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Sociopsychological Aspects of WhatsApp Interaction: Student Views on Transformations in Linguistic Expression and Educational Dynamics

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Abstract:

Given that the development and spread of new communication technologies require further research on the impact of innovations on language expression in written and oral contexts; this research can be an example of encouraging research on the influence of mobile communications as much as possible, because new mobile communications are used more for written expression than for oral communication. On the one hand, social networks enrich communication and expand the ways of social relations, and the question arises of how online communication with the help of digital tools such as Messenger and WhatsApp affects changes in the linguistic context and social relations. Instead of classic punctuation marks, there is a wide variety of marks that enable successful digital communication, but many experts see the problem that communicating through picture smileys can lead to negative changes in language expression. The paper starts with the hypothesis that the use of the digital tool WhatsApp changes habits and ways of communication, which can affect changes in written and oral expression. The research used an online questionnaire that was conducted in the period from May 20 to the end of June 2021/2022, years. This is a satisfactory result because it answers the question of awareness of the importance of using correct written and oral language for their profession. Although the research included students studying different fields of study, no differences in opinions were found. The research proved that most students consider it important or extremely important to research the impact of new technologies on language expression (oral and written) for their own profession.

Keywords: didactic challenges, WhatsApp communication, language expression, social relations

1. Introductory remarks

Media should not primarily be viewed as a technical tool, but as an aesthetic and symbolic material for selfexpression and communication. Young people are finding it increasingly difficult to deal with the challenges of mass communications, and the social depression and isolation of the individual with an obvious lack of empathy is becoming more and more noticeable (Schrob, 2005; Hurrelmann, 2007; Schäffer, 2007). German media pedagogues analyze six functions of the media: 1) communicative, 2) cognitive, 3) social-political, 4) cultural, 5) educational (refers to transferring communication between participants in the educational process) and 6) socialhumanistic (Bergmann), 2005; Neuss, 2006). All these functions can be analyzed in the educational process during the exchange of communications (codes and signs) with which all participants in education are involved in assuming or preserving (certain) roles in society. But, the development and spread of new communication technologies requires further research on the impact of innovations on language expression in written and oral contexts (Miliša, Tolić, Vertovšek, 2010). Considering that on social networks the focus is not on the content but on the message itself, many scientific studies implicitly indicate the danger of a superficial way of communication that can damage the culture of linguistic expression and interpersonal communication (Günthner, 2009). Using pictorial smileys in online communication replaces the description of feelings and, has become the style and habit of contemporary communication of the young generation. Given that mobile applications enable a quick exchange of information between communication partners, it is necessary to be aware that online communication can have

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an ambivalent role (Kerres, 2001). (Hug, 2001; Retter, 2002). The question is whether WhatsApp affects the quality of communication? With the advent of new media, written media are increasingly used in those areas of communication that were previously reserved for spoken language, such as Skype or video chat. The most famous communication tool used today is WhatsApp; and whose communication resembles a chat in which written communication dominates more than oral communication (Storrer, 2014). Dialogic exchange in this type of communication is often spontaneous because it occurs at the same time, but not in the same real place, but in virtual space. WhatsApp can therefore be classified as a synchronous - medial written form of communication whose written interaction is close to a dialogical conversation. In this way, interaction between communication partners can be achieved. But, this interactivity requires the use of new linguistic and graphic symbols (such as the use of smileys). WhatsApp messages are often characterized by simple syntactic language structures, and the result of the simplification of expressive language means are pragmatically more complex structures. Specific forms of signs such as acronyms and smileys appear very often in the practice of new digital communication. Precisely because of this, there are many linguistic differences that can be observed between written and spoken expression (Beisswenger, 2000). Sometimes a recording of a WhatsApp speech can be misinterpreted and can lead to a change of language because it sounds strange, unnatural, or inappropriate. It can also lead to misinterpretation of communication between partners. Since spoken language is much more dynamic and immediate, written texts need to be revised and thought through more thoroughly before use than spoken language. Considering that written language is often more articulate and sophisticated than spoken language in digital communications is essential to be aware of the didactic challenges of WhatsApp communication and its implications that can affect everyday life and relationships. It is from this that the motivation for the work came from the research problem that using the digital tool WhatsApp can change social habits and ways of communication, which can affect changes in written and oral expression. According to WhatsApp forecasts for Croatia, it is predicted that by 2025 the number of WhatsApp users will increase from the current 2,010,523 to 2,164,391, which is slightly less than half of the total number of mobile subscribers in Croatia, which currently number 4,546,464 (the number of subscribers is also expected to increase by 2025 increase to 4,671,315) Also, in the same period, an increase in smartphone users is expected from the current 77.8% to 87.6%. The percentage of WhatsApp users in Croatia experienced a sudden increase: of the total number of mobile subscribers in 2018, 52.6% of users used WhatsApp, in 2019 this number grew to 65.8%, then in 2020 to 69.2%, in 2021 to 73.4%, and in the current in 2008 it was 77.8%. It is predicted that in 2024 WhatsApp will be used by 87.6% of the total population of mobile subscribers (Infobip, 2022). Thus, the continuation of the trend of growth in the popularity of WhatsApp among users is visible, which affects the social and communication changes discussed in this paper.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research objectives and work hypotheses

