respondents for its being always and sometimes used), then by an expressive that personified Moodle which is '*How I love you Moodle'* (by 33 (41.9%) for its being used always and sometimes. Therefore, generally, one can say Moodle was more affirmed or positively evaluated given the number of respondents who indicated their affirmative responses.

Summary of Affirmative Expressive Sub-typology

We further sub-classified affirmative expressives into four speech acts which are affirming, evoking, thanking and commending, the differing extents of being used is illustrated in Figure 3.
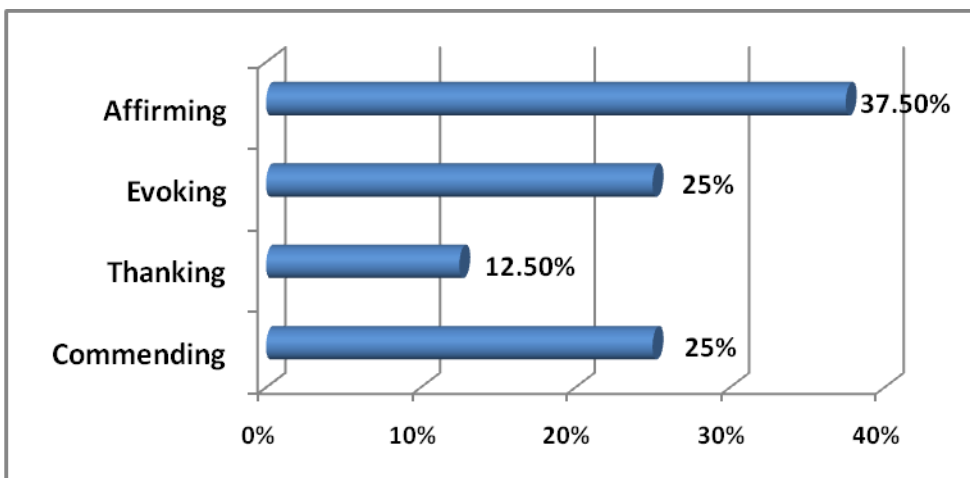

Figure 3: Types of Affirmative Speech Acts as used by the Respondents

Figure 1 above is highly telling of the extent to which the affirmative responses are diverse and how various the magnitudes of use are for each type. The most dominant affirmative speech act subcategory is affirming (used by 37.5%) followed by evoking and commending each of which was used by 25% of respondents. The least used subcategory was thanking, which was used by 12.5% of the respondents who affirmed Moodle platform. Briefly, we can say that there was employment of various forms of affirming Moodle platform so much that we can safely say the affirmation was plural and heterogeneous.

Aversive Expressives
Having explored the respondents who used language of affirmation to register their positive attitude towards Moodle platform, we also found that there were those that used aversive language to register their negative attitude towards Moodle platform. Their responses are summarized in table 2 below.

Table 2: Aversive Utterances towards Moodle

	Responses			
Expressive:	I always say this	I sometimes say this	I rarely say this	i have never said this
This thing is pathetic	1(1.3%)	10 (12.7)	3(3.8%)	9(11.4%)
Why did they have to bring this!	1(1.3%)	2(2.5%)	7(8.9%)	13(16.5%)
This is waste of time	4(5.1%)	4(5.1%)	5(6.3%)	10(12.7%)
Damn it!	4(5.1)	6(7.6%)	4(5.1%)	9(11.4%)
This is an ugly business	7(8.9%)	4(5.1%)	12(15.2%)	0
What a waste of money and time on this!	1(1.3%)	5(6.3%)	4(5.1%)	13(16.5%)

I hate online class discussions!	4(5.1%)	5(6.3%)	4(5.1%)	10(12.7%)
This heartless teacher called Moodle!	5(6.3%)	2(2.5%)	5(6.3%)	11(13.9%)
I regret joining OUT because of Moodle!	2(2.5%)	2(2.5%)	8(10.1%)	11(13.9%)

As indicated earlier on, only a few of the respondents negatively registered their dislike of Moodle. Table 2 above bears testimony to that observation. While the list is as long as the list of the affirmations, the list of aversive responses shows that, the responses are all in single digits for 'I always say this' and 'I sometimes say this' columns. The relatively dominance in this category is a spontaneous outcry '*This thing is pathetic'* which totals 11(14%) if we combine 'I always say this' and 'I sometimes say this', which is very few.

