

# Approaches to Internet Pragmatics

EDITED BY

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# Approaches to Internet Pragmatics

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## **Volume 318**

Approaches to Internet Pragmatics. Theory and practice  
Edited by Chaoqun Xie, Francisco Yus and Hartmut Haberland

# Approaches to Internet Pragmatics

Theory and practice

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# Table of contents

Acknowledgements	VII
Introduction: Approaching internet pragmatics <i>Chaoqun Xie, Francisco Yus and Hartmut Haberland</i>	1
<b>Part I. Theoretical and methodological perspectives</b>	
CHAPTER 1	
Expanding pragmatics: Values, goals, ranking, and internet adaptability <i>Jacob L. Mey</i>	27
CHAPTER 2	
Computer-mediated discourse in context: Pluralism of communicative action and discourse common ground <i>Anita Fetzer</i>	47
CHAPTER 3	
Cyberpragmatics in the age of locative media <i>Francisco Yus</i>	75
CHAPTER 4	
Interpreting emoji pragmatics <i>Ashley R. Dainas and Susan C. Herring</i>	107
CHAPTER 5	
Speech acts and the dissemination of knowledge in social networks <i>Paolo Labinaz and Marina Sbisà</i>	145

## Part II. The discursive management of self on the internet

### CHAPTER 6

- Humour and self-presentation on *WhatsApp* profile status 175  
*Carmen Maíz-Arévalo*

### CHAPTER 7

- Inviting a purchase: A multimodal analysis of staged authenticity  
 in WeChat social selling 207  
*Chaoqun Xie and Ying Tong*

### CHAPTER 8

- Online nicks, impoliteness, and Jewish identity in Israeli Russian  
 conflict discourse 235  
*Renee Perelmutter*

## Part III. Pragmatics of internet-mediated texts

### CHAPTER 9

- Candidates' use of Twitter during the 2016 Austrian presidential campaign 259  
*Helmut Gruber*

### CHAPTER 10

- A study on how cultural and gender parameters affect emoticon  
 distribution, usage and frequency in American and Japanese online  
 discourse 287  
*Barry Kavanagh*

### CHAPTER 11

- Migration through the English-Greek translated press 321  
*Maria Sidiropoulou*

- Name index 343

- Subject index 347

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# Introduction

## Approaching internet pragmatics

Chaoqun Xie, Francisco Yus and Hartmut Haberland

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Spain / Roskilde University, Denmark

### 1. The place of the internet

A researcher at the RAND Corporation in California had an idea which in 1969 led to the ARPANET, the predecessor of the internet as we know it. The idea was the answer to the question of how the US military's computers could connect after a nuclear attack that had destroyed nodes in a network. The solution was a distributed network where 'packets' of information could be rerouted through another node once one ceased functioning. What started as a small experimental network for a few dozen researchers became renamed as the internet in 1989, the same year when Tim Berners-Lee at CERN in Geneva created the World Wide Web combining the idea of the distributed packet-switching network with the hypertext concept. Today the internet is estimated to connect roughly half of the world's population, according to some estimates.<sup>1</sup>

More and more people are now using "material, immobile (desktop computers) or mobile devices (laptops, netbooks, tablets or smartphones)" (Hoffmann 2017: 4) accessing the internet on a daily basis, establishing and maintaining various connections with the world via the internet. The internet contributes to the extension of social networks by making possible the emergence of online communities and the management of digital selves. At the same time, the Net has changed the way language is used and social interactions are carried out by its users, which entails new ways of coding text, contextualizing discourses and inferring meanings from them.

The internet is nowadays indispensable to the social and communicative life of many human beings, and digital living or internet-mediated living is becoming

---

1. See <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm> (accessed 8 June 2020).

something normal for today's advanced societies (Xie and Yus 2018, 2021).<sup>2</sup> Deumert (2020: 363) is right in pointing out that "the so-called 'new media' are no longer 'new,' but have become an integral part of many lives." According to an estimate by the International Telecommunication Union,<sup>3</sup> at the end of 2019, about 4 billion people were using the internet.<sup>4</sup> In China, by June 2019, the number of internet users had reached 854 million, with 847 million of them using mobile phones to surf the internet.<sup>5</sup> Many users have not only adapted themselves to the internet, they have also become dependent on it, feeling that they cannot live without it (Young and Abreu 2011; Jiang 2014; Bozoglan 2018; Mey 2018). The internet, for better or for worse, has changed our lives, somehow digitalizing them. Labels for the impact of the internet on human lives include *digital body* (Broadhurst and Price 2017), *digital city* (Forte and Murteira 2020), *digital citizen* (Ohler 2010), *digital consumption* (Belk and Llamas 2013), *digital criminology* (Powell, Stratton and Cameron 2018), *digital diplomacy* (Bjola and Holmes 2015), *digital existence* (Lagerkvist 2019), *digital health* (Maturro and Moretti 2018), *digital housewife* (Jarrett 2016), *digital mind* (Oliveira 2017), *digital street* (Lane 2019), and even *digital mourning* (Giaxoglou 2021), among others. For many people, digitality has characterized a substantial part of their lives.

The emergence and rapid development of the internet has resulted in tremendous, far-reaching impact and indeed transformative changes in almost every aspect of human life and existence, from daily shopping to business negotiation, from psychological counselling to political campaigning and national security (cf. Abbate 2000; Bakardjieva 2005; Cantoni and Tardini 2006; Singer and Friedman 2014; Bechmann and Lomborg 2015). Individuals and nations alike cannot afford to neglect the place of the internet in their life-world. Few people would object to regarding Donald J. Trump as the first Twitter president in human history, who successfully tweeted his way into the White House (cf. Boczkowski and Papacharissi 2018).

The internet can be seen a double-edged sword, bringing both convenience and inconvenience, information and misinformation, news and fake news, intimacy and distance, security and insecurity, and so on and so forth. The power of the internet, be it constructive or disruptive, is there. It can be said that the

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2. This can also find some expression from the current Covid-19 pandemic that has, due to the implementation of social/physical distancing, e.g., made schools and universities move their teaching online.

3. See <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx> (accessed 2 February 2020).

4. In contrast, Mey (2018: 26; italics added) states "that a majority of the world's population still lives in substandard, *pre-internet* conditions."

5. See <http://www.cac.gov.cn/pdf/20190829/44.pdf> (accessed 10 September 2019).

internet, or rather, the technologically-mediated cyber world, as a new life and action space ‘seamlessly’ connected with the physical world, seems to have become an extremely crucial ‘social field’ in the sense of Bourdieu (1977, 1990).<sup>6</sup> And this is all the more so when online-offline and public-private boundaries are getting more and more blurred (Fetzer and Weizman 2019).

The internet has, among other things, substantially contributed to the evolution of and, maybe, a revolution in human interaction. We are not only *on* the internet, we are also *in* the internet. We are relying on the internet so much so that the internet is more and more crucial, and perhaps even indispensable to us. We are, in a sense, confined and shaped by the internet. What the German philosopher Martin Heidegger said 70 years ago about technology in general, applies now to the internet, too: if “we merely conceive and push forward the technological, put up with it, or evade it [...] we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it” (Heidegger 1977: 4). The internet can bring us gains, but it can also bring us losses; it can bring us hopes, but it can also bring us despair; it can bring us happiness, but it can also bring us unhappiness, etc.

## 2. Defining internet pragmatics

Several terms have been coined to describe the kind of communication that takes place in internet-mediated contexts. The most common term used to be *computer-mediated communication* (henceforth CMC), which, according to Susan Herring (personal communication, 7 September 2020), probably first appeared in the late 1970s (e.g., Arnold 1978; see also Baron 1984; Herring 1996). Besides CMC, several other terms have also been proposed over these years, including, but not limited to *electronically mediated communication* (Smeltzer 1986), *digitally mediated communication* (Timmis et al. 2010), *internet-mediated communication* (Yus 2011), *keyboard-to-screen communication* (Jucker and Dürscheid 2012), *convergent media computer-mediated communication* (Herring 2013), *internet-based communication* (Gernsbacher 2014), *digital communication* (Tagg 2015), *web-mediated communication* (Yus 2015), and *digital interaction* (Mackenzie 2020). As for the description of linguistic, multimodal, visual or semiotic resources that people use in online contexts, several terms have also appeared, such as *electronic discourse* (Davis and Brewer 1997), *computer-mediated discourse* (Herring 2001), *computer-mediated discourse analysis* (Herring 2004), *digital discourse* (Thurlow and Mroczek 2011), *convergent media computer-mediated discourse* (Herring 2013), and *discourse 2.0*

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6. The interested reader may refer to Mey (2018) for a thought-provoking discussion of the social nature of the internet.

(Tannen and Trester 2013). All in all, these different labels reflect, to some extent, the development of internet technology at different stages, the changes in people's communication forms, channels and resources, and researchers' understanding of internet communication. They also show that internet communication is a fast-growing and thriving area of inquiry, which can be further evidenced by the numerous pertinent monographs, edited volumes, journal articles and book chapters published so far. This is also true of internet pragmatics.

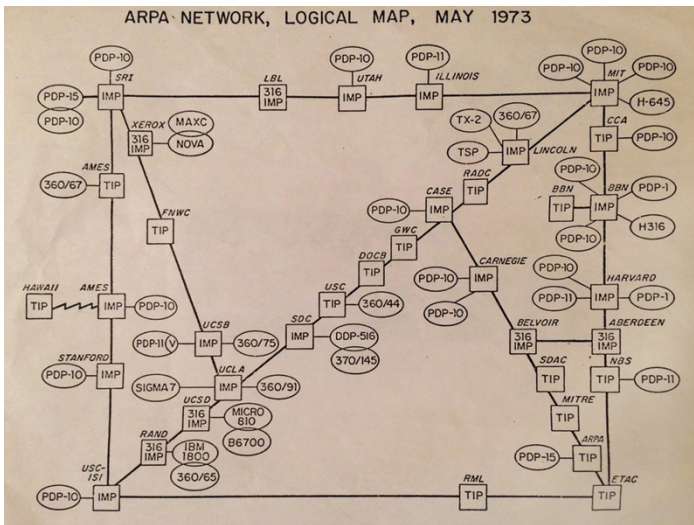
To define a concept or a research trend is not an easy matter. Wittgenstein (1969: 25) reminds us that “[w]e are unable clearly to circumscribe the concepts we use; not because we don't know their real definition, but because there is no real 'definition' to them.” The question, inevitably, is whether we should abandon the very act of defining something, since any definition can be one-sided, incomplete and may be misunderstood, since a definition can only be working and temporary and does not necessarily have a final satisfactory, fit-for-all meaning, since any definition may limit our understanding and research scope of the defined object. The answer is negative. Although Wittgenstein objects to defining concepts, he remarks that a “definition is a translation rule – it translates a proposition into other signs[...] A definition is a rule dealing with signs – it is neither true nor false” (McGuinness 1979: 247). In actual fact, the core issue here is not whether we need a definition, but what kind of definition we need. What is a definition? Definition is the product of explaining or evaluating behavior; it should be open-ended, not closed. But, even if we can give a tentative definition of something, does it mean that we really understand that something? Wittgenstein again contends: “We don't believe that only someone who can provide a definition of the concept 'game' really understands a game” (Wittgenstein 2005: 56e). Another point is this: “Does someone who uses the word 'chess' have to have a definition of the word in mind? Certainly not” (Wittgenstein 2005: 119e).

Bearing this brief discussion in mind, we venture to define internet pragmatics as follows. Internet pragmatics is, broadly conceived and simply put, concerned with the pragmatics of internet communication. We follow the European Continental tradition (Verschuere 1999; Huang 2007; Haberland 2010) and view pragmatics as a functional perspective on every aspect of linguistic, visual and/or multimodal behavior. In internet communication, people use mobile or desktop devices to go online and communicate with the world, with one another, and/or with themselves, linguistically, visually, semiotically, multimodally and/or emotionally producing, expressing, understanding, interpreting, evaluating, responding to, and/or manipulating news or fake news, information or misinformation/disinformation, truths or lies, meaning or intention, politeness or impoliteness, expectancy or deviance, deference or offence, etc., (partly) contributing to the emergence, maintenance, revolution and/or evolution of a user-generated,

participatory (cyber)culture and existence. Internet pragmatics presents a functional perspective on every facet of linguistic, visual and/or multimodal behavior/ (inter)action that occurs on and via the internet.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. The scope of internet pragmatics

From its small beginnings as a computer network experimenting with distributed packet-switching between a small number of mainframe computers that could survive a nuclear war the internet has grown beyond anything one could have foreseen in 1969. In 1973, one could still draw a simple map of the ARPANET with its 34 nodes (Figure 1), and UUCPNET, another precursor of the internet, used maps to construct ‘paths’ for the delivery of e-mail from one computer to the next, usually by modem connections. Today the complexity of the internet is beyond anybody’s grasp and understanding its workings does not really contribute to our understanding of what it does for us, and to us.



**Figure 1.** A map of the ARPANET, the internet’s predecessor, in 1973 (Stanford Research Institute)<sup>8</sup>

7. Taavitsainen and Jucker (2020) use the term *digital pragmatics* to describe “a specific way of doing pragmatics.” For them, “[i]t is not a sub-field of pragmatics, but relies on computerised data and ... applies a variety of empirical methods to investigate language use, and can be used in many different sub-fields of pragmatics” (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2020: 107).

8. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ARPANET#/media/File:Arpanet\\_map\\_1973.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ARPANET#/media/File:Arpanet_map_1973.jpg) (accessed 20 May 2020).