The aim of the research is to raise awareness among undergraduate humanities students at the Department of German Language and Literature in Split and undergraduate social studies students at Libertas University about the didactic challenges of WhatsApp communication and its implications for everyday life and relationships. Three work hypotheses were formed:

H1: It is expected that the use of the WhatsApp tool among students is very high because of the low price H2: By using the digital tool of WhatsApp, habits and ways of communication change, and there are changes in written and oral expression.

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H3: It is expected that there will be differences in the perception of the use and influence of WhatsApp between students of the Faculty of Philosophy (FF) and students of International Relations and International Business (MO&MP).

2.2. Respondents

The participants in the research were undergraduate humanities students at the Department of German Language and Literature in Split and undergraduate social studies students at Libertas University, majoring in International Relations and International Business, in order to determine any statistically significant differences.

2.3. Statistical analysis

Descriptive analysis of relevant data is summarized in N values and percentages (%). In order to determine the differences in individual variables (nominal scale) between two independent groups of students of different studies (FF and MO&MP), a non-parametric chi-square test (χ 2) was used and the p value and the significance threshold of p<.05 were presented. Data analysis was performed using Statistica 12 software. The research used an online questionnaire comprising 29 open-and-closed questions. A five (5) point Likert scale was used for the statement of agreement. The online questionnaire was set up on Google Classroom, where respondents could fill it in. The research was conducted in the period from May 23 to the end of June 2021/2022, years.

3. Results and discussion

A total of 123 students of the Faculty of Philosophy (FF), University of Split (30.2%) and International Relations and Business (MO&MP), Libertas University, Zagreb (69.8%) participated in the research. A total of 30.2% of students study German language and literature at FF Split, while 40.5% study International Relations at Libertas University in Zagreb and 29.4% International Business also at Libertas University in Zagreb. Most students attend the first year of undergraduate studies (39.7%), then the third year (34.1%) and the rest the second year (26.2%). Of the total number of respondents, 68.3% are women, 30.2% are men, and 1.6% opt for other. Most of the respondents live in the city (74.6%), while a smaller part lives in the countryside/suburban area (23%) and only 2.4% of them live on the (semi)island.

Table 1. Descriptive data of respondents (N=123)

	Undergraduate studies	N	%	In total (%)
Faculty of Philosophy (FF)	1st year	8	21.6	_
	2nd year	12	32.4	37 (30.2)
	3rd year	17	46.0	
International Relations and International Business (MO&MP)	1st year	42	48.8	
	2nd year	20	23.2	86 (69.8)
	3rd year	24	28.0	-

(source: authors)

As for the purpose of using WhatsApp, the research results showed that most students joined WhatsApp to reduce the cost of calling and sending SMS (54%), 42.9% because others use it, and 3.2% because of distraction. in free time. Most research participants use WhatsApp for messaging (77%), 15.1% for sharing information, 7.9% for sharing images and videos. When comparing the answers of the students of the Faculty of Philosophy and International Relations and International Business (Table 2), there is no significant difference in the way of using the WhatsApp tool (χ 2=3.41; p=0.18; p>.05). Students use WhatsApp frequently, 45.2% use it 20 times a day,

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38.9% 50 times a day, 9.5% 100 times a day and 6.3% over 100 times a day. If we compare the frequency of using the WhatsApp tool regarding the field of study (Table 2), there is no significant difference between the students of the Faculty of Philosophy and International Relations and International Business (χ 2=6.61; p=0.08; p>.05). The research results showed that 65.1% of students add close friends, 11.9% family, 15.1% acquaintances and 7.9% colleagues to their WhatsApp list. If we compare the students of the Faculty of Philosophy and International Relations and International Business (Table 2), the chi-square test shows that there is no significant difference between the students (χ 2=5.42; p=0.14; p>.05).

