

Investigating Cyberbullying through Forensic linguistics: Evidence from Iraqi Online Platform

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates cyberbullying as a form of digital aggression through the framework of forensic linguistics, using evidence drawn from Iraqi online platforms. It addresses a gap in existing study, where cyberbullying has been studied mainly from psychological perspectives, while its linguistic construction and evidential value have received limited attention, particularly in Iraqi digital contexts. The study aims to examine how cyberbullying is constructed through lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic patterns, how culturally embedded expressions such as Iraqi dialects, religious language, and political identity discourse intensify online aggression, and how forensic linguistic techniques can identify recurrent harassment patterns and stylistic consistency. A mixed-method design was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. A purposive sample of approximately 1,000 publicly available social media texts produced between 2022 and 2024 was analyzed using frequency analysis, discourse analysis, lexical profiling, and stylometric comparison. The findings reveal that cyberbullying in Iraqi online discourse operates as a structured linguistic phenomenon rather than spontaneous emotional conflict. Identity-based insults, dehumanizing expressions, threats, and strategies of humiliation were found to function as systematic mechanisms of digital violence. The results also show that verbal abuse was the most frequent form of aggression, followed by threats and sarcasm-based humiliation. Culturally embedded expressions related to honor, sectarianism, religion, and political identity were found to intensify the emotional impact of cyberbullying. In addition, forensic linguistic analysis demonstrated that repetitive linguistic patterns can serve as indicators of sustained harassment and possible authorship continuity. The study concludes that cyberbullying in Iraq is not only a social problem but also a linguistic and forensic issue, with implications for cybercrime investigation, digital safety policy, education, and legal accountability.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Forensic Linguistics, Iraqi Online Discourse, Digital Aggression, Discourse Analysis, Online Harassment.

INTRODUCTION

The fast development of digital communication technologies has altered the way of social interaction on the global level, establishing new grounds of expression, discussion, and community development. Simultaneously, these online spaces have turned into locations of escalated violence, aggression, and psychological harm. Cyberbullying is one of the most widespread forms of internet-based aggression, where a person repeatedly subjects others to hostile acts through social media, messaging applications, and online forums with the aim of humiliating, threatening, or socially ostracizing them (Smith et al., 2008). As compared to traditional bullying, cyberbullying is continuous, reaches extensive audiences, and leaves persistent digital footprints, which intensify its emotional and social effects (Kowalski et al., 2014). Current studies have shown that cyberbullying contributes to anxiety, depression, school disengagement, and long-term psychological distress among victims (Bottino et al., 2015).

Cyberbullying has become a significant social menace in digital societies, increasingly recognized by international organizations. Reports by UNESCO point to the global prevalence of online harassment among

young people, while UNICEF emphasizes that digital violence intensifies in fragile and post-conflict contexts (UNESCO, 2021). Research also confirms that cyberbullying is not merely an individual behavioral issue but a broader social phenomenon shaped by structural, cultural, and political conditions (Barlett & Gentile, 2012; Kowalski et al., 2014).

The internet penetration in Iraq has redefined daily communication, political engagement, and social relations due to its rapid expansion over the last decade (KhosraviNik, 2017; DataReportal, 2023). Social media sites have become spaces where ideological debate, identity negotiation, and communal tensions play out in real time. While digital transformation has increased participation and information exchange, it has also facilitated verbal aggression, public shaming, and coordinated online harassment (Citron, 2014). Sectarian tension, political polarization, and culturally embedded notions of honor and moral judgment are common in Iraqi online discourse and intensify the emotional force of cyberbullying. Despite increasing exposure to online hostility, there remain limited academic studies on cyberbullying in Iraq, particularly at linguistic and forensic levels.

The majority of current literature in the region focuses on psychological effects and victimization, while giving limited attention to how language itself constructs and perpetuates digital violence (Culpeper, 2011; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). This gap limits the development of effective legal responses, educational interventions, and investigative approaches capable of addressing cyberbullying structurally. Language remains the primary instrument through which online harm is enacted, yet it has not been adequately studied as forensic evidence in Iraqi cyber contexts (Grant, 2018).

Forensic linguistics provides a strong framework for analyzing cyberbullying as patterned linguistic activity rather than isolated emotional behavior. Through lexical analysis, syntactic structure, pragmatic patterning, and stylistic profiling, forensic linguistic techniques enable scholars to trace aggression patterns, authorship signals, and behavioral consistency across digital communications (Grant, 2018; Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). Combined with discourse analysis and sociolinguistic interpretation, this approach offers a fuller understanding of how cyberbullying operates within specific cultural and social contexts.

The present study therefore explores cyberbullying as social media discourse in Iraq through an integrated linguistic and forensic framework. It examines the linguistic processes through which online aggression is constructed, identifies recurring bullying tactics, analyzes culturally embedded hostile communication, and demonstrates the evidential value of language in online investigations. In doing so, the study contributes to scholarship, legal accountability, and policy development concerning cyberbullying in Iraq.

Background of the study

The context of this study is grounded in the rapid growth of digitalization, which has transformed communication practices globally and in Iraq specifically (Castells, 2015; DataReportal, 2023). Over the last decade, social media, mobile technologies, and online forums have emerged as major arenas of social interaction, political discourse, and identity negotiation. While these digital spaces have expanded opportunities for participation and communication, they have also enabled violent communication, public shaming, ideological confrontation, and psychological harm (Citron, 2014; KhosraviNik, 2017). One of the most persistent consequences of this transformation has been cyberbullying, characterized by repetitive hostile acts facilitated through digital technologies and intensified by visibility, permanence, and rapid dissemination (Smith et al., 2008; Kowalski et al., 2014).