Philosophers of the last century, writing before the advent of the internet and the World Wide Web, may help us towards such an understanding, though. In his *Prison Notebooks*, the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) formulated his thoughts about ‘common sense,’ the everyday understanding of the world by ordinary, non-specialist people, and the world view it implies: “Our picture of the world is not critical and coherent but occasional and disjoint, and composed of elements of the caveman as well as principles of the most modern and advanced learning, prejudices of all bygone historical phases and intuitions about a future philosophy.”<sup>9</sup> This ‘common sense’ has been decried as primitive and in need of enlightenment from above or also the source of true understanding unaffected by intellectual abstraction, while it is both. The enormous amount at least of information accessible through the internet shows the same dialectics: it can be seen as an irrelevant amassment of data the access to which is manipulated by all-knowing search engines or also as a potential of knowledge that enables societal action.

In the same vein, Martin Heidegger reminds us that the affordances provided by the internet are not its essence yet. He says that

*technology is not equivalent to the essence of technology.* When we are seeking the essence of “tree,” we have to become aware that That which pervades every tree, as tree, is not itself a tree that can be encountered among all the other trees.

Likewise, *the essence of technology is by no means anything technological.* Thus we shall never experience our relationship to the essence of technology so long as we merely conceive and push forward the technological, put up with it, or evade it. (Heidegger 1977: 4; italics added)

It is not the understanding of the technology of the internet that brings us closer to an understanding, but the study of how people make use of the affordances that the internet provides. The complexity of the internet is not just a quantitative giant step, it is also a qualitative leap forward. Internet pragmatics as the study of not just what the internet *is* but how people use it and what they use it for is dealing with not only an increasingly complex, but also an increasingly diverse aspect of our life-world. The studies in this volume are contributions to our grasp with the internet as its users experience it today. Given the fast, sometimes unexpected changes in our life-world, online and offline, it is next to impossible to present the full range of pragmatics in internet-mediated interactions, but it is hoped that the current collection has showcased some of current interests in this line of inquiry.

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9. *Prison Notebooks*, Notebook 11, § 12, Note I (our translation); cf. Gramsci (1972: 324).

#### 4. Exploring internet pragmatics

Given its increasing ubiquity and indispensability, the internet has occupied an increasingly important place in various fields of the humanities and the social sciences, including, but not limited to, law (Katsh 1995), computer-mediated communication (Herring 1996), philosophy (Graham 1999), psychology (Wallace 1999), translation (O'Hagan and Ashworth 2002), sociology (Bakardjieva 2005), linguistics (Crystal 2006), visual culture (Bentkowska-Kafel, Cashen and Gardiner 2009), storytelling (Page and Thomas 2011), pragmatics (Yus 2011), ethnography (Underberg and Zorn 2013), history (Weller 2013), rhetoric (Handa 2014), literature (Hockx 2015), semiotics (Danesi 2017) and discourse analysis (Chovanec 2018).

Internet pragmatics as a functional perspective aims to describe and explain how users resort to various linguistic and/or semiotic resources on and via the internet to express and understand themselves as well as others. As we know, one of the defining features of human life-world is variety and diversity, with different members coming from various and diversified backgrounds (e.g., linguistic, cultural, educational, religious, ethical, cognitive, etc.). Members of a certain sub-culture may also display heterogenous characteristics. Total homogeneity is next to impossible in today's globalized and hyper-connected world, and students of humanities and social sciences should (learn to) embrace diversity, difference and heterogeneity, which has actually been further extended and expanded inasmuch as the internet has become a more and more integral part of human existence and social practice. The late sociologist C. Wright Mills reminded us that “[w]hat social science is properly about is the human variety, which consists of all the social worlds in which men have lived, are living, and might live” (Mills 1959: 132). This is also true of the humanities including pragmatics and internet pragmatics, which should not neglect the human variety and diversity in the process of describing and accounting for various phenomena in face-to-face or mediated interactions. As a result, disciplinary demarcations should not be strictly enforced; instead, fluid and active interaction between or among disciplines should be encouraged, with a view to presenting a possibly unified account more fully unfolding complex, intricate, or even conflicting phenomena that occur before, during, and/or after human interaction and communication in various contexts. Mills (1959: 139) was right in asserting that “[i]ntellectually, the central fact today is an increasing fluidity of boundary lines; conceptions move with increasing ease from one discipline to another.”

However, despite this fluidity, the application of some trends in pragmatics to internet communication seems to be more straightforward than others. This is the case of discourse analysis, whose reference in any pragmatic analysis of the



internet is unavoidable, even if there is no agreement on its scope or on a possible delimitation of the term ‘discourse’ itself as used in pragmatic research on the internet. Different proposals have suggested an amplification of the scope of ‘discourse’ not only as the minimal communicative unit but also covering longer stretches of written or spoken language, in which case the term may refer to the semantic representation of some connected sentences or to diverse communications about a particular issue (Fetzer 2014: 35). In this case, a preliminary source of disagreement among scholars arises from comparisons or overlappings with the related term ‘text’. Initially, a possible way of differentiating these terms is to account for their context dependence or lack of it. Two insights apply here:

- a. Texts are often regarded as more stable across contexts and with an identifiable default meaning, whereas discourses are mostly tied to contextual parameters and their meanings depend on what the speaker means by that discourse in specific situations. Widdowson (2004: 35) seems to comply with this differentiation when writing that discourse analysis “has to do not with what texts mean, but with what might be meant by them, and what they are taken to mean.” In this sense, Fetzer (2018b: 409) mentions the linguistic, cognitive and sociocultural contexts as the ones particularly framing discourse when conceptualized as an instance of communicative action.
- b. Text often refers to spoken and (mainly) written stretches, whereas the label discourse also applies to other semiotic modes such as the ones we can find on the internet nowadays, mostly of a multimodal quality (Fetzer 2018b: 34). In this case, there would be two senses of the term ‘discourse,’ according to Barron and Schneider (2014): a *narrow* and a *broad* sense. According to the former, discourse would be restricted to spoken language and text would be preferred for written language. Underlying this position would lie the general belief that texts are better for analysis since, in order to be analyzable, these units have to have some enduring shape. Turns in a conversation or a chatroom would not be texts (since they are volatile and soon gone), while video recordings or screen shots are, and therefore they can be analyzed (see Haberland 1999). Regarding the broad sense, discourse would refer to the totality of a social interaction, and text, by contrast, often only to its linguistic components (although video recordings also can be considered entextualizations; for an overview and literature see Haberland and Mortensen 2016).

Discourse analysis also faces delimiting issues, especially when compared to pragmatics. On paper, discourse analysis would be a branch of pragmatics, overlapping with other pragmatic disciplines such as conversation analysis. Other analysts such as Fetzer (2014: 35) propose that these disciplines are connected and overlap. However, these two terms have often been treated as interchangeable.

This is particularly noticeable when restricting the scope of the term to what the immediately surrounding pieces of text do to one another. For example, Fetzer (2018c: 397) comments that discourse analysis treats discourse as a relational construct, “relating its constitutive parts locally at the level of adjacent positioning and linearization,” even though she acknowledges that its scope reaches a global level with regard to the nature of their connectedness with the discourse-as-a-whole. There is certain insistence in proposing cohesion and coherence as typical discourse-analytic endeavors, when in reality this pragmatic perspective covers a wider range of linguistic issues.

When these labels are applied to discourse on the internet, we think the label ‘discourse’ is preferred to that of ‘text,’ and in fact there is a theory of *computer-mediated discourse analysis* that parallels discourse-analytic studies of offline discourses. Since most of the interactions taking place nowadays on the Net are multimodal in nature (text with *emojis*, text-image combinations in memes, blogs, video clips...), it is interesting to be able to rely on a notion that covers more types of discourse than the notion of ‘text’ does.

In this sense, there is a progression in the history of internet studies that makes both text and discourse somehow fit the kind of analysis undertaken from a pragmatic perspective, at least for a certain time. Indeed, as Herring (2019) proposes, there are three main phases in internet studies. In the first one, roughly until 1993, internet communication was mainly textual (SMS, text-based chat rooms...), so the labels of both ‘text’ and ‘discourse’ would aptly apply here. However, as we move into the second phase (more or less until 2004) and especially the third one (until 2017) embedded in *Web 2.0*, discourses become increasingly multimodal and the label “discourse” is accordingly the most appropriate label. Computer-mediated discourse analysis gathered this context-bound notion of discourse and not only applied it to various types of discourse (verbal, visual, multimodal) but also expanded it with the incorporation of insights from disciplines outside linguistics such as ethnography and anthropology, to name a few (cf. Bou-Franch 2021).

In any case, what needs to be pointed out is that the existence of a diversified world does not mean the impossibility of a unified account of the diversities involved. Although the actual world is characterized by chaos, confusion and a high degree of complexity, indeterminacy and unpredictability; although we cannot grasp the world totally and completely, nor can we precisely predict the future by means of the present, and there is not any necessary link between today and tomorrow (Xie 2007: 261), still we can, more often than not, find or feel that there does exist a certain degree of order, unity and/or predictability in chaos, diversity and/or unpredictability; an invisible hand seems to be looming large behind all the varieties, diversities or even contradictions, with patterns or at least the so-called ‘family resemblances’ (Wittgenstein 2009) emerging from time to time. In

this sense, conditioned unified or universal accounts for various and diverse phenomena in the social world should be encouraged and indeed, aimed for. And this should also be one of the major goals for internet pragmatics, which is interested in and devoted to discovering and interpreting how and why users make use of various social media platforms to do various things on and via the internet, contributing to the existence of a (partly) participatory cyberculture.

Internet pragmatics progresses with the emergence and development of internet technologies, with the more and more frequent online interactions among users and with the deepening of researchers' understanding of various issues that arise during and/or as a result of internet communication (cf. Herring 1996; Herring, Stein and Virtanen 2013; Hoffmann and Bublitz 2017). Figure 2 pictures a prototypical act of internet communication. Different research trends have addressed this communication, together with its multiple research issues, and these trends may be attached to the prototypical communicative steps portrayed in the figure (see Yus 2018d):

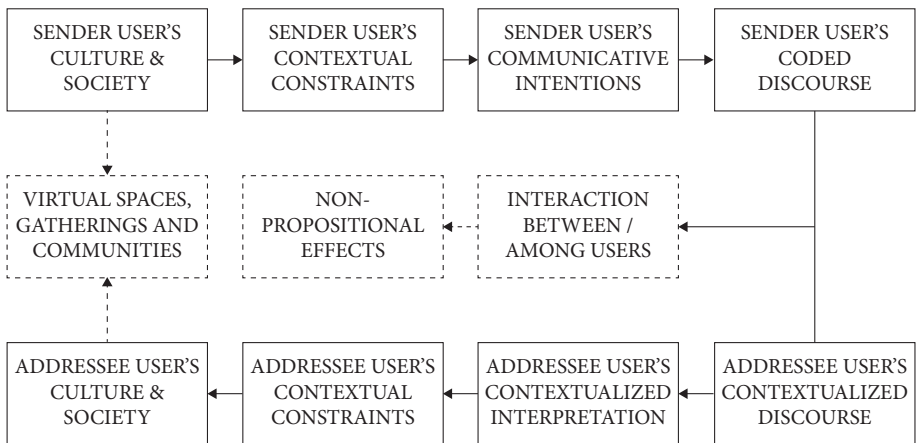


Figure 2. A prototypical act of internet-mediated communication

1. The chart starts with the sender user's culture and society, which generates a number of background assumptions, often of a stereotypical quality, including assumptions on how to engage in interactions online. Macrosocial pragmatic analyses such as those addressing (*im*)politeness (Maíz-Arévalo 2015; Graham and Hardaker 2017; Vladimirou and House 2018; Rabab'ah and Alali 2020), and *moral order* (Parvaresh and Tayebi 2018; Xie 2018, 2020a; Márquez-Reiter and Haugh 2019) would apply at this stage.
2. The user is framed, as it were, by what in previous research has been labelled *contextual constraints* (e.g., Yus 2017), namely aspects that frame, as it were, communication and have an impact not only on the quality of interpretation,

but also on the willingness to engage in future interactions. Needless to say, contextual constraints exist in every act of communication, not only internet-mediated ones, but their influence is much more noticeable on the internet, where interactions are often devoid of physical co-presence and utterances often exhibit a cues-filtered quality. More sociologically oriented pragmatic research would be interested in user-related contextual constraints such as *personality and identity* (Haugh, Chang and Kádár 2015; Kleinke and Bös 2018; Tanskanen 2018; Yus 2018a, 2018b; Xie and Tong 2019), and *self-presentation strategies* (Dayter 2016; Gruber 2019; Grieve, March and Watkinson 2020), clearly constraining the quality and quantity of the discourses produced and interpreted on the Net.

3. The user normally has certain communicative intentions upon engaging in an internet-mediated act of communication. Here, more cognitive-oriented approaches such as *cyberpragmatics* (Yus 2011) would be more suited for this kind of pragmatic analysis. However, *speech acts* have also been fruitfully applied to internet discourse as evidence of the user's communicative intentions (Page 2014; Hampel 2015; Aslan 2017; Decock and Depraetere 2018).
4. The user produces a discourse for other users to interpret (coded discourse versus contextualized discourse). As such, the internet exhibits a wide variety of discourses depending on how 'rich' they are in terms of options for contextualization, including (mainly) text-based interactions such as *email*; messaging *apps*' discourses with *emojis*, *GIFs* and *stickers* (Aull 2019; Beißwenger and Pappert 2019; Sampietro 2019); visual discourses such as *selfies* (Zappavigna and Zhao 2017; Page 2019b); verbal-visual discourses such as *memes* (Dynel 2016; Ross and Rivers 2017; Hirsch 2019; Vandelanotte 2019; Xie 2020b) and the innovative *danmu* (Chinese text superimposed on video, see Hsiao 2015; Zhang and Cassany 2019, 2021); *video*; and *social networking sites* where multiple discourses converge in the same area and each of these has its own specificities, as happens with the pragmatic uses of *Twitter hashtags* (Scott 2015, 2018; Matley 2018; Zappavigna 2018). Clearly, disciplines such as *computer-mediated discourse analysis* or *digital discourse analysis* would be appropriate research frameworks at this stage of the internet act of communication. The discourse produced on the Net is also constrained by the "social qualities" of the users to whom these discourses are typically addressed, as happens with highly specific discourses produced within *politically oriented sites* (Fetzer 2015, 2018a; Fetzer and Weizman 2018).
5. Discourses are not simply produced, but also aimed at triggering interactions with other users. Pragmatic disciplines such as *conversation analysis*, *interactional sociolinguistics* or even *ethnomethodology* may account for how

online interactions are structured or threaded, including turn allocation and adjacency pairs, among other issues typically studied by these frameworks.

