

## English Adjectives in Online Comments of Algerian English Speakers

**Khadija Belfarhi**

Department of English

Interdisciplinary Laboratory of Pedagogy and Didactics (LIPED)

University of Badji-Mokhtar Annaba Algeria

### Abstract

Adjectives are central in any use of language due to their role in providing descriptions to the aspects of the noun. The role of adjectives becomes more and more important with the emergence of computer-mediated communication (CMC). The aim of the present paper is to shed light on the use of adjectives in CMC. It is assumed that adjectives in online comments do not keep the same linguistic structure and function like in spoken English and new forms emerge as the result of using CMC. It analyses adjectives used by non-native English speakers through collecting a corpus of fifty utterances obtained from comments posted publically in Facebook. The results demonstrate that adjectives take different forms by means of combining with non-linguistic forms, and express functions other than just modifying nouns in the narrow sense. Adjectives combine with non-linguistic forms to reinforce their function, and a pragmatic function seen in implying the description.

**Keywords:** Adjectives, CMC, comments, emojis, English, Facebook, function, online, pragmatics

**Cite as:** Belfarhi, K. (2019). English Adjectives in Online Comments of Algerian English Speakers. *Arab World English Journal*, 10 (1) 231-241 .

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no1.20>

## Introduction

Modifiers such as adjectives and adverbs are needed in CMC for the huge descriptions they made along commenting or messaging. Adjectives, in particular, are frequently used especially in comments and posts as they take less space if compared with other word classes. However, the form and function of adjectives change once used in CMC including the total omission of the article, noun and intensifier as well as modification in their morphology. What is instead communicated are other features which act to transmit the message in a pragmatic way wherein the syntactic function of the adjective is carried out by pragmatic functions such as abbreviation, repetition, capitalization and emoticon.

Research on adjectives in social networks is very limited if not absent. Adjectives are important in CMC as they are generally the theme of utterances especially in the case of comments. They are not well treated in the literature of CMC may be because the language used in this medium is considered in its totality and, therefore, syntactic categories are not yet treated each one for its own sake. Another reason can be the fact of treating online adjectives as deformed adjectives and not part of the English grammar. Moreover, as being a new genre CMC as a discourse resists institutionalized.

Adjectives are selected as a topic of the investigation because they are considered as a heterogenous word class and function in relation to other word classes, a point which makes adjectives more interactional with linguistic and non-linguistic elements. To describe English adjectives used in CMC, a corpus of fifty comments has been obtained from Facebook comments of English speakers in Algeria who are generally graduated students of English as a foreign language. The main objective of this study is to shed light on adjectives used in CMC along with their modified form and the functions they take.

## Adjectives in Electronic Discourse

Information communication technology has changed the way language is used as several new emerging forms become usual in the language of users. Blurton (1999) attributes this to the flexibility, connectivity and interactivity of the modern digital communication: "It is possible to have many-to-many, many-to-one, one-to-many, and one-to-one modes of communication with modern digital information communication technology (ICT). These features of digital ICTs enable them to have a more pervasive influence on forms and uses of language" (as cited in Adams, 2009, p.112). Language underwent changes at several levels including most importantly the grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic aspects whereby users de-emphasize accuracy and focus more on the message. As Herring (1996) notes, this language has unique situational features, and embodies a distinctive set of linguistic features. The focus on the message more than the language it expresses resulted in the use of utterances where the form is structurally short. As adjectives modify aspects of nouns, they are preferred in the descriptions as there is a tendency towards attributive than predicative adjective since the former implies the predicate while the latter does not and presents as a short form. Thus, adjectives that are close to verbs are less used than adjectives close to nouns.

Adjectives had been classified as nouns or substantive nouns due to their similarity with word classes such as nouns and adverbs. They were considered as difficult to classify for this overlap.