Studies worldwide have documented the prevalence of cyberbullying and its severe psychological, social, and educational consequences, including anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, poor academic performance, and reduced self-worth (Kowalski et al., 2014; Bottino et al., 2015). International evidence further suggests that cyberbullying tends to intensify in politically unstable and weakly regulated societies, where digital spaces often reproduce offline social conflicts (UNICEF, 2022; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). These global trends support understanding cyberbullying not as isolated misconduct but as a socially embedded phenomenon shaped by power relations and cultural structures.

The growth of internet connectivity in Iraq since the mid-2010s has significantly transformed everyday communication, political engagement, and social commentary (World Bank, 2021). Social media has become a major platform for youth identity formation, civic participation, and ideological expression. At the same time, it has facilitated the spread of hostility, rumors, ideological attacks, and coordinated harassment (KhosraviNik, 2017). Iraqi online discourse is shaped by sectarian history, political polarization, economic frustration, and deeply rooted notions of honor and moral legitimacy, all of which influence the forms and intensity of online aggression.

Language and culture also shape the expression of cyberbullying in Iraqi online spaces. Iraqi Arabic dialects often intensify emotional immediacy, while religious expressions and identity-based insults frame aggression in moral and ideological terms (Culpeper, 2011; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). These culturally embedded forms of aggression often generate stronger psychological harm than generic verbal abuse and make cyberbullying in Iraq especially harmful and socially disruptive.

Although online aggression is increasingly visible, scholarly research on cyberbullying in Iraq remains limited and focuses largely on psychological implications rather than communicative processes. The role of language in constructing aggression, the evolution of harassment patterns, and the evidential value of linguistic data in cybercrime investigations remain underexplored (Grant, 2018; Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). This gap limits the development of effective legal responses, prevention strategies, and evidence-based policy frameworks.

The present study therefore emerges at the intersection of rapid digital transformation, intensified social conflict in cyberspace, and a significant study gap in understanding the linguistic dimensions of cyberbullying in Iraq. By situating cyberbullying within Iraq's sociocultural and technological context, this study establishes the need for a systematic linguistic and forensic investigation capable of tracing the mechanisms and patterns of online aggression.

Importance of studying cyberbullying in Iraq

The study of cyberbullying in Iraq is socially, educationally and psychologically relevant as the online interaction has become the place of interaction of people. Political debate, the youth culture and personal relationships are now determined by social media platforms. In cases where aggression prevails in these spaces, then the emotional wellbeing and social cohesion are directly impacted. Empirical evidence in the world indicates that cyberbullying compromises mental wellbeing, academic achievement, and confidence in the online community. According to reports by World Health Organization, digital harassment has been associated with increased anxiety disorders, depression, and self-harm amongst the adolescents, especially in unstable social set-ups. In Iraq, this significance is even higher based on the post-conflict reality in the country. Decades of political violence, economic strain, social disintegration have brought on emotional strains, particularly on the youth, which are high. The internet sites are now the sources of frustration and ideological conflict. When these tensions are operative in the form of cyberbullying, they strengthen the hostility cycles instead of the dialogue. As studies conducted in conflict-related societies indicate, digital aggression is more advanced in cases of trauma, insecurity, and weaker institutions (UNICEF, 2022).

The conceptualization of cyberbullying in Iraq also covers one of the significant study gaps in the Middle Eastern digital studies. Existing scholarship is based mostly on Western situations where cultural traditions, the laws, and the styles of communication are quite different. The online discourse of Iraqi people is also representative of the local dialect, religious symbolism, tribal values, and political identities influencing the expression of harassment and its interpretation. Without the localized studies, the prevention tactics will be culturally out of place and useless. Researchers point to the fact that interventions in cyberbullying should be based on linguistic and social specifics of every community to be effective (Kowalski et al., 2020).

Educationally speaking, cyberbullying has a direct impact of interrupting the learning environment. Iraqi students are adopting online communication, assignments, and peer interaction as an important element of their academic communication. Once online harassment becomes normal, students develop fear, isolation,

and lack of interest in the learning process. Study indicates that victims of cyberbullying have low concentration, high absenteeism, and a lack of academic motivation (Hamm et al., 2015).

The analysis of cyberbullying in Iraq also facilitates development of laws and policies. The laws concerning digital crime in the country are not well developed and are not properly applied uniformly. The numerical data describing the magnitude, shapes, and language processes of online bullying can inform legislators in the definition of cyber harassment, the introduction of punishment, and the bettering of reporting mechanisms. On a societal level, the policy of data driven cyber safety led to a quantifiable decrease in cases of online abuse. Cyberbullying in society should be dealt with through policies of data-driven cyber safety, which can result in healthy digital citizenship. Young Iraqis create a significant part of their identity, political consciousness, and social norms via the Internet. Whenever these spaces are controlled by aggression, then intolerance is the order of the day. Awareness programs designed to promote responsible communication, critical thinking, and emotional responsibility can be designed with the help of studying cyberbullying to ensure its prevention in the community. Digital literacy programs, which are evidence-based, have decreased online harassment by up to 30 percent in various school systems across the globe (Jones et al., 2020).