Comments on discourses that abound on the internet, as in internet fora, interaction threads triggered by videos or within social networking sites are also genuine objects of research within internet pragmatics (see Lorenzo-Dus, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich and Bou-Franch 2011; Weizman 2018; Weizman and Johansson 2019). Furthermore, these interactions generate a number of non-propositional effects in the shape of feelings and emotions (e.g., feeling of connection, of mutual awareness, of group membership, of self-worth) that often constitute the main positive offset of internet-mediated acts of communication (Yus 2017). Needless to say, humorous effects are among the most gratifying of these non-propositional effects and the main reason why many online interactions take place (see Piata 2018; Yus 2018c; Orthaber 2019; Vásquez 2019; Dynel and Poppi 2020).

6. Finally, the effects produced on the addressee user depend on their own contextual constraints, including the user's conceptualization of their broad social and cultural context, even though, as portrayed in Figure 2, the offline culture and society of all of the interlocutors involved in the act of internet communication may converge in parallel virtual gatherings (e.g., communities) that may exhibit similar features to the ones found in offline scenarios.<sup>10</sup>

## 5. An overview of the volume

This volume presents an effort to explore several theoretical, methodological and empirical aspects of internet communication from a broadly conceived pragmatic perspective. To be specific, it aims to explore new pragmatic phenomena, issues and challenges that appear as people tend to spend more and more time interacting on the internet or, generally, in different forms of technologically mediated communication. This volume is concerned with how people use the internet (e.g., social media) to cater for their communicative needs, and how those virtual interactions have pragmatic implications on human relationships, identities and social or professional collectivities. It also seeks to explore and expound how online interaction is both similar to and different from offline interaction, how the online world and the offline world, still being distinct, have become inseparable or interwoven, how they are intertwined in a number of ways, and how online or

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10. The interested reader may refer to Yus (2019a) for some possible future research issues for internet pragmatics and Fetzer (2019), Jucker (2019), Page (2019a) and Yus (2019b) for corresponding comments and replies.

digital identities impact on people's language use in interaction and vice versa. We also hope to shed light on the ways orality and literacy have been re-defined by the new digital media.

This volume is divided into three parts. **The first part** consists of five contributions, addressing theoretical and methodological issues pertinent to internet pragmatics.

*Mey* engages in a discussion of how expanding pragmatics (rather than merely extending it) is necessary and possible by attaching importance to the central concepts of the 'pragmeme' and of 'adaptability' within the confines of value- and goal-oriented human (inter)action on the internet. The introduction of personal and societal values into the account for users' online or offline behaviors is illuminating in the sense that it is something normal and indeed ordinary for human beings to bear in mind, if not to be obsessed with, certain goals and values when it comes to social (inter)actions.

*Fetzer* focuses on how the pragmatic universals of contextualization, indexicality of communicative action and implicature undergo specific particularization as a result of varying degrees of multi-layeredness and boundedness inherent in contextualized computer-mediated discourse. Based on a discourse-pragmatic analysis of data, metadata and metarepresentations from some news reports on the former refugee Magid Magid taking up the Sheffield Lord Mayor post (18 May 2018), she demonstrates that contextual constraints and requirements of the medium are interdependent and that computer-mediated discourse and its contexts turn out to be multi-layered in terms of production and reception formats, thus requiring dynamic and metarelational adaptations rather than monolithic conceptualizations.

*Yus* seeks to account for how changes in internet technology towards an increasing importance of users' physical location have impacted the way people perform networking and socializing practices and produce and process information and meaning. Following the theoretical framework of cyberpragmatics and resorting to the example of Facebook check-ins, he deals with various stages of internet interaction mediated via locative media as follows: constraints, intended manifest information, mutually manifest information, inferred information and non-propositional effects, arguing that locative media not only contributes to our further understanding of space and its relationship with the digital information it gives or gives off, it also changes the impact the physical-virtual connection has on information or meaning intended, mutually manifest, or interpreted.

*Dainas* and *Herring* explore the pragmatic functions of 13 popular emoji on social media. Based on a survey conducted in early 2018, in which respondents were asked to interpret the pragmatic functions of emoji contained in comment postings in public Facebook groups, they find that the most preferred function of emoji is tone modification, that preferred interpretations of pragmatic functions

are related to emoji types and that a pragmatic perspective on emoji meaning is important for a better understanding of the dynamics of emoji in context.

*Labinaz and Sbisà* demonstrate that an Austin-based speech act theory is able to account for both face-to-face and online interaction. Viewing Facebook as an interactional environment, they discuss how social media participants contribute to the dissemination of knowledge in different ways through the performance of various kinds of speech acts and how two of Facebook's main features, namely liking and sharing, play a role in knowledge dissemination. Making use of examples from a corpus consisting of comments on Facebook posts concerning health and political issues, they illustrate four main classes of illocutionary acts in terms of characteristic procedural steps and their possible knowledge-disseminating effects.

**The second part** has three chapters. It focuses on how users manage self and identity on and via the internet.

*Maíz-Arévalo* investigates the use of humor as a self-presentation strategy in *WhatsApp* statuses. Based on both quantitative and qualitative analyses of a corpus of 206 *WhatsApp* statuses in Spanish, she argues that recurrent patterns (e.g., intertextuality and incongruity) do exist in people's display of humor in profile statuses and that the variables of gender and age seem to play a crucial part in determining whether users choose humor as a self-presentation strategy when composing their *WhatsApp* status as a way to invite rapport-building with present and potential future contacts.

*Xie and Tong* explore, with the aid of Goffman's insights on self-presentation, speaker footing and frame, how people doing social selling on WeChat present themselves in Moments and group chats and how emoji contribute to both self-presentation and social selling on WeChat. A multimodal analysis of both screen data and user data of Moments, group chats and emojis therein indicate that both self-expression and self-promotion, as a result of strategic frame-shifting and frame-overlapping, are staged mainly for the purpose of inviting a purchase of products advertised and that various emojis are employed to enhance such invitation.

*Perelmutter* presents nickname manipulations in online conflict discourse and their relationship with self-presentation and identity positions. By examining nick manipulation in multi-participant conflict discourse involving a community and resource for Israeli ex-Soviets at *souz.co.il*, she shows that nicknames can be manipulated and altered in conflict discourse involving impoliteness and jocular mockery, that in a multilingual migrant online community, nick manipulation can index other identity components, such as language selection, Soviet Jewish history, and that nick manipulation plays a crucial role in how individual or group identities are supported or attacked in online discourse.

The **third part** contains three chapters addressing the pragmatics of internet-mediated texts across different genres.

*Gruber* examines if and how the innovation hypothesis and the normalization hypothesis can account for the Austrian presidential candidates' communicative practices on Twitter during the 2016 election campaign. The chapter is based on both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the candidates' Twitter posts during three ballots, focusing in particular on the amount of information the candidates provided on Twitter, their use of the platform's interactive affordances, and the campaign tweets' content and rhetorical and interpersonal features. His research demonstrates that a coherent, focused campaign communication strategy on a social media platform leads to success rather than following one of the two communication hypotheses.

*Kavanagh* examines and compares how American and Japanese bloggers resort to emoticons to express semantic and pragmatic meaning in text-based online asynchronous blog comments. With reference to 100 Japanese and 100 American blogs selected from websites that rank personal blogs and data from interviews with bloggers, he presents a detailed account of how the variables of gender and culture contribute to shaping the usage, frequency and functions of emoticons, and how emoticons interact with the linguistic text and other "oralization" marks such as unconventional phonetic spelling.

Finally, *Sidiropoulou* focuses on pragmatic shifts in web-retrieved English-Greek translated press news texts on the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe. Tracing a migration-related conflict in the way migration and migrant identities are reshaped through English-Greek translation practice in the news, she analyses cross-cultural variation of shifting patterns in verbally mediated instances of suffering and migration in the Greek translated press, arguing that the English news reports take a more threatening perspective on the issue of migration, in contrast to a more humanitarian stance in the translated Greek version and that verbal discursive strategies locally re-narrating aspects of global reality may be paired with the contribution of the visual to co-convey psychological meaning.

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PART I

# Theoretical and methodological perspectives



# Expanding pragmatics

## Values, goals, ranking, and internet adaptability

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A pragmatic (rather than merely ‘extended’) perspective on internet user values regards both the value(s) of the interaction and those of its results. Firstly, a pragmatic evaluation presupposes that the interactants are agreed on *what* to evaluate and *how*, which implies the values being ordered in a ‘ranking’ according to importance. On the internet, such values depend on ‘likes’ or ‘hits’; the number of times a contribution has been accessed, even if negatively (in a so-called ‘shit storm’) makes it important. Secondly, being based on ranking, the evaluation is *pragmatic*: values are not a priori given, but emerge in interaction. Ranking presupposes the users’ accepting society’s values and collaborating in their creation; on the internet, this is done through ‘meaning making’ activities like ‘texting,’ ‘tweeting,’ or ‘instagramming.’ Current evaluation, in contrast to earlier, is ubiquitous, continuous, and accessible by i-Phone, i-Pad or other social-mediatic devices. Access and speed are important here; one cannot with impunity disregard a tweet, a writing on one’s Facebook, or an Instagram sent by one of one’s contacts.

**Keywords:** values in pragmatics, expanding pragmatics, extending pragmatics, evaluation, internet cline, ranking, interaction, ‘meaning-making,’ social media, goals, adaptability

### 1. Introduction

Recently, there have been tendencies to expand the accepted view of pragmatics as ‘the science of (the) language use(r).’ Thus, the notions of the ‘pragmatic act’ and the ‘pragmeme,’ first introduced by Mey more than twenty years ago (Mey 1993; see Mey 2001 for an updated version) have attracted a good deal of attention, and are being put to practice in a number of contexts (see, e.g., the contributions in Capone and Mey 2016). In particular, the notion of the *situation*, which was

the original ‘matrix’ of the pragmatic act, needed to be made more specific and ‘grounded.’ Whereas what the ‘ground’ consisted of, was not always made explicit by many authors, Yueguo Gu, in an important article advocated what he called a “land-borne situated discourse” (‘LBSD’; Gu 2010), operationalizing the ‘grounded’ character of pragmatics as opposed to versions of pragmatics that mostly deal with theoretical abstractions such as truth values. Likewise, Mey (2013) was an effort to concretize the ‘ground’ as a set of parameters dealing with space and time – the latter aspect especially having been mostly absent from pragmatic considerations. In that article, I argued for an extension of the idea of ‘ground’ to also include the development of pragmatic acts over time, in what I chose to call ‘sequentiality,’ taking off from a well-known notion developed in Conversation Analysis, according to which the evolving nature of the conversation was determinative for its final meaning and impact (see further Mey 2016a, 2016b). Also, in a seminal article, Bert Hodges (2009) has argued for introducing the concept of ‘value’ into pragmatic thinking and acting; even though value is inherent in all we do as humans, yet it has not been thematized consistently in pragmatic thinking.

The present contribution represents an effort to restore this ‘missing link’ in the theory and practice of pragmatics. Pragmatic value is of relevance both to scientific discourse and to our daily practices, as manifested in the way we assume and attribute responsibility to our own and others’ utterances and texts, both under normal conditions and in special situations such as fieldworking, or in life-threatening situations such as occur in the ER (emergency rooms) of hospitals (Odebunmi 2011; Mey 2017, 2019). It is particularly important to have the value factor placed correctly in relation not only to the context of controversy vs. agreement as they occur in academia, but also on a larger, societal scale, where so much depends on the value of our findings when these are used in public debates on life-relevant issues of ecology, nutrition, medicine, law, engineering, and so on. The dimension of value needs to be incorporated into all of our pragmatic thinking and practice, on a par with the recognized dimensions of research having to do with the proper placing, timing, and sequencing of our results and conclusions. A ‘value neutral’ approach to research and practice involving humans and their needs will never function appropriately in a pragmatically responsible context.

## 2. Extending or expanding

Expanding pragmatics goes beyond extending its scope in space and time, which are necessary first moves to plug the gaps left by many modern accounts (as in Mey 2001). Since pragmatics deals with the use of language by human users in the societal ambiance in which they find themselves (see Mey 1985), it is clearly necessary

to explicitly introduce the *user* in the process of language use. In his groundbreaking 2010 article, the Chinese pragmatician Yueguo Gu has done exactly that, by following a user during a day's progression of activities, in which both the language used and its conditions of use were neatly arranged in a visual space and ordered chronologically according to the user's location and movements (see Yus, this volume).

To a certain extent, Gu was able to account for both the space and time dimensions that were missing in earlier accounts; in a recent article of mine I try to incorporate the time dimension into the pragmatic acting directly by invoking the notion of 'sequentiality' (Mey 2013). What Gu did not deal with, at least not explicitly, is the state of mind of the user, and in particular a person's (in this case, a male's) motivation for proceeding exactly the way he/she does in the sequence of activities that Gu (2010) describes. Clearly, the question why a particular act is executed at a particular moment of time in a particular location, can only be answered by the agent him- or herself. And this brings up the question of goals and values.