The syntax of English adjectives underwent changes. In that, old English was marked by adjectives-nouns agreement in number, case and gender. Besides, adjectives had more inflections than in Middle English and were differentiated in terms of strong and weak in relation to their position. Smaller changes in the English grammar occurred after the 1700s (Gelderen, 2014). Adjectives are classified in terms of prototypical vs. less prototypical (Quirk et al, 1985) including stative vs. dynamic; gradable vs. non gradable; and inherent vs. non-inherent (as cited in Aschenbrenner, 2014, p.101). Adjectives underwent other changes when used in the medium of online or electronic communication. In that, adjectives, like other parts of speech, go through the constraints of electronic use of language where the structure and function of some types of adjectives change for the aim to cope with CMC. However, these changes are not yet acknowledged for the fact that the language of CMC is still looked at as a new and different type of discourse.

English of CMC is considered as a new type of English (Crystal, 2003) because it differs from the English language used throughout the world. Collot & Belmore (1996) say in this respect:

Electronic language is characterized by a set of situational constraints which sets it apart from other varieties of English. Messages delivered electronically are neither 'spoken' nor 'written' in the conventional sense of these words. There is an easy interaction of participants and alternation of topics typical of some varieties of spoken English. However, they cannot be strictly labeled as spoken messages since the participants neither see nor hear each other. Nor can they be considered strictly written since many of them are composed directly on-line. (p.14).

This new form of English is studied as a unified discourse opting for the syntactic simplification. Users develop through time codes of communication by using linguistic and non-linguistic elements as they combine the linguistic material with other objects such as symbols and emoticons. The focus on the message rather than accuracy opened the scope to this combination allowing native English or non-native to communicate with forms of adjectives often different from the usual. In that, there is a tendency to simplify the adjective to some extent degree. Simplification has been studied in phonetics and morphology in contexts of language contact. Simplification is typographical in the way that words may change in their internal structure. In the context of digital communication, the simplification of forms results from the contact with the computer or digital machine. Users of English transcend the syntactic rules and instead bring more simplifications that the grammar of English itself may consider as strange to the language. Adjectives are used differently from the way they are set in the theory of grammar. The change or modification is facilitated by the multimodal aspect of CMC; in that, there is more freedom in the construction of new forms as far as they fit the purpose of CMC.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study is realized through the analysis of adjectives collected from Facebook comments of English speakers in Algeria. The corpus was collected by focusing on descriptions because they contain adjectives. Participants vary between English learners who still learn English and others who are already graduated. The participants can be considered as being in an on-going developmental stage because they improve their English proficiency through study and, also,

through social media along the CMC. The result of this interaction is the English language influenced by the electronic discourse at all the linguistic levels. Comments of English speakers on Facebook constitute a real and a large corpus allowing the collection of the different types of adjectives used in CMC, and which satisfies the aims of the present research which are to approximately estimate the most frequently used adjectives and the form these adjectives take in CMC. It is postulated that adjectives in online comments do not keep the same linguistic structure and function like in spoken English and new forms emerge as the result of CMC.

## DATA

As the collected data had been taken from Facebook comments of English speakers, it is worth noting that the corpus has been taken as it is including the syntactic errors of users. Also, anonymity has been preserved when names of persons or groups are cited by the users. In such a case, the item is put replaced by three points between brackets. Finally, it should be noted that the mistakes in the informants' utterances are kept as they are without corrections to preserve the descriptive aspect of the data.

1. what a monster?
2. Enviably Smart! Must Watch Plz!
3. I wish u all the Facebook friends..... 👍
4. That's why the greatest scientists are true believers in the existence of a supreme Creator.
5. We really need these 😊😊😊 precious tips
6. Airplanes are magic!! Hhhhhhhhhhhh
7. wow! it's amazigh:)
8. Another quote of the day ❤️<3 but from an anonymous 😊
9. Too much toxicity and discomfort. Pressure, bad energy, stress, bad vibes.
10. Huge dislike ! The only things I liked are the music choice and some philosophical parts in the storytelling/dialogues.
11. Thank million to everyone for participating
12. Another activities are waiting for you!
13. Warmly Welcome To (...)
14. you get a chance to practise many different skills in a setting that is more like real life.
15. Sometimes we passed by difficult times
16. ....i just want to ask about the 2nd sequence read
17. Algeria 😊 the best Sunset and sunrise in the world
18. Not only does Algeria have a great educational system but it also has a lot of smart qualified teachers
19. It has been an incredible journey!
20. Perfect
21. Still your opinion is also subjective.
22. Too many ambiguous points!!!
23. Always the most precious and the most valuable among other departments
24. a very interesting offer ..... don't miss it
25. 1000 likes 👍(...)thank you !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! ❤️
26. nice canu
27. Here's some pictures of day one ❤️
28. 🎧🎧🎧🎧🎧an exciting program 🎧🎧🎧🎧🎧an exciting program