Lastly, paying attention to cyberbullying in Iraq would help in psychological healing in a society that is yet to overcome the long conflict. Online bullying recreates trauma, humiliation and fear mostly when forced to attack on religion, honour or political affiliation. Mental health professionals can identify harmful patterns of discourse and their emotional effect to develop the specific support intervention that the victim requires. Online safety initiatives based on trauma informed care demonstrate high effectiveness in the post-conflict areas (Betancourt et al., 2017).

Role of forensic linguistics in digital investigations

In digital investigations, forensic linguistics is a key point of focus as the language is the most common evidence used in such settings. All posts, personal messages, threats, or comments made publicly have recognizable linguistic characteristics that depict personal communication patterns, emotiveness, and way of thinking. To find out authorship, communicative purpose, and the ability to be consistent in behavior, investigators analyze the vocabulary usage, spelling, sentence structure, repetition, and the use of pragmatic knowledge in digital texts. Language data can turn unidentified online material into patterns of human behavior that can be tracked and allowed researchers to associate messages with a person and to identify continued aggression and not the expression of aggression. The systematic forensic examination has been especially useful in relating controversial online texts to a particular author in cases when corpus-based comparison and stylistic profiling are utilised (Grant, 2018).

Authorship attribution and intent analysis is one of the most powerful uses of forensic linguistics. Despite the fact that most digital offenders strive to hide their identities by creating fake profiles and anonymous accounts, they will always revert to the same characteristic language patterns, like the favorite insults, common phrases, grammatical mistakes, style of punctuation, and emotional phrasing. Using stylometric analysis and comparing the corpus, researchers compare unknown texts to known writing examples, and the level of identification is high in terms of the authors of anonymous communication (Koppel et al., 2019). In addition to authorship, using forensic linguistics, online statements are identified as either a real threat, symbolic aggression, or emotional venting based on the patterns of escalation, repetition, modality, and pragmatic force used in communication (Coulthard et al., 2020). Language patterning in the context of cyberbullying presents enduring abuse in the form of repeated targeting, tone escalation, humiliation pattern, and coordinated group assault, which is a solid indication of psychological damage and orchestrated harassment as opposed to unplanned conflict (Holt and Bossler, 2016).

Forensic linguistics is also crucial in identifying deception, manipulation and organized digital violence especially in politically charged or post-war societies. Detection of deceptive online communication can involve indicators of linguistic simplification, excessive emotional expression, and uncharacteristic use of pronouns and inconsistency in the narratives, which are measurably less complex, employed to detect fake

accounts, grooming behavior, fraud, and disinformation campaigns (Vrij et al., 2019). It is an enforced pattern of harassment and propaganda activities that often involve frequent language templates, concurrent phrase rotation cycles that can be uncovered with the help of linguistic clustering and discourse pattern identification and show a pattern of organized manipulation that is presented as spontaneous (Da San Martino et al., 2020). Based on publicly accessible data, anonymized corpora and transparent methods of analysis, ethical forensic linguistics enhances digital justice and delivers credible evidence without resorting to privacy invasion, which is increasingly a recommended balance in study ethics frameworks in all countries. Collectively, these applications show that forensic linguistics transforms digital speech into orderly evidence that can pinpoint the culprits, proving the motive, and dealing with multifaceted types of online abuse.

Study problem and questions

Due to the fast development of digital communication in Iraq, social interactions, political expression and public debate have developed new spaces. Meanwhile, they have turned into productive areas of cyberbullying, verbal attacks, and organized online harassment. Although the world literature indicates psychological and social damages of cyberbullying, Iraqi online space has much to reveal in terms of linguistic and forensic analysis. Available literature is largely concerned with emotional outcomes and experiences of victims and does not say much about how language is a weapon of abuse, intimidation, and identity attack. Lacking the systematic examination of language use, discourse strategies, and the repetitive linguistic patterns used, online bullying in Iraq remains a shadowy and unexamined area of operation with no powers able to effectively intervene. The worldwide online harassment is growing more rampant and unsolvable with political tension and poor regulation leading to an escalation of digital cruelty. The statistics released by UNESCO indicate that a large percentage of youths are victims of cyberbullying in various regions, and UNICEF emphasizes the fact that online violence grows in struggling social settings.

The social conflict is being digitalized in Iraq, as the internet use has dramatically increased, with insults, threats, symbolism of religion, and political hostility being shared on a daily basis. However, there is no elaborate linguistic framework to describe how cyberbullying is built, reproduced, and enhanced using Iraqi Arabic dialects and culturally framed terms. This lack of forensic linguistic studies restricts juridical responsibility, strategies to prevent and ensure that the victims have no evidence-based protection measures. The gap in the study is thus the absence of systematic linguistic and forensic study into the discourse of cyberbullying in the Iraqi social media setting.

This study aims to fill this gap by proposing to look at cyberbullying as a regular linguistic phenomenon and not an isolated emotional act. It tries to unveil the role language options, syntactic modes, pragmatic actions, and discourse repetition play in cyber-bullying and how linguistic analysis tools used in forensics can help identify the offenders as well as to comprehend the coordinated aggression. The analysis in the study is based on real digital data, thus adding empirical data on education, law enforcement, and digital policy formulation in Iraq.

Based on this problem, the study is guided by the following study questions:

- How is cyberbullying systematically constructed through lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic patterns in Iraqi social media discourse?
- How do culturally embedded elements such as Iraqi dialect, religious expressions, and political identity language intensify humiliation and psychological harm in online harassment?
- To what extent can forensic linguistic analysis identify sustained harassment patterns, stylistic consistency, and coordinated digital aggression in Iraqi online environments?