Table 2. Differences in the frequency and manner of using the WhatsApp tool

		FF Split (N=37)	MO&MP (N=86)
	Correspondence (N,%)	33 (89.2)	65 (75.7)
Method of use	Information sharing (N,%)	2 (5.4)	15 (17.4)
S	Sharing pictures and videos (N,%)	2 (5.4)	6 (6.9)
	20 times a day	15 (40.5)	36 (41.8)
Frequency of use	50 times a day	21 (56.7)	34 (39.5)
	100 times a day	1 (2.8)	10 (11.6)
	> 100 times a day	0	6 (7.1)
WhatsAppfrien	Close friends	30 (81.1)	57 (66.2)
ds	Colleagues from work	0	9 (10.4)
	Family	2 (5.4)	9 (10.4)
_	Acquaintances	5 (13.5)	11 (13.0)

(source: authors)

Students assessed their agreement with some statements related to the use of the WhatsApp application, which are presented in Table 3. Most students believe that their relationships with people are not limited to WhatsApp communication (31.7%). Also, most do not agree that because of correspondence on WhatsApp, I often stretch and pay off obligations (31.7%), and that they are not dependent on WhatsApp (42.9%). In addition, students see the benefit of the application and believe that membership in WhatsApp groups helps them when studying/doing work (40.5%). This is a good indication that students prefer collaborative learning. Thus, Table 3 shows the results of the survey on the agreement with certain statements for the use of WhatsApp.

Table 3. Agreement with statements related to the use of the WhatsApp application (N=123)

Claim	I completely disagree	I disagree	I neither agree nor disagree	I agree	I completely agree
My relationships with people are reduced to WhatsApp communication	31.7%	25.4%	27.8%	7.9%	7.1%
Due to correspondence on WhatsApp, I often stretch and pay off obligations	31.7%	25.4%	23.0%	12.7%	7.1%
I am addicted to WhatsApp	42.9%	15.9%	18.3%	14.3%	8.7%

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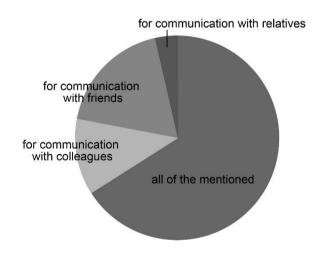
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Being a member of WhatsApp groups helps me when studying/doing work	5.6%	6.3%	20.6%	27.0%	40.5%
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(source: authors)

Thus, Table 3 shows the results regarding agreement with certain statements related to the use of the WhatsApp application. 42.9% of students completely disagree that they are addicted to the use of WhatsApp, which is a good result because it may indicate the fact that students prefer live contact and communication more often. Data of 40.5%, i.e. less than half of the students, are of the opinion that membership in WhatsApp groups helps them when studying/doing work. This is the data that gives feedback that most students prefer collaborative learning and that perhaps the didactic challenge of using the WhatsApp tool should be purposefully used in certain teaching tasks. As for the actual use of the type of communication via WhatsApp, almost all students who participated in the research use mobile communication most often (94.4%) (Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber, etc.), 4% of them more often use Internet communication (E- mail, chat, etc.) while 1.6% of students answered they do not know which type of (multi)media communication they use most often. Most of the respondents use WhatsApp for communication with colleagues, and communication with friends and relatives (Picture 1). When using the WhatsApp tool, research participants mostly use text messages (64.3%), only 0.8% use voice messages, while 34.9% use both voice and text messages. Figure 1 indicates this information. 6% of students answer they do not know what type of (multi)media communication they use most often. Picture 1 indicates this information.