29. amazing .... good continuation 😊
30. Come and adopt some old, lonely book from us.
31. Good job!
32. Welcome 😊
33. Morning period varied between different presentations,
34. It was a great event indeed , thx to (...) team for this wonderful journey 😊
35. it was nice to be there ^\_
36. your attendance was and will always be our greatest honor and support.
37. Here's some pictures of day one ❤️
38. I can't find ur cmnt!!! It's awkward 😬
39. LIVE! (...) interacting ! GROUP WORK 😊 ‘
40. This is the worst post on facebook 😞
41. happy friENDship day for you too ^^.
42. Hi how it is great
43. such an amazing move 😊
44. Have a peaceful night (...)❤️
45. proud of u team ❤️<3 keep up the great work 😊
46. Everyone is welcomed ❤️
47. Wow! such an honor for the Team ❤️
48. Thank you 👍
49. Her English !
50. Due to your constant support and encouragement, the (...) was honored for the outstanding work done by everyand each member.

### Reporting the Results

The results have been quantified in terms of adjectives and its relatives such as adverbs and modifiers.

**Table 1. Adjectives Frequency**

Adjective	Frequency	Adjective	Frequency
Smart	2	too	2
true	1	ambiguous	1
supreme	1	most precious	1
magic	1	most valuable	1
amazing	3	other	1
too much	1	interesting	1
bad	1	nice	2
huge	1	exiting	4
another	1	old	1
many	2	lonely	1
different	2	constant	1
real	1	outstanding	1
difficult	1	wonderful	1
best		greatest	1
great	3	awkward	1
educational	1	live	1
qualified	1	the worst	1
incredible	1	happy	1
her	1	good	2
subjective	1	peaceful	1

perfect	1	proud	1
the greatest	1	welcome	1
<b>41</b>			

The corpus includes 41 adjectives. They are grouped in the following table in terms of attributive and predicative

Table 2. Attributive and Predicative Adjectives

Attributive Adjective			Predicative Adjectives	
greatest	The greatest scientists		Enviably	It is Enviably Smart!
Good	good continuation		magic	Airplanes are magic
True	are true believers		subjective	your opinion is also subjective.
incredible	an incredible journey!		nice	it was nice
Big	A big tribute		awkward	It's awkward
master	a master piece		welcomed	Everyone is welcomed
peaceful	a peaceful night			
Great	the great work			
Good	Good morning			
amazing	an amazing move			
worst	the worst post			
happy	happy friENDship day a great event			
greatest	our greatest honor and support.			
difficult	difficult times			
different	Different presentations			
Real	real life			
Constant philosophical	constant support philosophical parts			
exciting huge	An exciting program huge dislike			
Nice	nice canu			
Ad	ad vibes			
Interesting bad	a very interesting offer bad energy			
<b>27</b>			<b>6</b>	

Table 3. Adverbs

Rank	Adverb	Frequency
1	warmly	1
2	sometimes1	1
3	just	1
4	still	1
5	always	1
6	very	1
7	definitely	1
8	indeed	1
9	there	1
10	inviably*	1

The big majority of the words in the corpus falls in the category of nouns, and more particularly common nouns. Adjectives came in the second level with 41 ones including six predicative adjectives and 27 attributed adjectives. The modified adjectives are 12. These listed adjectives in tables 01, 02, and 03 consecutively can be described as “linguistic adjectives” falling in an objective category following the syntactic rules: AP→ (AdvP) + A, or occurs within the NP: NP→A NP.

Most of the linguistic adjectives are attributive representing 28 out of 41. Predicative adjectives are just seven out of 41 adjectives. Other types of adjectives take another form identified as combinatory adjectives.

### Adjectives in Combinatory Forms

The corpus includes other forms of adjectives which are not “usual adjectives” as other adjectives because they take forms different from the linguistic or objective adjectives. These adjectives combine with other forms such as emojis or can even combine with marks like punctuation. They are presented in their complete utterances for the aim to describe them appropriately.