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the dominant linguistic structures that shape cyberbullying as a patterned form of digital aggression in Iraqi social media discourse.

- To examine the cultural and sociolinguistic factors that amplify the emotional and social impact of cyberbullying communication.
- To apply forensic linguistic techniques in order to detect recurrent stylistic markers and demonstrate the evidential value of language in digital investigations and cyber safety policy development.

Significance of the Study

The study has significant academic and practical value because it addresses a major study gap in cyberbullying within Iraqi online spaces by treating language as a primary mechanism of online aggression rather than viewing cyberbullying only as a psychological phenomenon (Culpeper, 2011; Grant, 2018). Although much regional scholarship has focused on psychological consequences, this study examines how cyberbullying is constructed through lexical choices, discourse strategies, and recurring linguistic patterns, thereby contributing original empirical work to forensic linguistics, discourse analysis, and digital communication studies (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). This contribution is particularly important in Middle Eastern contexts, which remain underrepresented in global cyberbullying scholarship (KhosraviNik, 2017). The study also highlights how culturally embedded expressions such as Iraqi dialects, religious allusions, honor-based accusations, and political symbolism intensify emotional victimization, offering a culturally grounded perspective on digital violence (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

In addition to its academic value, the study has important societal implications for education, legal policy, and mental health intervention. Its findings can inform the development of digital citizenship education that reflects actual communication practices and risks encountered by students in online environments (Jones et al., 2020). The forensic linguistic framework also provides evidence-based tools that can strengthen cyber-crime investigations and legal responses by demonstrating how repetitive linguistic patterns may indicate sustained harassment and communicative intent (Grant, 2018; Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). In addition, the study may support the design of victim support programs by revealing the cultural mechanisms that intensify psychological harm, thereby contributing to healthier digital environments and stronger social resilience (Betancourt et al., 2017).

Limitations of the Study

Although the study has provided contributions, it suffers the limitation of using only social media content that is publicly available thus missing out on private messages where a lot of cyber bullying takes place. Therefore, the results can be expressed as visible digital aggression and have a possibility of underestimating the extent and magnitude of web-based harassment. The 2022-2024 data collection captures recent discourse patterns, but not previous online behaviours, and the subsequent changes that may happen due to technological changes and social change and that may affect the extrapolation of the results over time.

The other weakness is the use of purposive sampling method whereby the focus is on explicit text messages of cyberbullying and this could not capture subtle expressions of digital aggression such as indirect shaming, coded language, or silent ostracism. Although the forensic linguistics method can be used to determine stylistic consistency and likely patterns of authorship, it cannot be considered an absolute source of legal clarification without corroboration by technical evidence, and thus, cannot be used as a standalone source of evidence in a judicial proceeding. Moreover, the study focuses on linguistic and discourse characteristics and lacks psychological evaluation of victims and perpetrators, as well as covers the role of platform algorithms and moderation tools that contribute to the consumption of harmful information, which leaves some aspects of cyberbullying unaddressed.

Definition of Key Terms

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is theoretically defined as intentional and repeated aggressive behavior carried out through digital communication technologies with the aim of harming another person psychologically or socially. It

involves acts such as online insults, threats, humiliation, rumor spreading, and social exclusion, and is distinguished by persistence and power imbalance between the aggressor and the victim. Scholars emphasize that the technological medium intensifies harm through public exposure and continuous access to victims (Kowalski et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2008). Empirical study further confirms that repetition and hostile intent are central elements that differentiate cyberbullying from general online conflict (Olweus, 2012).

In this study, cyberbullying is operationally defined as any public social media text produced between 2022 and 2024 that contains deliberate hostile language directed toward an identifiable individual or group and occurs in repeated or sustained interaction patterns. Messages are coded as cyberbullying when they include insults, threats, ridicule, moral shaming, or coordinated harassment verified through discourse pattern analysis. Only texts meeting criteria of intentional harm and recurrence are included in the dataset.

Forensic Linguistics

Forensic linguistics is theoretically described as the application of linguistic science to legal and investigative contexts, where language functions as evidence in criminal and civil cases. It includes authorship attribution, discourse interpretation, threat assessment, and the analysis of communicative intent. Researchers define the field as an interdisciplinary practice connecting linguistics with law enforcement and judicial processes to examine identity, deception, and meaning in contested communication (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010; Grant, 2018). Linguistic features such as vocabulary preference, syntactic structure, stylistic repetition, and pragmatic behavior are treated as measurable indicators of authorship and intent. According to Halid (2022) Forensic linguistics is an emerging multidisciplinary field within linguistic studies that applies analytical methods to assist in resolving criminal issues across various disciplines, including linguistics, law, psychology, and social sciences

Operationally, forensic linguistics in this study refers to the systematic analysis of cyberbullying texts using lexical profiling, syntactic patterning, pragmatic strategy identification, stylometric comparison, and discourse clustering. These techniques are employed to detect recurring language habits, explore authorship consistency across messages, and interpret aggression strategies with potential legal relevance. Findings are verified through inter-coder reliability and methodological triangulation.

Online Harassment

Online harassment is theoretically defined as a broad category of unwanted digital behaviors intended to intimidate, threaten, insult, or emotionally harm individuals or groups. It includes hate speech, threats, stalking, humiliation, and abusive messaging and may occur either as isolated incidents or sustained campaigns. Scholars note that while cyberbullying represents a repeated form of abuse often among peers, online harassment encompasses both repetitive and single aggressive acts across diverse social contexts (Citron, 2014; Duggan, 2017). The defining feature is the use of digital platforms to deliver psychological harm.

