

ABSTRACT

Contextualizing Jamaican Twitter Discourse

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This research examines the main linguistic conventions in the Jamaican Twitter community and the ways in which tweeters use the conventions to convey and negotiate meaning in their tweets. Data collection for this research was carried out in two phases over a period of 2 years. In the end, over 1, 500 tweets were manually collected, organized and stored in a database for analysis.

The results show that of the 18 conventions identified within the data, the most frequently occurring conventions are: (i) Acronyms, (ii) Ellipsis, (iii) Capitalization (CAPS), (iv) Iconic words and (v) Hashtags. These five conventions are analyzed using five conversations and a discussion as the units of analysis.

The analysis reveals that the conventions serve as contextualization cues which indicate the way in which a tweeter's meaning is to be interpreted. In this written, online platform, these cues act as gap-fillers which insert the contextual information which is available in face-to-face communication, but not accessible in a written medium like Twitter.

Thus, the research shows the ways in which communication which occurs outside of the canonical situation of utterance employs linguistic conventions to substitute for the missing contextual information needed to interpret meaning among interlocutors.

Keywords: André Kemoy Bernard; Twitter; Context; Contextualization cues; Jamaica.