### 3. A man and his cat: Value and behavior

To get a first grip on how values impact an individual's behavior, consider the behavior of an animal (such as a domestic feline) compared with that of its human owner. Obviously, my cat Nicky has goals: for example, he wants to get outside as soon as he wakes up, in order to attend to important business, and tries to catch my attention so he can realize this goal. Hence there is one pre-condition that needs to be fulfilled (a 'sub-goal,' one could call it, even though Nicky would not recognize this notion), namely that I open the cat flap (which normally is closed during the night so as to prevent other cats and predatory animals such as squirrels and raccoons to invade the property). Nicky cannot see the value of this sub-goal as compared to other, higher values (like mine: imagine that I tell him to wait until I get dressed or have had my breakfast); he will not, and cannot, understand any value that overrides his 'top-goal' of getting outside.

Compare now what may happen if my wife tells me to get out of bed and open that cat flap. I can either follow her gentle plea and do as I am told (probably the preferred option, given the time of day), or I can start to argue, invoking a higher value than that of accommodating a pet. I can say, for instance, 'Can't he just wait until I get dressed,' or 'I must have a shower/something to eat first,' or simply 'I don't want to be bothered this early.' Nicky the cat is an early riser and I maybe feel he should learn to be a little more patient (which is actually not as imaginary as it may sound; his twin sister Nilla has learned to listen to the clock, and makes no move until she hears it strike seven). So I could reason: if I don't do anything, Nicky will cease and desist, and I could stay in bed a little longer; however, this

would run counter to my wife's view of the situation, who'll tell me I'm a lazy bum without any feeling for Nicky's needs.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. Goals and values

Goals relate to values in the sense that they are determined by them: it's the value that makes the goal valuable. There is some confusion in the literature, where some authors uniquely focus on goals, or even consider values and goals as one and the same thing; in my opinion, calling a goal a 'value' is a wrong use of the term, akin to the rampant use of 'value' in commercial contexts, where it often is associated directly with the amount of money one has to shell out, alternatively can save, by making a purchase (or not).

Consider also that as a human, I may have conflicting goals (like getting out of bed vs. snoozing and let the cat wait); my choice of action is determined not by the various goals in themselves, but by the value I attach to executing the one or the other action (and hence also by the power I have available in the circumstances). There is also the superordinate value of maintaining domestic harmony; in the end, this will probably determine the outcome of this little morning episode: I get out of bed and let the cat out.

Whereas goals may be conflicting, transient, subordinated to other goals, and so on, values occupy a more stable position in our human make-up, our *identity*. Actually, in Jay Lemke's definition, identity is "the semiotic articulation of a person's *evaluative* stance toward interactions" (Lemke 2000: 283; my italics). The evaluation that is involved here does not only affect my own activities; it concerns, to a high degree, the interactions that I as a person participate in, and the concomitant values that these interactions represent and are guided by. As Bruno Latour has amply demonstrated, any scientific or other statement has to be understood as emanating from what he calls a "spokesperson" (Latour 2002: 70ff): a human being with his or her own system of values. All interaction with and among humans is tainted by the value systems that the users represent and are able to enforce if needed; willy nilly, they are spokespersons for those values, inasmuch as their "evaluative stance" colors, or even determines, the outcome of their interactions.

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1. As Hartmut Haberland reminds me (p.c.), values are related to power. In the present case, Nicky could resort to various ways of manifesting his power in order to enforce his values: loud mewing, scraping, jumping onto the marital bed, and even (Heaven forbid) start peeing on the carpet. However, Nicky being a well brought-up cat, he will do nothing of the kind; instead he silently acknowledges that his power is not readily available for cashing in on, so he'd better go on the potty like his sister Nilla always does.

Latour's example of a shop steward acting as a representative for the union, as compared to the foremen, whose 'stance' is colored by very different values (based on their interactions with the workers on the factory floor) is highly relevant here. The difference between the union representative and the foremen is one of 'spokesperson identities,' leading them to their respective stances, as determined by their systems of values. Consequently, the unanimous decision to strike, when voiced by the union's spokesperson and confirmed by the workers as a body, fritters away when the workers are considered as persons with their own identities, their own values, and their own "evaluative stances" towards the ongoing interaction, the labor dispute in Latour's (2002: 74) example.

## 5. Values in society

In an activity-based scenario, we should start by asking the all-important question: "What are the values that we humans try (and are able) to realize through our actions?" And next, we should put those values to work, while making them emerge in our use of language, in our pragmatic and speech acts. Doing this, we would indeed expand pragmatics by subsuming it within into the domain of human, *societal* values.

The problem is that such values cannot be defined solely on the basis of an individual's identity – something which Lemke's definition, quoted earlier, could seem to suggest. Our identity itself is constituted in society: even as persons with singular, independent identities, we are still dependent on society for our very existence. Lemke's (2000: 283) *shared* values are *shaped* values, shaped in and through interaction with our fellow humans. Even the classic '*homo economicus*,' trading his pair of home-made shoes for twelve yards of linen cannot realize the value of his labor unless somebody will take it 'off his hands,' in a transaction based on the respective goods' values. In today's advertising parlance, such 'values' are wont to be equaled with the general 'equi-valent,' aka. 'sums of money' – compare that Marx, in his tongue-in-cheek 'definition' of value, reminds us that for many people, "the value of a thing / is the price it will bring" (footnote to *Capital*, 1:16).<sup>2</sup>

In particular, when it comes to values in an internet context, the question arises whose values will prevail, and whose are the highest 'ranked': an ordering of values in and through social media which has gradually subsumed earlier criteria, based on the content of one's communication. One's appearance on the social

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2. The quote is due to the English literate Samuel Butler, who in his long poem *Hudibras* (1684) satirized the contemporary mores enforced by the Puritans (I owe this information to Hartmut Haberland, p.c.).



media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, WeChat and other platforms plays an increasingly important role in the process of ranking, both of the platforms themselves and of their users.<sup>3</sup> In the quantitative dimensions of the internet, where everything is immediately convertible to a certain numerically representable value, it comes as no surprise that also the appreciation of a person's 'value' now often is given in terms of how many 'likes' or citations a person can muster. And conversely, an absence of such a positive numerical evaluation can immediately be construed as a lack of social value for the person or platform in question.

As will be argued below, in Section 11, rather than focusing on the quality of what is produced and transmitted via the internet, the emphasis here is on *quantities*: the amount of text, the number of likes, the total figure denominating one's 'followers,' and so on, all this being calculated in a purely mechanical way, without respect for, or interest in, *what* is being transmitted. In fact, if one were to base one's evaluation based on actual transmitted content, one would probably be surprised to see how much 'negative' material (such as, but not exclusively, 'hate speech'; see Baider, Millar and Assimakopoulos 2020) is being socially mediated and distributed via web contacts, and thus is partially or wholly responsible for a user's overall ranking. Clearly, a high ranking number only expresses a 'being seen' (by being visited, quoted, or even re-'tweeted'); it is no guarantee for a person's ethical values or for a website's high moral standing.

## 6. The 'honor' problem

But what about those other 'values' – the ones not defined by considerations of money, media and markets? Recall the 2016 attempted 'honor killing' of a young Pakistani woman, Saba Maqsood, by her father, her brother, and an aunt (according to a report in the UK *Huffington Post*, 6 February 2016, the victim was shot twice in the head, stuffed into a sack, and dumped into the river, but survived), reminds us that the concept of 'honor' embodies values that may differ dramatically from society to society. While most people in the West (and also many in Saba's own country, Pakistan) consider this kind of 'honor killings' serious, even heinous crimes, many of Saba's own people will defend it, as belonging to their religious beliefs and cultural traditions.

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3. The present volume addresses several pragmatic issues of these platforms. See, for example, the chapter by Labinaz and Sbisà on speech acts in social media, the chapter by Gruber on Twitter, the chapter by Yus on Facebook check-ins and the role of location in social networking sites, and the chapter by Xie and Tong on WeChat.

Honor killings embody a ‘value’ in the societies in which they are practiced and condoned, even encouraged. In cases like these, we are witness to a *conflict* of values: the father, in the belief that the girl deserved to die, would appeal to values of correct behavior, such as a daughter’s acting in submission to parental authority and in accordance with the mores and norms of the community. Thus, while a certain segment of the community would accept, and agree with, traditional sanctions on this kind of transgression, outsiders to this societal segment would appeal to ‘norms’ believed to be of universal value, such as the Fifth Commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. When the father in the Saba case defended the attempted murder, he specifically referred to his actions as duty-bound within his society’s system of norms as an instance of ‘honor killing’; his words and acts matched the societal structure of which he was a part. By contrast, a person born and raised outside of that particular society would never be able to accept, and identify with, the family’s defense of the ‘honorable’ killing; their words and acts do not match the appropriate standards valid in his or her own society.

## 7. Truth and value in science

Science is supposed by many to be ‘value-free,’ that is to say, the scientist’s personal preferences should not be allowed to interfere with his research. What the scientist does, or is supposed to do, is to give us ‘the facts, all the facts, and nothing but the facts.’ Freeman Dyson, the famous American (but British-born) physicist, a recipient of the highest scientific honors, talks about ‘facts’ as true or false, as opposed to theories. “Science consists of facts and theories. Facts and theories are born in different ways and are judged by different standards. Facts are supposed to be true or false. Theories have an entirely different status” (Dyson 2014).

I want to hedge Dyson’s position by saying that we cannot truthfully talk about facts as ‘true’ or ‘false’; it is our *statements* about facts, often called ‘factual statements,’ that are “supposed to be true or false,” in Dyson’s words. The ‘facts as such’ are neither true nor false until somebody pronounces them to be either true or false. Hence, a ‘factual statement’ is not ‘factually true’; a factual statement is just what it says, a ‘statement about facts’; the ‘facts’ in this case being the findings reported by the scientist.

The important point to make here is that the scientist expresses his findings in statements; as such, the question of ‘truth in stating’ comes up. As Dyson himself admits, based on his own, rather embarrassing experiences in physics (the infamous W-particle was finally discovered, contrary to Dyson’s statements predicting

that it could not be found, since “it could not exist in this world”),<sup>4</sup> a scientist can indeed be mistaken in his or her statements (which thus can be ‘true’ or ‘false’).

Consider also that in certain, philosophically unimpugnable, but otherwise rather uninteresting ways, facts are *always* true, inasmuch as they ‘are,’ in the same way that the world ‘is.’ What is interesting here is the way scientists makes their claims *about* a certain fact. Whether or not explicitly addressed in the shape of a caveat or not, such ‘factual statements’ are necessarily subject to the scientists’ capabilities of expressing themselves – capabilities that vary greatly, due to the context in which the scientists do their work. While this context often limits the scientists’ abilities of expressing their findings, at the same time it affords them a unique (and often the only) way of making their findings accessible to a wider audience. In expressing him- or herself, the scientist is not merely a mouthpiece, a mechanical ‘spokesperson’ (Latour), letting some facts ‘speak’; contrary to popular belief (both among professional and amateur scientists), nobody has ever observed a ‘speaking fact.’ Consequently, the moment the scientist speaks, or climbs onto his/her keyboard, an entire system of *human* pragmatic parameters is put into action; among these parameters, *values* occupy a prominent place.

## 8. The pragmatics of value

The Scholastic philosophers, in addition to what they called the *causa efficiens*, the motor ‘behind’ the action, posit the importance of another cause, namely the *causa finalis*, the final aim that impacts the human motor ‘from ahead.’ That is to say, we consider the outcome of one particular activity by following its progress and outcome all the way to the end, or as far as we can envision it. One could say that our human activities are literally ‘finalized’ by the goals we are pursuing.

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4. In the case of Dyson’s theorizing, a paramount value was that of ‘stability,’ in this case the “stability of ordinary matter,” which was said to have been proven by a “laborious mathematical calculation” (Dyson 2014). A further value (dear to all scientists) was that of ‘generalizability,’ in this case the application of stability across the board also to sub-atomic modes of existence, such as observed in the world of particles. Thus, the overriding value of stability made Dyson predict that a certain particle, which embodied a theoretically necessary complement, could not exist since it defied stability. However, some twenty years later, this very particle (named the W-particle to honor the Nobel laureate, UT Austin professor of physics Stephen Weinberg) was indeed discovered following a series of experiments at CERN in Geneva. What had seemed to be a ‘factual’ statement turned out to be nothing but another sophisticated piece of theory, with a rather different place of origin: it was “born in a different way,” namely out of *value* considerations. The truth of the matter still hangs in the balance – precisely because value is a *pragmatic* consideration, not to be collapsed with some abstract ‘truth condition.’

Moreover, as it is our values that specify our goals, these values allow us to order our goals in ranking of *preferences*. Classical sociologists, such as Max Weber, hold that what he calls the rationality embodied in values ('value rationality') always has to compete with what he calls 'instrumental rationality,' and that usually, the latter trumps the former. However, as I see it, an instrument is only as good as the value it represents; and naturally, this value is of a different character, dependent on the society in which it is 'valid.' For instance, consider the ethical value represented by Thomas Jefferson's "pursuit of happiness" (as enshrined in the Preamble to the 1776 US Declaration of Independence, beginning with the words "We, the People ...").<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the values held by "the people" in 1776 are different from those that 'the people' are wont to embrace a couple of centuries later. Even if the words remain the same, their meaning (and value) has evolved: while 'happiness' for Jefferson and his consorts had to do with prosperity and social status, in our times we rather associate it with 'feeling good' (as in the popular cartoons and phrases telling us that 'Happiness is X,' where 'X' may stand for e.g., 'a warm puppy').

While values such as these by no means are universally or eternally valid, it behooves us to reflect on their placement in recent and current debates. Much of the discussion centers around what is, and what is not allowed, in our 'pursuit of happiness.' Suppose my happiness consists in being able to drive a fast car, regardless of the circumstances (such as road conditions, presence of people or animals in the vehicle and on the roads, the prevailing weather and other atmospheric conditions, my own state of mind and body, including my alertness after consumption of alcohol and/or drugs, and so on). If my value is the pursuit of that particular happiness of 'speed in driving,' regardless of the circumstances and traffic rules (such as maximum speed limits, insurance constraints, health and age restrictions, a valid driver license, and so on), I will set aside all other considerations, and drive like a madman if that is needed to make me happy.