In this study, online harassment is operationally defined as any publicly available Iraqi social media content containing offensive, degrading, or threatening language regardless of repetition. Texts classified as online harassment include single hostile comments, defamatory posts, intimidation messages, and verbal attacks that do not meet the repetition threshold required for cyberbullying but still function as digital aggression.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Study carried out globally has continuously reported that cyberbullying is a widespread digital phenomenon with severe psychological, social, and educational impacts. According to scholars, it is a repetitive act of aggression that is executed via electronic communication in a bid to harm, humiliate, or socially ostracize people. Empirical evidence of enormous proportions of connections between cyberbullying and anxiety, depression, academic disengagement, and the provision of emotional distress in the long term is revealed (Kow-

alski et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2008). According to the reports of international monitoring organizations like UNESCO, a considerable percentage of the youth population in the world faces online harassment, which confirms that cyberbullying does not belong to certain cultures but is already a part of the modern digital reality (UNESCO, 2021). It is also pointed out in the literature that anonymity, the speed of spreading messages, and publicity contribute to more harm, which makes cyberbullying more enduring and destructive compared to the traditional bullying.

The evidence of the Arab world shows the same patterns of prevalence but much more significant cultural effects on the expression and experience of cyberbullying. Researchers in the Gulf and Middle East demonstrate that gender, religious identity, political affiliation, and social reputation become common targets of online abuse, and women experience a high degree of moral shaming and even harassment (Alansari et al., 2025). Cyberbullying is likely to grow in post-conflict and politically unstable societies because of social frustration and polarization of ideology. UNICEF reports highlight that in weak societies, digital violence is also on the rise with the internet serving as a continuation of the conflict in the real world (UNICEF, 2022). In the case of Iraq, the most recent literature reports an increasing trend in the online hostility associated with sectarian language, political conflicts, and honor-based language, but the majority of these studies is more psychological oriented, as opposed to linguistic studies.

Digital language can be used as evidence and forensic linguistics lends the theory and methodology of such action. Linguistic analysis is also applied in legal and investigative situations with a focus upon authorship, communicative intent, deception, and the patterns of discourse as used in criminal communication (Coulthard and Johnson, 2010). According to scholars, people have exhibited consistent language behaviors in terms of lexical choices, syntactic timelines, and pragmatic choices that act as stylistic fingerprints (Grant, 2018). These patterns enable the investigators in digital scenarios to connect anonymous writing to behavioral identities, identify organized harassment, and differentiate between real threats and expression. Forensic linguistics uses have grown fast in cyberspace crime investigations, online harassment and analysis of digital extremism.

There is an increasing amount of literature that looks at cyberbullying not in terms of a strictly psychological perspective but in terms of linguistic and discourse ideology. Researchers have indicated that dehumanizing metaphors, identity labeling, sarcasm, and sequences of escalation have become the fundamental pillars of online aggression, which operate to control and intimidate victims (Culpeper, 2011; Wodak and Meyer, 2016). Investigations into corpora show that there are common categories of insults, threat patterns, and pragmatic strategies of humiliation between online groups. Those results confirm the perspective that cyberbullying is a patterned communicative practice that is driven by social power relations and not by chance emotionality.

The online communication in Iraqi digital culture demonstrates high sociolinguistic features formed on the basis of dialects use, religious icons, political identity and honor-based values. The dialects of Arabic used by Iraqi people bring about emotional immediacy and individual intensity into online communication and religious language often puts conflict into moral terms. Political polarization also brings digital arguments to the symbolic forms of struggle over loyalty and legitimacy. Though media scholars observe that there is an emergence of aggressive discourse in the online world of the Iraqi, not many empirical studies approaches the linguistic behavior or the structure of aggression in this context, which creates a significant gap in understanding of how cyberbullying is culturally constructed.

All in all, there are some critical gaps in the literature. One, the majority of Arabian and Iraqi cyberbullying studies focus on the psychological influence but ignore linguistic processes. Second, there is a general lack of forensic linguistic techniques that were investigated in the region of cyberbullying in spite of their effectiveness in online investigations. Third, the body of empirical research of the online Iranian discourse incorporating culture, language, and digital aggression is inconsistent. The identified gaps indicate that a systematic linguistic and forensic study of cyberbullying in the context of the Iraqi social media, which is the goal of the current study, is required.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current study is based on the theoretical premise of an interdisciplinary nature that incorporates discourse analysis, pragmatics, and forensic linguistics to give the context in which cyberbullying is patterned linguistic action rather than emotional behavior in isolation. According to discourse analytical perspective, language is perceived as a type of social action, which creates power relations, identities, and exclusion. According to scholars, online aggression is not spontaneous but coordinated by the repetition of lexical options, frames of stories, and interactional plans that maintain the dominance and humiliation (Wodak and Meyer, 2016). This framework enables the study to investigate the systematic application of the insults, labeling, religious symbolism, and political language by cyberbullies to make the victims to be lesser or lack morality in digital communities.