Picture 1. The purpose of using the WhatsApp application



(source: authors)

When using text messages via the WhatsApp tool, 34.1% of students use letters of the alphabet and numbers, 2.4% use emojis (smileys), 1.6% use pictorial symbols, and 61.9% use all the above. When students were asked to estimate which purpose of sentence, they use most when using WhatsApp text messages, the majority stated they use declarative sentences (49.2%), 5.6% interrogative sentences, 1.6% exclamatory sentences and 43.7% use all the above. Respondents most often use simple sentences (50.8%), followed by complex ones (8.7%) and 40.5% mostly use all the above. Given that the success of communication is influenced by the different opinions and attitudes of the interlocutors on the same topic, the temperament of the interlocutors, their current mood, speaking habits and communication experience, this information is satisfactory. Further, when students were asked for their opinion if they think that using the WhatsApp tool changes habits and ways of communication. A total of 57.9% of students of both majors believe that using the digital tool WhatsApp changes habits and ways of communication, both in written and oral aspects of communication. 23.8% of them believe it refers only to written expression, while 6.3% believe that it refers only to oral expression. Only 11.9% of students are of the opinion

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that habits and ways of communication do not change in this way. In examining the differences in the perception of changing habits and ways of communication, we compared students of German language and literature, FF Split, and International Relations and International Business, Libertas University (Table 4). Chi-square test shows that there is no significant difference in students' perception (γ2=4.38; p=0.22; p>.05). A total of 57.9% of students of both majors believe that using the digital tool WhatsApp changes habits and ways of communication, both in written and oral aspects of communication. 23.8% of them believe it refers only to written expression, while 6.3% believe that it refers only to oral expression. Only 11.9% of students are of the opinion that habits and ways of communication do not change in this way. In examining the differences in the perception of changing habits and ways of communication, we compared students of German language and literature, FF Split, and International Relations and International Business, Libertas University (Table 4). Chi-square test shows that there is no significant difference in students' perception ($\chi 2=4.38$; p=0.22; p>.05). A total of 57.9% of students of both majors believe that using the digital tool WhatsApp changes habits and ways of communication, both in written and oral aspects of communication. 23.8% of them believe it refers only to written expression, while 6.3% believe that it refers only to oral expression. Only 11.9% of students are of the opinion that habits and ways of communication do not change in this way. In examining the differences in the perception of changing habits and ways of communication, we compared students of German language and literature, FF Split, and International Relations and International Business, Libertas University (Table 4). Chi-square test shows that there is no significant difference in students' perception (χ2=4.38; p=0.22; p>.05). 9% of students of both majors believe that using the digital tool WhatsApp changes habits and ways of communication, both in written and oral aspects of communication. 23.8% of them believe it refers only to written expression, while 6.3% believe that it refers only to oral expression. Only 11.9% of students are of the opinion that habits and ways of communication do not change in this way. In examining the differences in the perception of changing habits and ways of communication, we compared students of German language and literature, FF Split, and International Relations and International Business, Libertas University (Table 4). Chi-square test shows that there is no significant difference in students' perception (χ 2=4.38; p=0.22; p>.05). 9% of students of both majors believe that using the digital tool WhatsApp changes habits and ways of communication, both in written and oral aspects of communication. 23.8% of them believe it refers only to written expression, while 6.3% believe that it refers only to oral expression. Only 11.9% of students are of the opinion that habits and ways of communication do not change in this way. In examining the differences in the perception of changing habits and ways of communication, we compared students of German language and literature, FF Split, and International Relations and International Business, Libertas University (Table 4). Chi-square test shows that there is no significant difference in students' perception (χ 2=4.38; p=0.22; p>.05). 3% believe that it refers only to oral expression.