One could perhaps say that such a driver's happiness is a singular user's only (in an interpretation of the term 'singular' that nowadays enjoys much popular appeal in public debate). By contrast, if we take Weber's 'value rationality' seriously, we should ask whose reason (or *ratio*) the value in question represents. If it only embodies (a) value(s) recognized by (a) particular individual (or group of individuals, as in "We the People ..."), we should not blindly honor such (a) value(s), as they may merely express our own (social or personal) wishes (in the 1776 histori-

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5. Actually, Jefferson's words had been amended by Congress: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

cal context, this would have been the contemporary urge for independence and liberty – at all costs).

## 9. Value-laden conflict: The participant observer

The pragmatics of value may be illustrated by referring to a case of ‘value-laden’ conflict, that of the participant observer. The classic case (for reasons of public normativity only accessible in practice by way of anecdote) is that of the ethnographer who, in the course of his or her fieldwork, is confronted with the concept and practice of anthropophagy, usually referred to as ‘cannibalism.’ Much has been written about the subject, but realistic, credible accounts are unavailable, for obvious reasons. But also on a less ‘loaded,’ more neutral level, the participant observation that is the core of ethnographic work, often runs into serious problems of value-laden behavior.

I will dismiss cases where the ethnographer may feel some nausea when offered a cup of locally brewed beer, especially when s/he is aware of the details of the production process (often involving the masticating of local fruits by the female members of the tribe under study). More serious conflicts of value arise when the ethnographer is confronted with information that, when divulged, may lead to investigations, arrests, and even prosecution of informants, in addition to nefarious personal side effects for the researcher, such as loss of valuable data and the impossibility of continuing the research, in addition to jeopardizing his/her stance in the local community, often acquired at great expense, and risking possible vengeful behavior on the part of his erstwhile informants. Here is a case in point.

In the eighties of the last century, the American ethnographer Eric J. Arnould, then of the University of South Florida (now at the University of Wyoming), worked as a participant ethnographer in the Central African republic of Chad, while also being instrumental in the CARE organization and providing human relief services in the aftermath of the decade’s devastating local wars. Arnould describes how one of his informants, a merchant, told him about how supplies from CARE were diverted for profit to the private market by some local CARE employees – many of whom were also among the researcher’s informants, and with whom he had forged bonds of solidarity and friendship. The ethnographer was in other words a participant observer but, being enmeshed in local disputes, he was unable to decide which side was right, which was wrong. No matter what he would do, drawing on his own understanding and principles would predictably result in the end of his observer functions – both locally and perhaps even professionally.

At this point, Arnould suddenly came to realize the political impact of his presence and how his ethnographic research involved value- and human

priority-related matters. He concluded that not only all “(ethnography) research is political,” but also that such research “raises issues of standards, terminal and instrumental value priorities” (Arnould 1998: 72). In other words, the issue was whose priorities (read: values) should carry decisive weight in a situation like his: the local people of Chad, or some other ‘stakeholders’ like CARE and its sponsors, the Chad government (“at the time a loose fraternity of warlords and their clients”; Arnould 1998: 73) or perhaps his own university?

After much deliberation, the ethnographer decided to inform the CARE-Chad authorities in the capital Ndjamena of his experiences, but did not directly confront the CARE people ‘on the ground’ with the accusations. In the end, he still wondered if his behavior had been “ethical” (Arnould 1998: 74), and concluded that at the end of the day, “almost no ethnographer feels free to go against his or her experiences in order to proclaim the value-neutral research ideal that is dear to many experimental and survey researchers” (Arnould 1998: 75). Indeed, such an approach to matters like these (and where things really matter) is not only value-neutral, but also ‘value-less,’ in the strict sense of the term. In particular, it is not a *pragmatically* valid approach, as pragmatics is explicitly concerned about values as they are present to, and practiced by, the common people, the ‘users,’ as they often are called in the dismissive, a tad cavalier jargon of our disciplines.

## 10. ‘Are they biting?’: Values and pragmemes

Sports fishers usually don’t like it when casual passers-by stop to inquire if ‘they are biting.’ Since the whole point of this kind of fishing is to sit undisturbed close to the river or lake, enjoy nature, and wait for the lucky fish to bite, the inquiry constitutes an intrusion into the private sphere of fish and fisher, endangering this special piscine-human relationship.

In another scenario, I might ask my wife the same question, ‘if they are biting.’ Despite the obvious linguistic identity of the querying, this situation is quite different: the moskies just love my wife, but she is pretty allergic to their attentions. Rather than showing a mere passing interest, the question now is one of concern and worry (a worry that may be warded off by my wife telling me that she did indeed put her ‘Off’ – a mosquito repellent – on).

For a person trained as a linguist, a significant potential difference between the two queries is in the use of the pronoun *they*, which for each case refers to a distinct noun: ‘fish’ in the first, ‘mosquitoes’ in the second. According to the linguist, it is the context that allows us to make the distinction – the context, either interpreted as ‘that which precedes and follows the utterance’ or ‘the entire constellation in

which the respective utterances occur.' The latter view of the 'context' is decidedly more in the line of pragmatics, as we will see; yet, it is not the whole story.

What we need to do is to look deeper, and probe into the underlying *pragmatic* structures of these seemingly identical utterances. For a linguist, the two phrases represent identical questions, to be differentially identified only in a larger context. In classical, Austin-Searle-Gricean pragmatics, the utterances are said to represent questioning speech acts, to be further interpreted in a broad framework of conditions and maxims, in particular (in Sperber-Wilsonian pragmatics) of the maxim of relevance.<sup>6</sup> Even so, the pragmatic elephant in the room is the ever-looming problem of what such utterances represent, considered from the *users'* point of view (see Mey 1985).

One way to look at the differences between the two questions is to consider the positive vs. negative orientation of a possible answer. In the case of the fisherman/woman, a 'Yes' would indicate a positively oriented situation: the fish are doing what fish are supposed to do, namely bite; this is what we (from the human user standpoint) value *positively*. By contrast, the same answer, 'Yes,' to the question asked in the mosquito context, indicates a negative orientation: even though from their own, mosquito viewpoint, mosquitoes too, when they bite, do what they are supposed to do, for humans, this biting is a pretty negatively valued activity: we do not want mosquitoes to bite, period!<sup>7</sup>

All of which goes to show that our consideration of the initial question, 'Are they biting?', lacks an essential element, viz., the values that we, linguistically and otherwise, attribute to the entire situation. Having a fish 'bite' (i.e., swallow the bait and get hooked) is considered a 'plus' phenomenon; having a mosquito bite you (i.e., puncturing your skin and injecting its venom) is definitely a 'minus' event.

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6. But what about 'truth-conditional pragmatics,' as invoked recently by François Recanati (2010) in an eponymous book? The answer is that 'pragmatics,' in Recanati's case, is a kind of 'magic wand,' called upon to sort out certain semantic anomalies and apparent contradictions (See also Levinson 2000).

7. At this point, I do not wish to go into the semantic legalities surrounding the term 'bite' when applied to mosquitoes. As anyone who has ever watched a mosquito at work knows, the evildoing insect uses its proboscis to penetrate the skin, then uses it to extract our precious blood, mixed with the insect's venom, and injected again in order to promote the flow. Clearly a 'sting,' not a 'bite' – but the English language decides otherwise!

Compare that other languages, following a more rational approach, award the 'bite,' rather than the 'sting' label only where appropriate. Thus, the Norwegian word for 'sting' (*stikk*) is applied indiscriminately to bees and mosquitoes (among other insects): *bistikk* 'bee sting,' *myggestikk* 'mosquito bite.' It is only in the entomological universe of English that fleas, lice and other pesky varmint have to share their linguistic biting rights with (female) mosquitoes – who technically don't 'bite' but 'sting' (Hartmut Haberland, p.c.).

The difference is in the *value* we accord the respective ‘bites’: positive vs. negative. But this value is not located just within the language as such, or even within the context, considered in the abstract, linguistic sense: it involves the entire perspective of the questioning speech act, comprising the personal and social presuppositions that each language user brings to the situation.<sup>8</sup>

In the example at hand (“Are they biting?”), we either have a perspective of (supposedly mutual) interest, as in the case of the friendly inquiry about the state of the fishery; alternatively, the perspective could be one of compassion or sympathy, as when we inquire about another person’s mosquito experiences. The situational speech (and other) acts that go with each of such perspectives have been conveniently bundled into what I call *pragmatic acts*. Here, the emphasis is not on any individual act of speech, but on the situation as a whole (which of course includes a multitude of speech and other acts of various kinds). Also, pragmatic acts are realized against the backdrop of past situations, as well as by looking ahead into the future with its anticipated events.

A cluster of pragmatic acts of the same type is called a *pragmeme*. A pragmeme (Mey 2001: Chapter 8) bundles our pragmatic acts as (‘allo-)practs,’ which are our individual ways of adjusting to the context of the situation, in all of its linguistic, social, and other aspects. In the case at hand, we could talk about a ‘pragmeme of interest’ (collecting acts that show an active interest in other people’s doings, as in the ‘fishing’ example), vs. a ‘pragmeme of compassion’ (gathering acts of commiserating with another person’s unhappy condition, as caused by mosquito bites or other woes).

Note that ‘compassion’ and ‘interest’ are not abstract qualities; they are the real *values* that are embodied in the situation at hand, not just in the utterances involved. Following Voloshinov’s (1973: 105; quoted in Xie 2008: 160) statement that “every utterance is evaluative,” it is from these values, as they are embodied in the situation and its participants, that we draw our motivation to address the fisher on the river bank or the mosquito-plagued wife on the patio. It is those values that make the speech act into what it actually *does* beyond merely representing; in the case of the two questions in our example, the embodied values show us what underlies the questions, namely the different pragmemes of value-inspired interactional behavior on the part of the interactants.

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8. Such presuppositions may of course differ from person to person. In extreme cases, some would even call a flea bite a ‘positive’ thing, as I presume the French Saint Benoît-Joseph Labre could have done. This Catholic mendicant saint lived from 1748 to 1783, mostly on the streets, roads and alleyways of Central Europe, and is considered the patron of the homeless. He became known for his peculiar ways of doing penance, among other things by constructing a girdle containing all sorts of blood-sucking insects, causing itch-provoking bites and stings.



Most importantly, these values show us, by their orientation, how to evaluate the respective acts in their appropriate situational surroundings, either positively or negatively. But note that such evaluations cannot be properly performed, or the implied values correctly assessed, until ‘post festum,’ when the pragmatic acts in question have been recognized for what they actually do/have done/may do. As Xie (2008) has observed, “what people do after the [verbal] interaction” is as important as what they do while ‘speech acting’; the end of the interaction is not simply identified as the point at which people stop interacting verbally. Similarly, pragmatic acting, with its concomitant determination of value, extends to, and encompasses what in classical speech act theory is called the ‘perlocutionary effect’ of the act. And that, at the end of the day, determines the societal importance of the human acts, collected under the *pragmeme* label: an importance which is grounded in the participants’ own values, as these are realized in their actions (see Gruber, this volume).

## 11. User values in the cyber world

In this final section, I will consider how an expanded pragmatics provides us with possible insights into the workings of what is often referred to as the ‘cyber world’ of virtual reality (as manifested on the internet). Pragmatically speaking, what happens on the internet with regard to user values, is a matter of two things: one is the evaluation of the interaction between the participants, the other is the value attributed to the result of the interaction (Mey 2016c).

As to the first, evaluating an interaction pragmatically rests on the assumption that the interacting persons are agreed as to how, and what to evaluate. Most of the times, such an evaluation rests extensively, if not mainly, on the notion of ‘ranking’ introduced earlier, as the process by which the interactants (explicitly or implicitly) establish a scale along which they and their values can be ordered according to importance. Thus, markers on the internet cline are emblematically rendered in terms of numbers of ‘likes’ or ‘hits’ – the latter number merely indicating the times your contribution has been accessed, even if negatively (in what colloquially goes under the label of a ‘shit storm’).

With regard to the second, evaluations necessarily imply a result in the form of an acceptance of this order of values called ‘ranking.’ When I was a rookie professor in a big American university, one of my older colleagues took me aside and kindly informed me of the practice of faculty ranking. What he said was ‘you may not realize it, but you are being ranked all the time by your peers’; what he meant was that my behavior (both personal and professional, including in particular my scientific production) was constantly being evaluated and ‘ordered,’ resulting in my

placement in the ranking order of the department. A further thing I did not realize at the time was that one's placement in this ranking order determined one's status with regard to perks and privileges, as for example in the assignment of courses to teach, like a '301 – Introduction to Linguistics' course, versus an upper level course in 'Theoretical Syntax'; what kind of office one came to inhabit (a top floor corner office versus one deep in the basement – a 'debasement,' as we jokingly called it); or the kind of secretarial and monetary assistance one could count on; and so on).

Ranking is typically a *pragmatic* process: the values involved are not a priori given, but emerge during the interaction. It presupposes the willingness on the part of the interacting users to be actively involved in the ranking process, to evaluate and be evaluated, to accept the values that are 'valid' in their given segment of society, and to independently collaborate with others in the creation of value. Typically on the internet, this is seen in the way internet users engage in 'meaning making' activities such as 'texting,' 'tweeting,' or 'instagramming' (Poulsen 2018).