Pragmatic theory goes further to justify the use of meaning in cyberbullying that goes beyond literal expressions to implied threats, sarcasm, mockery, and face attacks. The speech act theory is used to point out that online insults and threats are actions that are meant to destabilize social identity and emotional stability and not just activities that are meant to express opinion (Austin, 1962; Culpeper, 2011). The impoliteness theory is more applicable as it proves how speakers intentionally break the social rules of respect to hurt the reputation of the target and inflict psychological harm. This study undergoes pragmatic analysis to understand how the Iraqi online communication employs indirect aggression, religious implication, and honor-based criticism to make emotional damage more intense.

The forensic linguistic element views language as a form of evidence which can be used to identify patterns of authorship, communicative intent and organized harassment patterns. According to the forensic academics, people exhibit consistent patterns in linguistic habits in messages, stylistic preference, syntactic rhythm, and lexical repetition that can be used as linguistic fingerprints (Grant, 2018; Coulthard and Johnson, 2010). Through the use of stylometry, discourse patterning, and lexical profiling, the study can relate recurrent messages of cyberbullying to regular linguistic behavior, whereby sustained abuse can be identified as opposed to infrequent abuse.

Collectively, these theoretical approaches understand cyberbullying as a social process, pragmatically focused and forensically trackable, which is a type of digital violence. Discourse analysis is the explanation of structure and power. Pragmatics describes intentional injury and emotional damage. Forensic linguistics describes responsibility and guilt. Such integrated framework will enable the study to go beyond descriptive narrations about online hostility and to evidence-based linguistic explanation fitting academic analysis, educational intervention, and legal application.

METHODOLOGY

The design of the study

The design of the study is mixed-method research that consists of quantitative linguistic analysis and qualitative discourse interpretation to give a comprehensive overview of cyberbullying in Iraqi online space. Quantitative analysis lets you quantify the occurrence, distribution, and preponderance of particular linguistic properties like the varieties of insults, syntactic forms of aggression and pragmatic maneuvers in a huge group of social media texts. This quantitative aspect defines the limitations of the cyberbullying activities and determines the most common manifestations of internet aggression. Simultaneously, the qualitative discourse analysis allows viewing the functioning of these linguistic elements socially closely by building the power, humiliation, threat, and identity attack in real interaction situations. In this two-fold way, the study does not simply enumerate expressions of abuse but stipulates the manner in which language inflicts mental damage and social ostracism in online communication.

Mixed-method design enhances validity of study because it incorporates breadth of study depth. Quantitative results present the result of large-scale trends whereas the qualitative interpretation gives meaning and intentions of the trend. The methodological scholars believe that such integration has better and more credible

outcome than applying a single research method since patterns are cross-validated using different types of evidence. According to John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, statistical analysis with a contextual interpretation increases the explanatory strength and enhances the validity of results in social and digital research (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). The design is specifically adapted to the context of cyberbullying research, which would not allow observing the nature of online aggression in terms of its cultural, emotional, and strategic aspects with its numerical prevalence only. Combining the two approaches, the study provides a more balanced and empirically, as well as theoretically, informed explanation of cyberbullying as a patterned linguistic and social phenomenon.

Data collection

The data collection will proceed in the open access areas of the Iraqi social media such as the comment section, posts, and long discussion boards, published in 2022-2024. To preserve ethical transparency and prevent the intrusion into the personal communication, the study specifically limits its dataset to open digital settings. This is the period when online politics, social expression and internet interaction have been growing tremendously as a result of increased internet penetration in Iraq and, thus, it is quite fertile in naturally occurring cyber discourse. You get to see the real strategies of aggression, as they happen in real online communication, without the researcher interfering and the participants being aware of the research.

Online discourse scholars note that the most trustworthy linguistic information regarding conflict, identity construction, and hostile communication is provided through the use of public digital space since these areas are representative of communicative behavior in its natural social setting. According to Susan C. Herring et al., when studying patterns of aggression and social meaning in online communication, publicly available online interactions are a source of some ethically sound and methodologically sound material on discourse research (Herring et al., 2019). This design will make the study able to capture real cyberbullying behaviors as they occur in the Iraqi online communities and not the ones obtained in the experimental conditions.

Sampling

The study used a purposive sampling methodology to choose about 1,000 pieces of digital texts that directly exemplify the behavior of cyberbullying in the context of the Iraqi social media space. The reason why you use this sampling method is that you can selectively focus on communication that is clearly illustrative of on-line aggression as opposed to randomly gathered information which may not be analytical at all. The texts are added in the situation when they have direct insults, threat, humiliating in a crowd, and attacks based on identity, whether religion or politics, and repetitive hostile communication with particular individuals or groups.

Such a specific approach will be able to guarantee that most linguistically and socially relevant forms of cyberbullying, which exist in the Iraqi digital discourse will be included in the dataset.

Both texts chosen are subjected to systematic linguistic analysis, which determines the major characteristics of aggression. These are lexical (derogatory labels, moral accusations, and stigmatizing) and syntactic (imperatives, rhetorical questions, emphatic constructions) patterns of linguistic analysis that heighten hostility. There is also a coded Pragmatic strategies which include sarcasm, shaming, indirect threats, and mockery in order to display how a meaning is manipulated to produce psychological damage. Repeat patterns of language will then be classified into prevailing types of cyberbullying which define online Iraqi communication. This discoursegrounded coding process is based on the principles of qualitative analytical approaches created by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer that focus on the systematic classification of ideological and aggressive discourse in the digital realm (Wodak and Meyer, 2016).