### Analysis

The description of adjectives in the present corpus can be achieved by setting two groups. The former includes linguistic adjectives and the second non-linguistic adjectives. Table 1 shows that there are 41 linguistic adjectives with 28 attributive adjectives and seven predicative adjectives. The second group includes non-linguistic adjectives which are constructed in forms that do not fall within the grammar of the English language, and, therefore, cannot be generated by the adjective rule (AP → (AdvP) + A). This is due to their combination with other elements making the word, as a whole, referring to an adjective but cannot be considered as part of the English adjectives.

The combination is often with emojis which occurred a lot in the analyzed corpus. The following utterance, for instance, has a description of the monster substituted by the emoji: “What a monster 🐼?”. The Adjective is substituted by the emoji. The latter substitutes an adjective like “terrible, terrifying”. The emoji acts as a description of the noun “monster”. It is not a typical adjective but rather an adjective by the mediation of the emoji. Since the emoji replaces the quality attributed to the noun “monster”, it acts, therefore, as an attributive adjective.

The same thing can be said about the following utterance: “I wish u all the Facebook friends 👍». The adjective is substituted by the emoji which is used to refer to the adjective “well”. The emoji is a description of the noun “facebook friends”. The adjective is used indirectly by the mediation of the emoji. The emoji replaces a predicative adjective “well” which is part of a predicate that is not present in the utterance but implied by means of the emoji.

A similar occurrence of the adjectives is seen in the following utterance where the adjective is present and reinforced by another adjective in the form of emoji: “We really need these 😊😊😊 precious tips”. The three smiling emojis can be considered as an adverb like “wonderfully” or an adjective like “wonderful”. The emojis add a further description of the noun “tips”. If seen as an adjective, it is then an attributive adjective like the adjective precious.

Another form of adjectives described or reinforced by emojis is seen in the following examples:

- a- I can't find ur cmnt!!! It's awkward 🙄
- b- such an amazing move 😊
- c- This is the worst post on facebook 😞
- d- wow! it's amazigh 😊😊
- e- 🎧🎧🎧🎧🎧an exciting program 🎧🎧🎧🎧🎧an exciting program
- f- Everyone is welcomed ❤️

g- amazing ....good continuation 😊

The emoji come at the end of the utterance and just after the adjective. However, it is to consider from two angles: either it adds to the description of the adjective by reinforcing it; or as a general comment on the utterance. While a, b, c, d and e have the emoji playing the role of reinforcing the adjective with a more descriptive value, f and g have rather the emojis like a comment. Since the adjective is already present in these utterances, the emojis cannot be qualified to be attributive adjectives because this quality is already carried out by the adjective. The emoji, however, adds more description to the adjective.

Other forms which reinforce the adjective are punctuation marks as show the following utterances

- a. Enviably Smart! Must Watch Plz!
- b. Too many ambiguous points!!!
- c. Her English!

In a, the exclamation marks add further description to the adjective “smart”. The described noun is implied because it refers to the post which is the subject of the object of the user’s utterance. The exclamation marks add to the ambiguity of points in b. Three marks designate the user’s description of the adjective “ambiguous”. In the third utterance, the adjective is replaced with the exclamation mark. The utterances used as a comment on the speech of Queen Elizabeth whereby the user is impressed by the Queen’s English, and wants rather to say “Her English is perfect”.

The second type of adjectives is presented indirectly by means of implication. The following utterances illustrate:

- a. Another quote of the day ❤️
- b. Algeria 😊
- c. proud of u team ❤️<3 keep up the great work 😊
- d. Here’s some pictures of day one ❤️
- e. GROUP WORK 😊
- f. 1000 likes 👍(...) thank you !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! ❤️
- g.

In this category the adjective is absent. It is implied by means of the emoji in indirectway. In a, the heart emoji means that the user liked the quote. Since it is a comment, the user cannot say “I liked the other quote of the day”. Instead, he/she put the emoji at the end to mean that the quote is wonderful. The emoji makes the adjective distributed along two states. The first is the act of liking the quote, and the second is the result of liking the day is itself the adjective modifying the noun “day” which is implied as the result of being distributed. The same thing can be said about d.