The difference from earlier communicative processes (and this is where the 'expansion' of pragmatics alluded to in the beginning of this chapter becomes relevant) is that the internet values are constantly created and re-created in full publicity, and that, once the collaborative process of making meaning on the internet has started, it becomes very difficult to extract oneself from it, or even live properly without it. "When my iPad bust, I thought I'd died," as one young internet user expressed it. And "to have your Twitter voice suddenly silenced without warning, to suddenly stop answering those who tweet you is sending a message you don't want sent" (as Lynda Partner expressed on LinkedIn, May 4th, 2009 in a 'morceau' entitled "14 Days in Twitter Hell"); this, to the infelicitous twitter-berefts, may seem like doing time in the ultimate place of doom, the internet-less hell of our times. This, to vary Jean-Paul Sartre's description, is truly 'hell' as defined by the *absence* of 'the others.'<sup>9</sup>

What is new in comparison to earlier 'rankings' and evaluations, is that the current processes are ubiquitous, continuous, and accessible to anyone with an iPhone, iPad or any other social-mediatic device. In addition, the degree and speed of one's collaboration in 'making meaning' is of importance: as noted above, one cannot with full impunity neglect or disregard a message, a tweet, or a writing on one's Facebook wall. Silence on the internet is not exactly 'golden': it carries with it the forewarning of the final silence that will befall everyone of us users – not just in a Nietzschean 'recalibrating of all values,' but one occurring after the death blow to

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9. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, "L'enfer, c'est les autres" (from *Huis clos*, 1944).

all human values has been delivered, some million years from now, in a Posnerian “far future” (Posner 1990).<sup>10</sup>

As to ‘dying’ and ‘being reborn’ on the internet as a possible ‘out’ of the eternal conundrum of human survival across the aeons, this brings up the very pragmatic, real-life difficulties that may be involved in creating and maintaining an internet user *identity* (Turkle 1999). Typically, adopting a new, ‘live’ internet alias poses the immediate need of acquiring all the attributes characteristic of the ‘renovated’ personality. The risks involved here have been discussed by Sherry Turkle in an earlier work (1985), in which she recounts the sad fate of a person who ‘created’ himself on the internet as a practicing psychoanalyst, and as such became the victim of his own success. Despite the fact that the internet impersonator had been accepted in his new personhood, and actually was able to establish an extended internet practice of happy analysands, the new user’s self-evaluation apparently was not up to the pragmatic requirements of time, space, sequentiality and so forth. Hoping that things would adjust themselves as time and space developed in a more sustainable direction, the ‘psychiatrist’ continued the charade for a long time, until his earlier ‘true ego’ caught up with him and made him want to ‘retire.’ This, however, created a new series of pragmatic problems, having to do with changing or terminating his faked coordinates – which could only be done over the live, internet embodiments of the ‘patients.’ In the end, a harebrained solution was hit upon by the pseudo-psychiatrist: he would orchestrate his own demise on the net, and retreat to a hidden corner of the web where nobody would know or recognize him!

It is easy to say that the faker just could have ended the charade by pressing the ‘delete’ button and consign his whole internet personality to the trash; but the buck wouldn’t have stopped there. There were the many real cases of on-line patients who felt their mental condition and personal health depended on the impersonator’s advice and therapeutic interventions. When, in the end, the man did ‘kill’ his avatar, his own life situation had not become any better as the result of the experiment; in addition, he had to carry the burden of having misled a great many innocent bystanders, who now had to do without his advice and guidance, and suffered from a very real withdrawal syndrome. (Needless to say that this was not the real end of the story – which however will not be revealed here; the curious reader is referred to Turkle’s own fascinating narration of how this internet ‘köpenickiade’ was brought to an end; Turkle 2005).

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10. The Berlin semiotician Roland Posner has in an important early work, alerted us to the dangers and impossibilities of securing our atomic waste verbally or otherwise in relation to future generations of users (Posner 1990).

## 12. Conclusion: Adaptability vs. adaptivity

A pragmatic act, in the sense defined earlier, is in reality a situationally determined instance of ‘adaptability’ as “contextualized adaptive [human] behavior” (Mey 2001: 227; see also Mey 2009, 2020). The present contribution has shown how pragmatics, when studying the use of our senses and gestures in communicative behavior, needs (in addition to the parameters of time/space and sequence) to situate itself within the confines of value- and goal-oriented human (inter)action, both in its more or less traditional, voice- and/or writing-based forms and as realized by means of the social media on the internet.

In all these contexts of use, our values and goals do not merely concern the individual human, but are embedded in societal connections whose interests often are at odds with personal or group-based notions and aims. Consequently, ‘adaptability’ often is reduced to mere ‘adaptivity,’ understood as the passive adjustment to unforeseen and unforeseeable, hence poorly understood, changes in one’s environment (Mey 2009).

The above was illustrated by referring to a few recent cases where obvious clashes have occurred between the values of distinct societal formations (e.g., immigrants vs. ‘locals’). It was established that a ‘value-free’ pragmatics makes no sense, not even in scientific discourse, where the personal and societal values that determine the individual’s behavior should always be taken into account. Gathering speech, along with gestural, mediatized, artistic, and other communicative activities under the respective labels of different interactional pragmemes may help us envisage our adapting actions in a more consistent and transparent manner. In the way sketched here, *expanding* pragmatics (as opposed to merely *extending* it; Mey 2018) amounts to seriously applying the central concepts of the ‘pragmeme’ and of ‘adaptability’ – as they have been expounded above and elsewhere (e.g., Mey 2001).

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# Computer-mediated discourse in context

## Pluralism of communicative action and discourse common ground

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This paper examines the particularisation of the pragmatic universals of contextualisation, indexicality of communicative action and implicature in computer-mediated discourse. It adopts a discourse-pragmatic perspective to account for the interdependencies between the contextual constraints and requirements of the medium on the one hand, and the multilayeredness and hypertextuality of computer-mediated discourse on the other. Particular attention is given to the importation of context and provision of background information, and to their contribution to the co-construction of discourse common ground. Utilising data, metadata and metarepresentations from the coverage of a former refugee taking up a Lord Mayor post, the paper shows how the pragmatic universals undergo medium-specific particularisation and count as multiply contextual communicative actions with multilayered production and reception formats.

**Keywords:** context, contextualisation, discourse common ground, implicature, participation format, pluralism of communicative action, pragmatic universal

### 1. Introduction

Discourse has been described as a parts-whole configuration in which the whole is more than the sum of its parts. This does not only imply the truism that discourse-as-a-whole is more than the sum of its constitutive parts, but also that discourse is both process, that is its constitutive parts are being concatenated and linearised, and product, that is a final bounded whole (Fetzer 2018). In discourse pragmatics, discourse is conceived as communicative action and this does not only hold for its constitutive parts, for instance utterances realising speech acts – or conversational contributions –, but also for discourse-as-a-whole. The question whether the constitutive parts of discursive joints, e.g., discourse connectives, can be assigned the



status of communicative action is highly controversial. In their analysis of expositive illocutionary acts as higher-level speech acts, e.g., expounding a view, conducting an argument, and clarifying a usage or a reference (Austin 1975: 161), Oishi and Fetzer (2016) argue that both discourse connectives and expositives fulfil a metacommunicative function: “In performing an expositive illocutionary act, the speaker makes manifest how illocutionary force and locutionary meaning are intended to be contextualised discursively in context C, at a particular stage in discourse. In doing so, the speaker as the addresser of the illocutionary act makes manifest her perlocutionary intention of producing a perlocutionary object or sequel” (Oishi and Fetzer 2016: 54). They argue that because of their metadiscursive function, not only expositives, but also discourse connectives have illocutionary force. Grice (1975) differentiates between conversational implicature and conventional implicature and assigns the English discourse connective ‘therefore’ the status of a conventional implicature through which the speaker expresses a connection between two utterances A and B. By assigning the first utterance A the discursive function of premise and the second utterance B the discursive function of conclusion, the speaker claims that B follows from A without actually saying it literally. Relevance theory analyses discourse connectives as instances of procedural meaning (Blakemore 1992). While communicative intentionality has been assigned to speech acts, communicative acts or conversational contributions, which are considered as functional synonyms in this chapter and referred to with the term ‘discursive contribution’ in the following, this has generally not been the case for discourse connectives. As for internet pragmatics, the question whether hyperlinks can be assigned the status of carriers of illocutionary force will be addressed in Section 3.

Pragmatic investigations of discourse in general and of computer-mediated discourse (CMD) in particular have targeted the linguistic realisation of speech acts, considering primarily degrees of (in)directness, issues of (im)politeness, the strategic use of address terms and audience design, and the use of web-based particularities, such as hashtags, clickbaits, but also multimodality and hypermodality (e.g., Lemke 2002; Kress 2010; Blom and Hansen 2015; Scott 2015; Georgakopoulou and Spilioti 2016; Bou-Franch and Garcés-Blitvich 2018). The question whether mediation has an impact on the production and interpretation of discursive contributions as constitutive parts of discourse-as-a-whole has not been fully addressed yet. This is particularly true for the question of whether a discursive contribution may realise one communicative action or more than one communicative action, depending on the stage at which it occurs in the CMD, and depending on what kind of a discourse-as-a-whole a user may construct in their structuring of discourse. The dynamics of the sequential organisation of CMD allow individual users to construct their individual discourse-as-a-whole, as they

may exploit the hypertextuality of the web by clicking on different hyperlinks and accessing different frames following different threads, which themselves may contain different hyperlinks and different frames. Adopting a more commercially oriented perspective, hyperlinks may lure users “into clicking on and reading the full article thus making the news site more attractive for advertisers. If the readers click, it does the trick, seems to be the logic” (Blom and Hansen 2015: 99). CMD assigns the boundedness of discourse only a temporary status – the question of whether users have accessed one discourse, or a pluralism of discourse will be addressed in Section 3.

The constitutive parts of CMD, in particular, hyperlinks and frames, make it an unbounded sort of discourse entity which may, however, be bounded for individual users, who decide when they intend to terminate their accessing of further frames. This makes the production and interpretation of discursive contributions and of the discourse-as-a-whole a multilayered and thus rather complex endeavour which cannot solely be based on fundamental premises of pragmatics, that is intentionality of communicative action, the cooperative principle, maxims and conversational implicature – alternatively relevance-theoretic ostensive-inferential communication, the principles of relevance, and explicature and implicature –, presupposition and common ground. Rather, these generalised pragmatic premises need to be adapted to the contextual constraints and requirements of the medium, in particular to its status as a multilayered and potentially unbounded unit.

A discourse-pragmatic analysis of CMD also needs to address the question of what kind of data counts as communicative action. While the differentiation between data and metadata, representation and metarepresentation are fairly clear-cut in non-digital discourse, the status of discursive contributions in CMD is less straightforward. This is because CMD is no longer linear, but rather a multimodal, multilayered hypertext, and depending on a discursive contribution’s sequential status, that is whether it is accessed as an opening contribution of a CMD to be constructed or as a constitutive part of one of its topical sections accessed through hyperlinks, one and the same contribution can count as data or as metadata. This also holds for a discursive contribution’s status as representation or metarepresentation.

In the following two fundamental premises of discourse pragmatics – intentionality of communicative action and indexicality of communicative action – and their medium-specific particularisations resulting from varying degrees of hypertextuality, multilayeredness and boundedness inherent in the medium are analysed and discussed, and illustrated with a case study of the former refugee Magid Magid taking up the Sheffield Lord Mayor post (18 May 2018) as covered

by the BBC and other news outlets.<sup>1</sup> The following section analyses context, contextualisation and indexicality of communicative action in CMD, while Section 3 addresses pluralism of communicative action as regards multilayered participation and co-construction of discourse common ground. A conclusion summarises the results obtained.

## 2. Context, contextualisation and indexicality of communicative action

Context as a theoretical construct has undergone some fundamental rethinking in pragmatics and discourse pragmatics. Rather than being looked upon as an external constraint on linguistic performance, context has been analysed as a product of language use, as interactionally negotiated and co-constructed, and as imported and invoked (Levinson 2003; Fetzer 2011). Context is also of great importance to the psychology of communication. Bateson (1972) conceives context along the lines of the gestalt-psychological distinction between figure and ground and the related concepts of frame and framing. Frame is seen as a delimiting device which “is (or delimits) a class or set of messages (or meaningful actions)” (Bateson 1972: 187). Because of its delimiting function, “psychological frames are exclusive, i.e., by including certain messages (or meaningful actions) within a frame, certain other messages are excluded” and they are “inclusive, i.e., by excluding certain messages certain others are included” (Bateson 1972: 187). The apparent contradiction is eradicated by the introduction of set theory’s differentiation between set and non-set, which – like figure and ground – are not symmetrically related, as explained by Bateson: “[p]erception of the ground must be positively inhibited and perception of the figure (...) must be positively enhanced” (Bateson 1972: 187), concluding that the concept of frame is metacommunicative, which also holds for context: “the hypothesis depends upon the idea that this structured context also occurs within a wider context – a metacontext if you will – and that

1. The data are adopted from the following websites:

- <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-44144705>;
- <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5741235/Reality-TV-star-failed-fugitive-Hunted-Lord-Mayor-Sheffield.html>;
- <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sheffield-lord-mayor-magid-somalia-refugee-youngest-green-party-viral-picture-a8359751.html>;
- <https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/sheffield-lord-mayor-magid-magid/>;
- <https://www.indy100.com/article/magid-magid-lord-mayor-somalia-sheffield-viral-dr-martens-stairs-8357291>;
- <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/people-watching-magidmagid-dominic-cummings-sandra-bullock-and-harry-styles-jgbjm9pv6> (accessed 23 February 2019)

this sequence of contexts is an open, and conceivably infinite, series” (Bateson 1972: 245). Bateson thus provides a frame of reference which may not only help to understand the varying degrees of boundedness in CMD, but also multilayeredness and hypertextuality. By relating set and non-set, frame and metaframe, and context and metacontext, he provides a system which may account for the different computer-mediated discursive products constructed by different participants who nevertheless started with the same opening frame, but ended with differently linearised discourses, as they included some discursive frames, thereby excluding others: “whenever this contrast appears in the realm of communication, [it] is simply a contrast in logical typing. The whole is always in a metarelationship with its parts. As in logic the proposition can never determine the metaproposition, so also in matters of control the smaller context can never determine the larger” (Bateson 1972: 267).