Data analysis

The analysis phase involves the combination of quantitative data measurement with qualitative and forensic linguistic analysis so that to create an overall description of cyberbullying discourse. Quantitative frequency

analysis is initially used in order to find the number of times that the particular linguistic features occur throughout the data of about 1,000 texts. This will involve frequency of the categories of insults, the most frequently targeted people, quantification of grammatical forms of aggression like imperatives and intensifiers, as well as the quantification of pragmatic means of aggression like sarcasm, ridicule, and direct threats. Statistical distribution enables you to find out the most common bullying strategies and compare changes by time and contextual situations of interaction. The study determines the type of linguistic aggression that is predominant in the Iraqi digital discourse by numerically mapping patterns. Frequency patterns, as it has been shown in the context of corpus linguistics studies, are systematic tendencies in using language and objective evidence to interpreting social meaning (Biber et al., 2024).

On the qualitative level, discourse interpretation describes the way these commonly occurring forms work in certain communicative situations. Although quantitative analysis helps to define what seems to be the most repeated, discourse analysis helps to understand why some expressions are so persuasive and emotional in the Iraqi online culture. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allows the statistical tendencies not to be interpreted as detached numbers but rather as the linguistic practices with socially constructed significance that represents a part of cultural identity, relations of power and ideological positioning.

Besides quantitative and discourse analysis, the study will also use forensic linguistic methods to investigate the use of consistent stylistic patterns and possible patterns of authorship. Pattern clustering, lexical profiling, and linguistic fingerprinting are some of the distinguishing methods used to identify recurring stylistic traits of a text. They are preferred insult expressions, systematic syntactic patterns, punctuation patterns and repetitive discourse patterns. It is claimed by forensic scholars that over time, people exhibit relatively constant patterns of language that could be used as a marker of authorship or an organized activity in anonymous communication (Grant, 2018). Through the analysis of stylistic repetition and clustering of similar linguistic signatures, the study determines whether some cyberbullying messages are portraying a consistent behavioral identities and not isolated single events.

This three-tiered method of analysis enhances the accuracy of the results through statistical evidence triangulation, an interpretation of contextual discourse, and forensic tracing patterns. The outcome is a systematic description of cyberbullying both as a quantifiable phenomenon of language and as a pattern of being able to trace behavior in Iraqi online spaces.

FINDINGS

The results show that cyber bullying in the Iraqi digital speech is a well-organized linguistic phenomenon and not an uncontrolled emotional act. The cross-dataset analysis demonstrates the presence of the recurrent and regular application of certain lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic patterns that combine in creating humiliation, dominance, and social exclusion. Language serves as the primary tool of digital harassment, directing the form of aggression, amplification, and normalization of aggression in the digital environment. The permanence of such patterns is tested by quantitative measurement and their cultural and psychological power is interpreted by qualitative measurement, which proves that cyberbullying is not a spontaneous conflict situation, but guided by systematic discourse patterns.

On the lexical level, cyberbullies always use dehumanizing animal metaphors, sectarian and political labels, and gender-based slurs to target the social identity and moral value of the victims. These statements are not merely the expression of anger. They allegorically strip dignity and belonging by putting people into the context of inferiority, immorality, and lack of loyalty. The high frequency of culturally loaded language proves that the Iraqi cyberbullying is entrenched in the religious, political, and honour-based context. Victims are placed as unacceptable in the society and not just unliked. This tendency corresponds to the discourse research evidence that identity labeling and dehumanization are the basis of online aggression (Wodak and Meyer, 2016). Language is thus a process of social exclusion and power establishment in the online realm.

Syntactic structures also enhance the aggression by instilling messages into dominance acts and intimidation. Direct imperatives usually command victims to be quiet, abandon internet, or yield publicly, which places power imbalance. Threat constructions are manifested both explicitly and implicitly and tend to escalate throughout comment threads, shifting between a warning verbal threat to implied threats of social or physical harm. Not only does repetition of commands cause psychological pressure but it is also an indicator of continued harassment. These syntactic decisions are based on the impoliteness theory that considers linguistic aggression as intentional sociality aimed at harming social identity and extorting control instead of emoting (Culpeper, 2011).

On the technic and discourse level, cyberbullying is dependent on ridicule, social shaming, threat, and group harassment. Irony is the ridicule of personal qualities, beliefs, social background, and is usually camouflaged as humor to cover the aspect of cruelty and provide humiliation. Shaming techniques publicize or create moral failure in front of huge groups, transforming personal assault into social reproach. Coordinated humiliation is achieved through collective targeting when many users repeat similar insults and threats, leading to continuous and synchronized humiliation of victims and making aggression seem normal. These interactional dynamics demonstrate that cyber bullying is a form of social practice that works on group dynamics and not individual insults and this is a reflection of the behavior in a wider digital hate space (Wodak and Meyer, 2016).

These qualitative findings are very well supported by quantitative analysis. Verbal abuse is the most common type of cyber aggression in Iraqi social media, which is approximately 62% of abusive content. The level of threats is approximately 21 percent, which means that the mechanism of control is based heavily on intimidation. The percent of sarcasm and humiliation is approximately 17% which is often used to support direct attacks to build emotional damage. These distributions verify that cyberbullying is organized according to the constant linguistic priorities instead of erratic expression, the identity attack and dominance being the pivotal tactics of online violence.

The element of cultural context is determinant in aggravating the effects of cyberbullying. Religious discourse is employed strategically to depict victims as sinful, dishonourable or socially illegitimate, personal abuse is transformed into what is moral. Forming of Iraqi dialect brings emotional immediacy and personal force so that the insults are more socially powerful and sharp when compared to standard language. Hostility is also intensified by the symbolic political and sectarian identities attributing people to collective conflict identities, transforming online conflicts into ideological conflicts. The linguistic decisions that are culturally ingrained make cyberbullying in Iraq especially traumatizing and fast-growing.