Table 4. Perception of changing habits and ways of communication using the WhatsApp tool

Variable	FF Split (N=37)	MO&MP (N=86)
Written expression (N,%)	8 (21.5)	22 (25.5)
Oral expression (N,%)	5 (13.5)	3 (3,4)
Written and oral expression (N,%)	20 (54.0)	52 (60.4)
Habits and ways of communication do not change (N,%)	4 (11)	9 (13.7)

(source: authors)

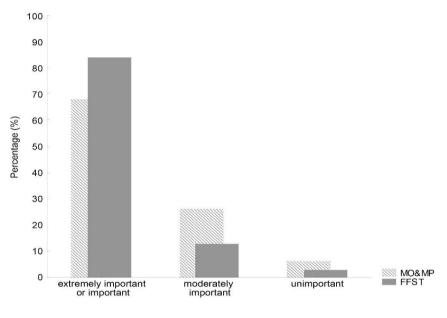
Students also often use bilingual language (83.3%) (eg English and German words and sentences together with Croatian words). In examining the differences in bilingual language use between students of German language and literature (84% use bilingual language) and International Relations and International Business (82% use bilingual language), there is no significant difference between the two majors (χ 2=0.03; p =0.86; p>.05). Most research participants believe it is important or extremely important (73.8%) to research the impact of new technologies on language expression (oral and written) for their own profession. 22.2% of them consider it moderately important, while 4% consider these activities unimportant. The difference between the students of

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German Language and Literature and International Relations and International Business in the importance's perception of researching the impact of new technologies is not significant (χ^2 =4.75; p=0.09; p>.05) (Picture 2).

Picture 2. Students' opinion on researching the impact of new technologies on language expression (oral and written) for their own profession



(source: authors)

Students of both majors were also asked whether they think that the use of pictorial smileys can lead to negative changes in language expression (Table 5). Students are divided in their opinion. 36.5% of them believe it cannot lead, while 36.5% of them believe it can lead to changes. 27% of them are not sure. If we compare the students of German language and literature and International Relations and International Business, there are no significant differences on this issue (χ 2=2.06; p=0.35; p>.05). Also, the students answered whether the use of innovative technologies can lead to a superficial way of communicating, damage the culture of language expression and interpersonal communication (Table 5). 73% of them believe it can influence, 15.1% that it cannot, while 11.9% are not sure.

Table 5. Perception of changes in the way of communication and language expression because of the use of new technologies

Variable	Answer	FF Split (N=37)	MO&MP (N=86)
Can the use of pictorial smileys lead to negative changes in language expression.	YES (N,%)	16 (43.2)	30 (34.8)
	NO (N,%)	14 (37.8)	29 (33.4)
	I DON'T KNOW (N,%)	7 (19.0)	27 (31.8)
Can the use of innovative technologies lead to a	YES (N,%)	30 (81.0%)	61 (70.9)
superficial way of communicating, damage the culture of linguistic expression and interpersonal	NO (N,%)	3 (8.0%)	13 (15.1)
communication.	I DON'T KNOW (N,%)	4 (11.0%)	12 (14.0)

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In accordance with the answers to the previous questions, the opinions of the students and whether WhatsApp communication is a bridge or/and a limit to the development of linguistic and cultural identity. Thus, 21.4% of students believe that this form of communication represents a bridge, 11.9% of them believe it represents a border, while 41.3% of them believe it represents both a bridge and a border. Even 25.4% of students do not have an expressed opinion about it and do not know. The students were asked whether they use post sticks in WhatsApp communication. Author Vrljić (2007)² indicates that poštapalice are semantically empty words that are used in the language with no real need and their only role is to provide the speaker with a free moment to find a suitable word or thought with which to continue his speech. Vrljić (2007) believes that such linguistic elements have no syntactic or logical connection with the sentence and do not express any specific meaning and are therefore redundant. Because of this, post-postals in speech give the impression of the speaker's indecision, hesitation, withdrawal and stuttering (Vrljić, 2007). These are the reasons postmans have no place in a linguistically correct statement. It is extremely important that everyone who makes a public appearance knows this, since the use of letter-sticks can never be a sign of good style (Vrljić, 2007). The research showed that with 43, 7% of students answer they use some postcodes in WhatsApp communication. Some nicknames that the students mentioned were: btw, app, pozz, bvb, rip, fkt (fakat), so that, like, ono, kužis, kak', kaj da, kaj really, brutal, ae, so, whatever is warning. According to the same author, Vrljić (2007), who believes that sometimes the use of certain post cards gives the impression that the speaker is asking and the interlocutor is answering. However, it is a monologue in which mail sticks are used, which only leave the appearance of a dialogue. These are the most common compound verbs: is it, is it so, if I can say so, if I may say, etc. And these verbs reflect the inability of the speaker to find the right word (Vrljić, 2007; 62). Precisely because slangs reflect the inability of the speaker to find the right word, there is a possibility that their more frequent use can lead to negative changes in written and oral expression in online communication. The same author Vrljić (2007) also warns that losing meaning can also be observed in some loanwords from the English language, the use of which in the Croatian language can be so frequent that they become empty meanings. The research wanted to examine the opinion of students about the use of WhatsApp tools in higher education teaching by teachers. Although, today many teachers in higher education use WhatsApp as a way of communication between students. Students are divided in their assessments of whether using WhatsApp is a disadvantage or an advantage. We list some advantages and disadvantages (Table 6).