Context has also been approached along the distinction between context as type and context as token, differentiating between more generalised, if not default context, and more particularised variants of context as well as their actual instantiation in social interaction. Furthermore, a typology of context – related dialectically, but with fuzzy boundaries – has been suggested classifying context as cognitive context, linguistic context, social context and sociocultural context. The type and token differentiation, the typological classification and the dynamic conceptualisation of context as both process and product are of particular importance to the examination of context in CMD. They allow the constitutive parts of CMD to be conceived of not only relationally, but also – to employ ethnomethodological terminology – *doubly contextual* (Heritage 1984: 242). That is to say, a discursive contribution relies upon the existing context for its production and interpretation, and it is, in its own right, an event that shapes a new context for the action that will follow. This is because discursive contributions contain context and they are at the same time contained in context, which is also reflected in Bateson’s claim that “communication is both context-creating and context-dependent” (Bateson 1972: 245).

The interactional and logical-typing-based approaches to context are based on the premise of indexicality of communicative action, and at the same time entail the process and product of contextualisation – both as regards the constitutive parts of discourse and discourse-as-a-whole, and as regards context itself. This is of prime importance to the investigation of context, contextualisation and indexicality of communicative action in multilayered CMD with its varying degrees of boundedness.

## 2.1 Context and contexts, and types and tokens

Natural-language communication is a context-dependent endeavour par excellence: participants refer to themselves and their minds, and to each other and each other's minds (Givón 2005), to the immediate and less immediate physical surroundings, including temporal and spatial settings, and to prior and potentially succeeding talk, all of them being constitutive parts – with fuzzy boundaries – of cognitive, linguistic, social and sociocultural<sup>2</sup> context, which are related dialectically in communication (Fetzer 2012, 2017). In CMD participants expand their discourse beyond the here-and-now by anchoring it in the world-wide web, which allows them to follow hyperlink-based invitations – deliberately clicking on or being lured into clicking on – in order to access more remotes discursive frames, which may contain yet further layers of CMD. This kind of multilayeredness makes discursive frames multifunctional, assigning them the status of a constitutive part of a discourse-in-progress, which – depending on the stage at which the frames are accessed – may provide additional background information required for inferring. Alternatively, the frames may be continuations of the discourse's thematic thread. The hypertextuality and multilayeredness of CMD and the pluralism of communicative action do not only have consequences for the conceptualisation of the different kinds of context, which have been postulated for natural-language discourse as described in the following, but also for the administration of discourse common ground (Fetzer 2007), which will be examined in Section 3.2.

To capture the multilayeredness of context in natural-language discourse, a taxonomy has been proposed based on the embeddedness of utterances in interaction: cognitive context, linguistic context, social context and sociocultural context. Cognitive context is composed of mental representations, propositions, contextual assumptions and factual assumptions. It is utilised for inference and other forms of reasoning and thus is indispensable to the interpretation of language and other semiotic codes: cognitive context may be conceived of as functionally equivalent to language users' minds. Since cognitive contexts are anchored to an individual, but are also required for a cognitively based outlook on discourse and communication, they need to contain assumptions about mutual cognitive environments or "other minds" (Givón 2005). To capture the differentiation between an egocentric participant and their individual speaker-intention, and an interacting participant and their collective we-intention (Searle 2010) and their I- and thou-sociality (Brandom 1994), Penco (1999) distinguishes between subjective context and individual context. The former refers to a subjective, viz. cognitive (or epistemic),

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2. Sociocultural context represents a particularization of social context, coloured by culture-specific variables.

representation of the world, and the latter refers to an individual representation of the world. Both may be identical, but need not be. This is because subjective context refers to an individual set of beliefs, which may belong to an individual participant or to a community, and individual context refers to an individual representation of the world, which is functionally synonymous with the set of beliefs of an individual participant, which may be quite idiosyncratic. The differentiation between subjective context and individual context is of great importance to the analysis of a participant-centred construal of context as it allows for an explicit distinction between the sociocognitive construal of individual context anchored in a single participant, and the participants' construal of – in Penco's terms – subjective context, which is negotiated by the participants in and through the process of communication and thus is – to some extent – shared by the participants. While participants may negotiate cognitive context in face-to-face interactions and agree on some – to varying degrees – shared cognitive context or subjective context, the negotiation of context is very different in CMD with its participant format of one-to-many, or many-to-many. Here, it is neither clear who participates in the interaction, nor is it clear whether the participants share discourse common ground, as will be expanded on in Section 3.2.

Linguistic context comprises the linguistic output of language use and is composed of linguistic constructions (or parts) embedded in adjacent linguistic constructions (further parts), which may be further embedded, composing a discourse unit, which has been referred to as elementary discourse unit, clause, sentence, utterance, turn or text. Linguistic context is functionally synonymous to text-linguistic co-text. In CMD the conceptualisation of linguistic context as co-text needs to be expanded and include multimodality, that is other semiotic codes, such as font, colour and layout, as well as pictures and videos. In the BBC online-coverage<sup>3</sup> of Magid Magid illustrated below in Figure 1, the linguistic context comprises the actual co-text, some of it printed in bold in order to foreground the information transmitted '**Former refugee Magid Magid takes up Sheffield Lord Mayor post**', with the date '18 May 2018' as well as the caption in the picture 'CHRIS SAUNDERS' and the captions below the picture 'Magid Magid is the 122nd Lord Mayor of Sheffield'.

The discursive value of the information transmitted in the linguistic context is further contextualised with the picture, showing the new Lord Mayor squatting on a plinth, wearing Doc Martens, a colourful tie and the ceremonial chain. The picture supports the pragmatic process of reference assignment mapping the person in the picture with the new mayor, as encoded in the caption. At the same time, the

3. See <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-44144705> (accessed 23 February 2019)

Former refugee Magid Magid takes up Sheffield Lord Mayor post  
18 May 2018



Magid Magid is the 122nd Lord Mayor of Sheffield

Figure 1. BBC Online Coverage

picture imports social context with respect to its temporal embeddedness, which is encoded (18 May 2018), and its signalled local coordinates of public space and institutional space of the city hall of Sheffield, pragmatically enriching the depicted plinth on which Magid Magid sits as the end of bannister in Sheffield City Hall. The CMD on Magid Magid contains numerous hyperlinks, which invite – or lure – participants to access more background information in order to gain further insight into the matter. It also invites participants to share the article via various social-media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter, or simply use email.

Social context goes beyond linguistic context and cognitive context and is generally seen as ‘external’ to discourse. This does, however, not mean that social context is not referred to in discourse and thus imported into the discourse through entextualisation,<sup>4</sup> as is the case with the indexicals *here*, *now* or *I*, respectively *here in Sheffield*, *now at this very moment here in the UK* or *I as the Lord Mayor*. Constituents of social context are, for instance, participants, the immediate concrete, physical surroundings including time and location, as well as macro contextual institutional and non-institutional domains.

4. The use of ‘entextualisation’ shares Park and Bucholtz’s (2009: 489) conceptualisation of entextualisation in terms of “conditions inherent in the transposition of discourse from one context into another” and acknowledges Haberland and Mortensen’s focus on heteroglossia (Haberland and Mortensen 2016). However, it additionally considers entextualisation of unbounded context at particular stages in a discourse. This is the case when participants assign an unbounded referential domain, for instance ‘here,’ the status of a bounded referential domain, for instance ‘here in London.’ It also applies to unbounded events, for instance the embodied act of speaking, or to its particularisation.

In CDM, the description as ‘external to discourse’ is very problematic. Of course, social context comprises the participants who produce and interpret the CMD, and it comprises their local and temporal embeddedness in the process of meaning production and meaning interpretation. Social context is, however, more deeply embedded in the linguistic context of CMD than it is in its non-mediated counterpart. This is because of its multilayered constitutive discursive frames and of its mediated status reflected in the participation framework with a one-to-many or many-to-many orientation as well as with its being uncoupled from space and time. To contribute to felicitous communication and to support comprehension, referential domains of social indexes are generally provided, either as entextualised social context within a discursive frame or as hyperlinks, inviting – or luring – participants to access more information, should the communicative need arise.

Context has been analysed and described as a relational construct, relating communicative actions and their surroundings, relating communicative actions, relating individual participants and their individual surroundings, and relating the set of individual participants and their communicative actions to their surroundings (Fetzer and Akman 2002). It has also been described as dynamic, relating participants and their discourse in a dialectical manner. To capture the dialectics of the dynamics of context, discourse needs to be defined as context-dependent, context-changing and context-creating. In a similar vein, context is imported into discourse and it is invoked in discourse, for instance by the reference *I as the Lord Mayor*, which imports and invokes a different social context than the reference *I as a linguist*. In interactional-sociolinguistic terms, context is brought into a discourse with indexical expressions, presuppositions and background information required for communication to be felicitous, and context is brought out in the discourse through the negotiation of meaning, e.g., negotiation of referential domains of indexicals and enrichment of other inexplicit and elliptic forms.

## 2.2 Contextualisation cues and contextualisation

A dynamic conceptualisation of context is based on the contextualisation of the constitutive parts of a discursive contribution as well as on the contribution-as-a-whole. This holds for both micro and macro domains of communication, and is thus connected intrinsically with the research domain of interactional sociolinguistics and its premise of indexicality of communicative action, which is analysed and discussed in the next section. Contextualisation is functionally equivalent to enriching inexplicit forms and contents of a discursive contribution or of some of its parts, assigning discursive values through local and global conversational inferencing to these indexical tokens. Contextualisation as a process and its indexical forms – referred to as contextualisation cues – are a constitutive part of the



metasignalling system of communication: “I argue that (...) contextual information is imported into the interpretative process primarily via indexical contextualization cues, in the form of presuppositions of what the activity is and what is communicatively intended” (Gumperz 2003: 119).

Contextualisation cues are metalinguistic indexicals, whose discursive meaning is calculated against the background of their co-occurrence with other linguistic and semiotic devices. Contextualisation cues can be realised phonologically, such as intonational contours, stress and pauses, they can be realised lexically, for instance as particles and metacommunicative comments, they can be realised non-verbally, for instance with gestures, facial expressions and spatial management, and with typographic means, for instance font, colour and spacing. They “serve to retrieve the contextual presuppositions conversationalists rely on making sense of what they see and hear in interactive encounters. They (...) have no propositional content. That is, (...) they signal only relationally and cannot be assigned context-free lexical meanings” (Gumperz 2003: 9). The contextualisation of discursive contributions is done via conversational inference:

... in the case of contextualization cues context is not overtly specified. It is this that suggests the parallel with Gricean implicature, where inferring also involves a two-step process in which the contextual ground, in terms of which an assessment of what is perceived is made, must be first retrieved and related to stored memories before an interpretation is arrived at. Contextualization cues channel the inferential processes that make available for interpretation knowledge of social and physical worlds. (Gumperz 1996: 383)

The importation and invocation of context is based on the premise that language is a socially situated form and that language variation and alteration are not random or arbitrary, but communicatively functional and meaningful. The use of language and of other semiotic systems is always embedded in the delimiting frame of a discourse genre with its genre-specific constraints, in accordance with which discursive contributions are contextualised. The two-step process referred to above is thus not only local, but also feeds on the macro domain of discourse genre and thus on both local and global conversational inferencing:

It is useful to distinguish between two levels of inference in analyses of interpretive processes: (a) global inferences of what the exchange is about and what mutual rights and obligations apply, what topics can be brought up, what is wanted by way of a reply, as well as what can be put into words and what is to be implied, and (b) local inferences concerning what is intended with my one move and what is required by way of a response. (Gumperz 2003: 14)

The interpretation of discourse as both process and product is not an additive endeavour and is thus not only based on the contextualisation of discursive parts, but

also on their decontextualisation and recontextualisation in order to construct a coherent whole. While contextualisation describes the process of assigning discursive values to indexical tokens, recontextualisation describes the process of adapting discursive values which have been assigned to the tokens in a prior context to the constraints and requirements of a different context. Decontextualisation, by contrast, describes the process whereby an indexical token is extracted from its particular context and assigned a generalised discursive value which is intended to obtain in a default context. Entextualisation is different to re- and decontextualisation as it encodes the linguistic product of an indexical token's contextualised context in discourse: "I link processes of entextualization to the notion of *mediation*, (...) involving the encoding, transfer, and decoding / interpretation of meaning" (Jaffe 2009: 573). In discourse, context may be entextualised in pictures, hyperlinks or in the encoding of unbounded referential domains indexed by the deictic 'here,' for instance with 'here in Sheffield' which assigns the unbounded referential domain 'here' the status of a bounded object (cf. Fetzer 2011).

Context and contextualisation are complementary. They are constitutive parts of the process and product to recontextualisation, decontextualisation and entextualisation, and they may account for bridging the gap between internal and external contexts, micro and macro contexts, and context importation and context invocation (Levinson 2003), as will be illustrated with the analysis and discussion of the following discursive Excerpt (1), which is placed below Figure 1 on the BBC<sup>5</sup> website:

Excerpt 1. **A former refugee who has taken over as Sheffield's Lord Mayor says he hopes to bring the role "into the 21st Century."**

*Magid Magid, is the city's first Somali mayor, first Green Party mayor, and, at 28, the youngest mayor.*

*He came to Sheffield aged five after six months in an Ethiopian refugee camp with his mother and five siblings who left Somalia "to find a better life."*

"Just me being in the post brings an element of difference to the role," he said.