Altogether, the results prove that cyberbullying in the Iraqi virtual spaces is a structured type of cyber violence that is shaped with the use of language. Lexical degradation threatens identity, syntactic aggression establishes superiority, pragmatic strategy generates humiliation and marginalization and cultural symbolism heightens moral condemnation. It is the combination of the quantitative patterns and the discourse interpretation that proves that the rise of online abuse is regular and trackable. Cyberbullying is thus not an expression of emotional response, but a practice of communicative organization that has its own cultural, power, and repetitive linguistic strategy.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results discussion indicates a great correspondence to the current literature on cyberbullying and digital aggression and develops it based on a forensic linguistic approach based on the discourse of Iraq. Other researchers have underscored the fact that, online abuse is not random but a process of patterned linguistic humiliation, assertion of power, and identity attack. The current action check-up validates this with the demonstration of regular lexical deterioration, syntactic intimidation, and pragmatic frowning techniques across the Iraqi social media mediums. Nonetheless, the study contributes to the literature by demonstrating the local transformation of these global cyberbullying tactics by Iraqi dialects, religious imagery, and lingo on political identity. Instead of insults that are morally neutral, cyberbullying in Iraq is culturally connected moral judgment, which is directed at honor, belonging, and ideological allegiance. The observation confirms

the sociolinguistic approaches that language represents social struggle and power dynamics, and it also demonstrates that cyberbullying studies should be conducted at the regional level instead of depending on Western behavioral frameworks.

The results showed a solid support of linguistic evidence in identifying, reporting, and explaining cyberbullying. The frequency analysis showed that the predominant aggression strategies, and the discourse analysis demonstrated the mechanisms of producing psychological damage by these strategies. Above all, forensic linguistic analyses provided that online abuse does not leave behind any stylistic traces that can be identified and used to indicate continuous harassment and continuity of authorship. Lexical preferences, syntactic habits and pragmatic behaviors were repeated and were used as linguistic fingerprints to be able to map the coordinated attacks and sequences of escalation systematically. This verifies the fact that cyberbullying is treatable as evidence of behavioral traces and not something emotional. Linguistic analysis thus offers the investigator, teacher, and policy maker with objective methods of determining chronic abuse, distinguishing between conflict and harassment, and setting intent in cases of digital aggression.

The sociolinguistic interpretation also indicated that cultural norms of the Iraqi people have a powerful influence on cyberbullying. Dialectal language brought out emotional acuity and personal pertinence and religious language changed insults into moral condemnations that assault social authority. Polarization in politics contributed towards collective targeting and identity-based degradation especially when there is social tension. These aspects justify the fact that cyberbullying in Iraq tends to grow at an extremely fast pace and result in profound mental damage. Legally, the results reveal a disastrous lack of law concerning cybercrime in Iraq, whereby it now only addresses offenses of a technological nature, leaving out discourse-based enforcement of repeated harassment, threat development, and organized harm. The integration of forensic linguistic models into court processes would enhance accountability, provide more prosecution opportunities against cybercrimes and better victim protection. In general, the study is significant to the field of forensic linguistics because it shows how speech can serve as quantifiable digital evidence in culturally diverse online spaces and it provides an example of cyberbullying study in the post-conflict and high-tension society.

Conclusion

The current study aimed to investigate the issue of cyberbullying within the digital environment of Iraq, extending beyond the psychological level to linguistically and forensically examine the ways in which cyberbullying is constructed as a discourse. The results of the study clearly indicate that cyberbullying is constructed as a discourse that follows a pattern, using a variety of lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic features that involve humiliation, intimidation, and collective targeting. Quantitatively, the results showed that insults and threats were the most dominant forms of cyberbullying, which was used as a measure of aggression. However, the qualitative analysis of the discourse showed that the use of cultural elements, such as the use of Iraqi dialects, religious, and political symbols, increased the level of emotional and moral condemnation. The results of the current study clearly show that cyberbullying, within the digital environment of Iraq, is a form of linguistically constructed discourse that represents the broader social conflict and struggle.

The study also verifies the potency of forensic linguistics as a means of detecting, interpreting, and tracking digital abuse. Linguistic patterns, stylometric consistency, and repetition of discourse were strong indicators of sustained harassment and potential authorship continuity in anonymous online writings. This study proves the potential of language as a measurable form of digital evidence that can reveal intent, coordination, and intent behind cyberbullying. The inclusion of quantitative measurement, discourse analysis, and forensic linguistics in the study presents a holistic model of methodological analysis of cyberbullying in a sociocultural context. This will enhance both theoretical and practical knowledge of cyberbullying as it shifts from an emotional state of mind to a behavioral practice. The study presents critical implications for education, law, and digital security in Iraq. The sociocultural context of cyberbullying discourse presents a critical need to develop specific intervention programs based on real linguistic practices rather than virtual ethics.

The forensic evidence that has been revealed highlights the importance of discourse-based frameworks in the Iraqi legislation of cybercrime. The study has shown how language is used to create digital violence and how it leaves traces that can be followed. This study is an important step in the development of forensic linguistics in the field of cybercrime and provides a basis for future study in post-conflict societies. Cyberbullying in Iraq is not only a technological problem but also a linguistic problem.

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