This was also similar in extents with and evaluative outcry, '*This is an ugly business'* which has 11 (combining the 7 (8.9%) and 4(5.1%) respondents who said they always said that and they sometimes said that, respectively) of the respondents with similar results. The least used in this subcategory is a rhetorical question, '*Why did they have to bring this*?' which was responded to by 3 (3.8%) people who indicated to have always and sometimes said it to register their dislike of Moodle platform. *I regret joining OUT because of Moodle*! is a self-blaming aversive remark which ranked second from unpopularity. To this remark, only 4 (5%) either indicated to have always said it or sometimes said it. Overall, few respondents who registered their dislike of Moodle platforms when compared to the others used the affirmative remarks.

Summary of Aversive Expressive Sub-typologies
We were also interested to probe further into what specific speech acts were employed by the respondents to registered their dislike of Moodle. We found three differing magnitudes of use of which are
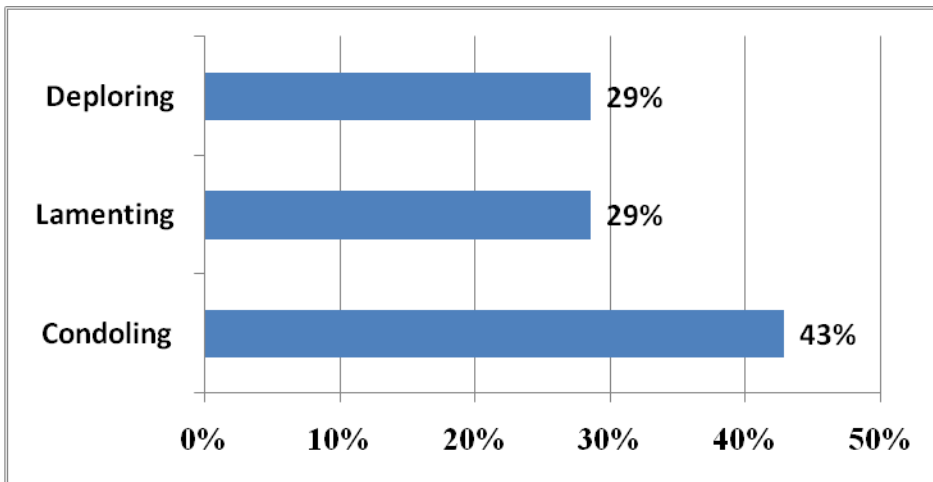
illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Figure 6: Aversive Speech Acts as Used by the Respondents

As per the findings in Figure 6, condoling predominated with 43% using aversive sentences and clauses to register their dislike of the Moodle. Lamenting and deploring were both second by equal number of respondents (29% each) using them to register their dislike of Moodle platform. Therefore, the variation was rather big between the last two aversive speech acts and the condoling one. Overall, the sub-types of the aversive speech acts are as few as the respondents who used aversive language to evaluate the Moodle negatively.

Conclusion

The findings have revealed that the Moodle users are not unanimous when it comes to accepting/appreciating it. However, the majority used affirmative language showing that they have positive attitude towards the technology. While it could not be empirically established, there is the likelihood that those who admitted to be ignorant of the Moodle were the ones whose evaluative language was aversive while those who indicated that they know how to use the Moodle might be the ones whose remarks were affirmative. From this end, the recommendation proposed to all distance-learning institutions is to

train/orient all stakeholders thoroughly on how moodle platform operates in order to maximize efficiency of the platform but also motivate and encouraged users who will then become ambassadors of the platform and of ODL institutions at large.

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