Table 6. Advantages and disadvantages of using WhatsApp as a means of communication between students and teachers in higher education

Advantages	Disadvantages		
Faster communication	Unprofessional		
Quick answers	Other means of communication are ignored		
It's free and we can all relate	The business relationship is lost		
Quick exchange of information	Too personal and no 'working hours'		
Simpler and faster, all information reaches all students	Misunderstandings can easily occur because the gesticulation and tone of the person cannot be seen		
Always available	The professor-teacher relationship is being broken		
Less formality, but as an advantage because people communicate more relaxed	Lack of formality in the relationship		
(source: authors)			

²Stojan Vrljić (2007), Postmen in the Croatian language; Language: magazine for the culture of the Croatian literary language, Vol. 54 No. 2, 2007

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Table 6 indicates that students have a divided opinion regarding the use of new digital tools in higher education teaching. Given that the same generation of respondents went through the time of the Covid-19 pandemic and had the opportunity to meet and/or use various ways of digital communication; this information was to be expected. On the one hand, as stated in the introductory notes of the paper, digital media can represent a bridge in communication, while there can be limits in communication in higher education teaching. Although today there are many well-founded scientific studies on the influence of digital media on consciousness, the behavior of the young generation, there are also those studies that implicitly point to the danger of disrupting true interpersonal communication (Müller, 2022).

4. Conclusion

Multimedia communication has become the most effective form of communication today. When communication is created through media, then the use of media becomes part of the educational process. Media communication should become part of that process. Communication skills mean the ability to understand, give and receive information in different situations, using the media appropriately. Given that the development and spread of new communication technologies requires further research on the impact of innovations on language expression in written and oral contexts; this research can be an example of encouraging research on the influence of mobile communications as much as possible, because new mobile communications are used more for written expression than for oral communication. And this can be a warning that there are certain mailers that can disrupt the written culture of expression. This paper had examined the students' opinion whether the new use of language through digital applications affects the written language? Despite the changed spelling caused by social networks, students know that it is necessary to use sentences correctly and form them grammatically, but the more frequent use of new ways of communication (such as WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, etc.) often happens, they also communicate with symbolic messages and this can also represent dangers that may have negative implications for the standard language. This research was based on three affirmative hypotheses: H1: It is expected that the use of the WhatsApp tool among students is very high; H2: By using the digital tool of WhatsApp, habits and ways of communication change, and there are changes in written and oral expression and H3: It is expected that there will be differences in the perception of the use and influence of WhatsApp between students of the Faculty of Philosophy (FF) and students of International Relations and International Business (MO&MP). The first two hypotheses were accepted, but the third hypothesis was rejected. Hence the respondents know that using the digital tool WhatsApp as a means of communication can change language expression, especially in an oral context. Since the frequency of using such a tool is very high; however, the research proved that there are no statistically significant differences in the perception of the use and influence of WhatsApp between students of the Faculty of Philosophy (FF) and students of International Relations and International Business (MO&MP). The research proved that most students consider it important or extremely important (73.8%) to research the impact of new technologies on language expression (oral and written) for their own profession. This is a satisfactory result because it answers the question of awareness of the importance of using correct written and oral language for their profession. Although the research included students studying different fields of study, no differences in opinions were found. Students know somewhat that the use of innovative technologies can lead to a superficial way of communicating, it can damage the culture of language expression and interpersonal communication. All the above justifies the thematic issue of the work that the development and spread of new communication technologies requires continuous further research on the impact of innovations on language expression in written and oral contexts. It is important to be aware of the issue so that didactic innovations could be reshaped for purposeful use not only in private life but also for the improvement of higher education teaching.

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