Similarly, utterance b has the emoji as a smiley referring to the state of being happy, which itself acts as a description of the noun “Algeria”. The emoji makes the adjective distributed along two states. The first is the act of being “happy”, and the second is the fact of being happy is a description or a quality that Algeria is nice. The adjective is implied as the result of being distributed.

For c, the heart means that the user liked the pictures. The user does not say “I liked the pictures” because he/she posted them. Instead, he/she put the emoji at the end to mean that the

pictures are wonderful. The emoji makes the adjective distributed along two states. The first is the act of liking the pictures, and the second is the result of liking the pictures is itself the adjective modifying the noun “pictures” which is implied as the result of being distributed.

For f, the smiley emoji means that the user liked the group work. Since it is a comment, the user cannot say “I liked the group work”. Instead, he/she put the emoji at the end to mean that the group work is great. Besides, the two nouns are capitalized which is another emphasis on the appreciation of the group work. In this way, the emoji makes the adjective distributed along two states. The first is the act of liking the group work, and the second is the result of liking the pictures itself the adjective modifying the noun “group work” which becomes implied as the result of being distributed. Besides, the capitalization of the words reinforces the adjective implied by the emoji.

In f, “1000”, “likes”, “the exclamation marks” and the two emojis are all description of a comment which is very appreciated by the user. The “1000 like” plus the “emoji” mean that the posted item is “wonderful”. 1000, likes, the exclamation marks make the adjective distributed along two states. The first is the wonderfulness of the post, and the second is the fact of liking the post as the result of its wonderfulness. The exclamation marks plus the heart emoji means that the user liked the post a lot.

## Discussion

The studied corpus reveals various facts about English adjectives used in online language. The first thing that retains attention is the use of attributive more than predicative adjectives. The user’s descriptions through adjectives tend to be more in relation to nouns than verbs. The reason behind using attributive adjectives is in the fact that users develop through the attributive adjective the theme of their utterance. The majority of the attributive adjectives describe an object which is itself the point around which the theme turns. In fact, the attributive adjectives are also found in the second category of combinatory adjectives. The users’ combined adjectives focus more on the noun and less on the verb. It means, when adjectives are put in a combined form, they still follow the same principle of modifying nouns.

Concerning combinatory adjectives, they have two main functions. Either they reinforce the attributive adjective with further descriptions or they are indirect adjectives by means of implication. The adjective has a reinforcing descriptive function when used to reinforce the description of the noun, i.e. attributively like in the examples where the emoji is itself an adjective used for reinforcing another adjective. A similar occurrence of the adjectives is seen in the following utterance where the adjective is present and reinforced by another adjective in the form of emoji: “We really need these 😊😊😊 precious tips”. The three smiling emojis can act as an adverb like “wonderfully” or as an adjective like “wonderful”. The emojis act as an added description of the noun “tips”. If seen as an adjective, it is then an attributive adjective like the adjective precious.

The combinatory aspect of adjectives has been already discussed in the literature of ICT. Kress (2000) talked about mode-mixing as a combination of codes and symbolic systems (as cited in Adams, 2009, p. 117). These multimodal features are combined in particular ways because they

give to the user space for representing the same thing with the inclusion of the linguistic and non-linguistic material. It means the combination is functional as it assists in conveying meaning. Moreover, the different modes interrelate in the way that one leads to the other as it has been seen in the distributive function.

Adding emphasis to adjectives by means of the combination is the main point in the preset research. While the present paper analyzed the function of emojis and punctuation marks, other studies revealed different means. Hall (1996), for instance, studied discursive styles that characterize feminism in computer-mediated communication. Among the analyzed utterances were adjectives. For adding emphasis on adjectives, users put the adjective between two asterisks like in the following example: \*easily\*, \*bad\* \*serious\* (p.153). Other reinforcing symbols can be capitalization, numbers, and other forms that users think they reinforce the adjective.

The adjective has a primitive state as the result of bearing quality in indirect way. It is turned to its primitive state as being a description of a quality or a description of a given object. Due to the pragmatic function of indirectness the facebooker has it more appropriate to say quality of something by means of implication rather than declaration. The utterance "Another quote of the day ❤️" is an implication that the quote is lovely as the user is commenting on the quote and s/he is not in instant communication.

The use of capitalization is also for adding emphasis to the adjectives. This practice is not frequent by English native speakers using the net. It is rather considered as rude, a reason why users avoid it in online language.

Adams (2009) has categorized the language of ICT as a modification of existing forms and uses and change as the emergence of novel and original creation of language. It is also at the level of pervasive emoticons to express the feeling when writing. The adjectives analyzed in the present study can be characterized as combining the three changes together. The adjective is modified because of the new features brought to it. For example, capitalizing the noun that the adjective refers to is a change or modification of an existing form. The combination with the emoticon brings together the second and the third change as in the following example: GROUP WORK 😊. The full utterance is a new and original use of language.

Emoticonomy is also one of the main features of the analyzed adjectives and can be considered to bring new features in the grammar of the language used in ICT. Emoticonomy is defined as by Bodomo & Lee (2002) as "*a subfield of CMC which involves the analysis of practices of employing smileys and related icons for conveying emotions and other linguistic and kinesic features intended by the author*" (as cited in Adams, 2009, p. 117). Indeed, the emotions that the adjectives have been expressed through could reinforce the descriptive value of the adjectives as it mediated pragmatically between the adjective as a linguistic material and the description as a combination of both description and emotion.

Finally, it should be noted that adjectives in combinatory forms impose constraints in their understanding as they deviate from ordinary English adjectives. In a comment on the overuse of adjectives and adverbs on online language, Musburger (2012) said that these modifiers confuse

the audience as they can muddy the meaning with the inaccurate degree of intensity. In fact, users develop through time small virtual communities where they create a common code understood within these small groups.

### Conclusion

The adjectives analyzed in the present corpus take forms and functions peculiar to the digital discourse. It has been shown through the analysis of utterances taken from English non-native speakers' facebook comments that attributive adjectives are preferred than predicative adjectives. Adjectives are grouped into linguistic and non-linguistic. The former includes English adjectives generated by the adjective rule while the second category contains combinatory adjectives which are adjectives presented by the combination with other non-linguistic forms such as symbols and emojis. This type of adjectives have the adjective reinforced by the emoji and in this case the e-adjective can be said to be equipped with more descriptive capacity than the linguistic adjective because the non-linguistic material allows the user to extend in the scope of the adjective unlike the linguistic adjective which is rather rule-based. Adjectives are also presented indirectly by means of implication. The reinforcing function is present indirectly when the adjective implies the description. This means that when the adjective combines with the non-linguistic material such as symbols and emojis, it is not necessary to keep the same placement before the noun. The analyzed corpus demonstrated that adjectives take a final position and the whole description is implied as the result of being indirect.

### About the Author:

Khadija Belfarhi PhD in Applied linguistics. She is currently a lecturer at the Department of English, the University of Annaba. Her research interest is applied linguistics in relation to language teaching, language learning and stylistics. ID Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3232-183X>

### References

- Adams B. B. (2009). *Computer-Mediated Communication for Linguistics and Literacy: Technology and Natural Language Education: Technology and Natural Language Education*. IGI Global.
- Aschenbrenner, A. (2014). *Adjectives as nouns, mainly as attested in [i]Boethius[/i] translations from Old to Modern English and in Modern German*. Herbert Utz Verlag.
- Collot, M & Belmore, N. (1996). "Electronic language: a new variety of English", In S.C. Herring (ed.), *Computer-mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social, and Cross-cultural Perspectives*, pp. 13-28, John Benjamins Publishing.
- Crystal, D. (2006). *Language and the internet*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gelderen, E.V. (2014). *A History of the English Language: Revised edition*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Hall, K. (1996). "Cyberfeminism" In *Computer-mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social, and Cross-cultural Perspectives*, S.C. Herring (ed.), pp. 147-170, John Benjamins Publishing.
- Herring, S.C. (1996). *Computer-mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social, and Cross-cultural Perspectives*. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Musburger, R.B. (2012). *An Introduction to Writing for Electronic Media: Scriptwriting Essentials Across the Genres*. Taylor & Francis.