[Yorkshire Breaking News: Man dead in Leeds Ring Road crash and "plastic-free" shop opens in Sheffield](#)

Mr Magid, [who was a contestant on Channel 4's reality show Hunted](#), added: "I hope it will help engage those that have not previously engaged before."

5. Cf. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-44144705> (accessed 23 February 2019).

He was sworn into his new role at the annual mayor-making ceremony, where the Imperial March from Star Wars was played followed by the Superman theme tune, [as reported by the Sheffield Star](#).

*But his story is not a case of a privileged upbringing helping to open doors but of determination, ambition – and a love of climbing mountains.*

The discursive Excerpt (1) recontextualises the heading ‘**Former refugee Magid Magid takes up Sheffield Lord Mayor post**’ above the inauguration photograph by not only providing more pictures of Magid Magid – one as a child in his home in Sheffield, and another very recent one depicted in Figure 2 with the ceremonial chain of the Lord Mayor, but also a brief biography of Magid Magid’s life with the classical narrative of a refugee who left their home hoping “to find a better life,” formatted as a mixed quotation by the newsmaker thereby deflecting responsibility and signalling detachment from the quoted (cf. Fetzer 2020). In the excerpt Magid Magid’s ethnic background, age, his role in a reality show and his political affiliation, as well as the quotation that the new mayor hopes to bring the role “into the 21st Century” are indexed. The mixed quotation contains the quoted “into the 21st Century,” which implies that up to now the role of the Lord Mayor has not yet been brought into the 21st century and thus is outdated. It also illustrates the clickbait function of hyperlinks luring participants to access further news sites.

The new mayor is quoted saying that “Just me being in the post brings an element of difference to the role,” with the invited conversational inference that the elements depicted in Figures 1 and 2 bring in that element of difference, that is Magid Magid squatting on, and not standing in front of a staircase in Sheffield’s city hall, wearing Doc Martens boots and not more conventional leather shoes, having selected the Superman theme tune, and not a more conventional one, for his inauguration ceremony. Similar new elements are also depicted in the recent picture of Magid Magid wearing a more ordinary outfit in office, that is baseball cap, combat jacket, T-shirt and ceremonial chain – and not suit, shirt and tie –, as shown in Figure 2.

Based on the discursive input, readers may interpret the new role of a mayor in the 21st century and contextualise it accordingly as introducing radical changes in how politics is going to be done. This politics-based contextualisation is, however, not supported by the discursive excerpt on the BBC website, where the new role of the Lord Mayor co-occurs with Magid Magid having gained experience as a contestant on Channel 4’s reality show ‘Hunted,’ which is hyperlinked to a story in which the new Lord Mayor reveals what apparently went on behind the scenes. Should readers have contextualised the new role of a lord mayor as regards political changes, they would at this stage need to recontextualise the new role along the parameters put forward in the news discourse and encoded in the pictures.



**Figure 2.** Mr Magid has said he wants to bring the role of Lord Mayor into the 21st Century<sup>6</sup>

On the website there is another hyperlink to the local newspaper Sheffield Star, from which the Superman theme tune has been adopted. It invites readers to access their coverage of the new role of Magid Magid. The final section of the BBC website depicts Magid Magid's success in local politics as having been down to "determination, ambition – and a love for climbing mountains."

The conceptualisation of context as a dynamic construct is based on the contextualisation of communicative action in general, and on the contextualisation of discursive contributions in particular. Looked upon from a CMD perspective, which explicitly considers the distinction between discourse-as-product and discourse-as-process, discursive contributions are not only contextualised locally, but may also require de- and recontextualisation at a later stage when discursive incongruencies arise and their discursive value needs to be renegotiated. This process of contextualisation, decontextualisation and recontextualisation is particularly important when readers accept invitations – or are lured – to access further hyperlinked discursive frames, whose coherence with the ongoing discourse may need to be (re)established.

Interactional sociolinguistics provides relevant bridging points between an exclusively product-oriented conception of context-as-given and an inherently dynamic process of contextualisation, which has been assigned the status of a universal in human communication: "Since all interpretation is always context-bound and rooted in collaborative exchanges that rest on shifting contextual presuppositions, contextualization must be a universal of human communication" (Gumperz

6. The final part of the heading of the website reads "he hopes to bring the role 'into the 21st Century.'"

1996: 403). In CMD, contextualisation is based on the hyperlinked interactions between textual units, and visual and auditory elements captured by Lemke's concept of *hypermodality* (Lemke 2002), and it is this hyperlinked interactivity which guides the participants' meaning-making processes.

### 2.3 Indexicality of communicative action

A dynamic perspective on discourse supplemented with the interactional-sociolinguistics universal of contextualisation (Gumperz 1996) and the ethnomethodological premise of indexicality of social action (Garfinkel 1994) goes beyond the local contextualisation of discursive contributions, thus providing a synergetic approach to the multilayeredness of CMD. Both interactional sociolinguistics and ethnomethodology are based on the premise of indexicality of communicative respectively social action. While the former conceives of language as a socially situated form and considers discourse genre as the basic unit of investigation to which its constitutive discursive contributions refer indexically thereby interactionally organising the genre-as-a-whole, the latter relates the indexicality of social action to practical reasoning from means to ends, goals and purposes, in particular to the operations *et cetera*, *let it pass*, *unless* and *ad hocing*. This allows ethnomethodology to postulate another fundamental premise derived from indexicality and practical reasoning: accountability of social action.

Indexicality of communicative action requires a relational framework which connects one communicative action with another, with the latter being a constitutive part of a metasystem, as has been argued for in the discussion of a relational conceptualisation of context in Section 2.1. Thus, the resolution of linguistic expressions and of other semiotic signs depends on their indexical references to metasystems, which constrain discursive production and discursive meaning-making processes. As for discourse genre and other larger units, they function as metasystems for discursive contributions, while the meaning-making process for the discourse-genre-as-a-whole depends on the units of investigation in which the genre is embedded, for instance sociocultural context. Thibault (2003) points out another important issue with respect to genre-specific constraints:

Rather, genres are types. But they are types in a rather peculiar way. Genres do not specify the lexicogrammatical resources of word, phrase, clause, and so on. Instead, they specify the *typical* ways in which these are combined and deployed so as to enact the typical semiotic action formations of a given community. (Thibault 2003: 44)

Discourse genres are not only important because of their status as metasystems; they also connect individual action with collective goals (Alexander and Giesen

1987), thus bridging the gap between monolithic participants and their discursive and interactional roles and functions in multilayered polylogues. This is also true for genres in hyperlinked and multilayered CMD, contributing to their hybridity and potential embeddedness in different genres, as has been shown by Mirović, Bogdanović and Bulatović (2019) for science communication on the internet with the users' easy access to hypertextual resources in the context of knowledge building, and the facilitation of the use of multiple genres.

Another kind of system-metasytem relation, which has not explicitly been seen as an instance of indexicality of communicative action, is the relevance-theoretic conceptualisation of quotation as a kind of metarepresentation. Metarepresentation "involves a higher-order representation with a lower-order representation embedded inside it. The higher-order representation is generally an utterance or a thought" (Wilson 2012: 232), and "can be analysed in terms of a notion of *representation by resemblance*" (Wilson 2012: 243; original emphasis). Indexicality of communicative action is also reflected in the system-metasytem relation of data and metadata. While data may be seen as functionally equivalent to 'what-is-said,' metadata make explicit the contextual coordinates of what-is-said, for instance captions of photos, local and temporal embeddedness, hyperlinks or multimodality (fonts, spacing, colours, etc.), if intended and used as contextualisation cues. It needs to be pointed out that what-is-said does not only refer to linguistic output, but may also include photos, pictures, videos and other visual and auditory information. Needless to say that the status of data or metadata is interdependent on the users' access of the website's constitutive discursive frames: if accessed initially, the what-is-said of a particular discursive frame counts as data. Should the identical discursive frame be accessed as a hyperlinked follow-up, what-is-said counts as metadata.

The complexities of indexicality of communicative action and of the multilayeredness of CMD are illustrated with a discursive Excerpt (2) from the Daily Mail Online,<sup>7</sup> which does not contain any hyperlinks. Data and metadata relevant to the analysis are printed *in italics*:

Excerpt 2. Magid, who featured on popular Channel 4 show *The Hunted*, *has promised to bring the ceremonial role 'into the 21st century.'*  
 A former student of Hull University, he is the first Lord Mayor to have a *degree in marine biology.*  
 And wanting to rid the post of its 'archaic' nature, *Magid was also the first to swear during his inaugural speech.*

7. See <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5741235/Reality-TV-star-failed-fugitive-Hunted-Lord-Mayor-Sheffield.html> (accessed 23 February 2019).

He thanked his mother *'for putting up with all the s\*\*\*'* he'd caused her over the years.

The nontraditional theme didn't stop there as Magid picked the *Imperial March from Star Wars* followed by the *Superman theme tune* to play while guests and elected members took their seats in the town hall to welcome their new Lord Mayor.

For his inaugural portrait the *Green Party* councillor, also known as *'Magic Magid'*, decided to illustrate just how unconventional he planned to be.

*Donning black Dr Martens* and squatting on top of the staircase in Sheffield Town Hall, Magid looked like the city's own *'Batman'* as many dubbed him.

*Social media users were quick to show how much they appreciated Magid's modern approach, with one writing: 'He's super and a brilliant role model for young people. I am loving your start!'*

*Another said: 'Already a big fan of the new lord mayor of Sheffield based on his inaugural portrait alone.'*

*'Possibly the most majestic mayor photo ever? Congratulations to the 122nd Lord Mayor of Sheffield.'*

*Others said: 'The appointment of Magid Magid as Sheffield's new Lord Mayor is just brilliant. I really hope he shakes up the system and shows others what an amazing city Sheffield is.'*

*'Sheffield you may be bad at trees but you major perfectly.'*

*'Loving the style and confidence from the [new] Lord Mayor of Sheffield.'*

Following his appointment to the post yesterday, Magid paid homage to the city he was raised in, *saying he is 'honoured and privileged' to have been given the title of first citizen and the responsibility of representing Sheffield.*

The Daily Mail Online and the BBC website discussed above frame their report on the inauguration of Magid Magid with a mixed quotation, metarepresenting his saying that he wanted to bring the role of the Lord Mayor – described as “ceremonial” in the Mail – ‘into the 21st century.’<sup>8</sup> The BBC presents the mixed quotation as a heading and the Daily Mail in the initial contribution of the report. While the BBC uses the neutral quotative ‘say’ in the metarepresentation, which introduces the fully quoted content (**A former refugee who has taken over as Sheffield's Lord Mayor says he hopes to bring the role “into the 21st Century”**), the Daily Mail Online assigns the illocutionary force of promise to the quoted content and meta-represents only the time span with a mixed quotation. The dichotomy between the

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8. The Lord Mayor of Sheffield is a ceremonial post held by a member of Sheffield City Council. Lord Mayors are elected annually by the council.

21st century and so-called former times is also metarepresented in Excerpt (2), juxtaposing ‘archaic’ and ‘21st century.’ Other instances of metarepresentation are the mixed quotation ‘for putting up with all the s\*\*\*’ used by Magid Magid when thanking his mother in his inaugural speech. Embedded in the mixed quotation is another indexical reference realised with the metacode ‘\*\*\*.’ Other metarepresentations of Magid Magid are the ‘Magic Magid’ and ‘Batman,’ the former indexing his style and personal aura, and the latter his musical preferences. Both outlets refer to Magid Magid’s Doc Martens, to the Superman tune and the Imperial March from Star Wars, and to his political affiliation.

The indexicality of communicative action is also reflected in the Mail Online website quoting social media users’ comments on the new mayor, both within the body of Excerpt (2), and as the actual presentations of the messages within the same frame. In the body of the excerpt the new Lord Mayor is metarepresented as ‘Possibly the most majestic mayor photo ever? Congratulations to the 122nd Lord Mayor of Sheffield,’ and as ‘He’s super and a brilliant role model for young people. I am loving your start!’ The metarepresentation contains a compliment (‘I am loving your start!’), metarepresenting on the metarepresentation. The positive evaluation is also reflected in the comment ‘Already a big fan of the new lord mayor of Sheffield based on his inaugural portrait alone,’ in ‘The appointment of Magid Magid as Sheffield’s new Lord Mayor is just brilliant. I really hope he shakes up the system and shows others what an amazing city Sheffield is,’ and in ‘Loving the style and confidence from the [new] Lord Mayor of Sheffield’ with the original tweet containing ‘newly attested.’ Another comment quoted in the report refers indexically to Sheffield’s tree massacre in 2018, and comments on the new mayor with a pun: ‘Sheffield you may be bad at trees but you major perfectly.’ It is not only users whose comments are metarepresented, but also Magid Magid’s reaction to his appointment, saying that he is ‘honoured and privileged’ to have been given the title of first citizen and the responsibility of representing Sheffield.

The analysis of Excerpt (2) has shown that quotation as a kind of metarepresentation plays an important role in the indexicality of communicative action, referring to other communicative actions and relating them. However, it is not only the quoted content, which is metarepresented, but also the original illocutionary force and the original participation format as well as other kinds of metadata, in particular their contextual embeddedness. It has also become apparent that indexicality of communicative action in the context of the hypertextuality and hypermodality of CMD means that indexical references to multilayered discourse and multilayered context are interdependent on the stage at which the discursive frames are accessed. Hence, the indexicality of communicative actions and their constitutive parts may be resolved by users relating different referential domains to different layers of discourse and different layers of context.



### 3. Pluralism of communicative action

Discourse pragmatics analyses the context- and discourse-dependent meaning of the constitutive parts of discourse as well as of discourse-as-a-whole. It shares the fundamental premises of sociopragmatics, that is intentionality of communicative action, indexicality of communicative action, the cooperative principle, its maxims and implicature, and common ground, which have undergone genre- and medium-specific particularisation, this chapter argues. In line with the fundamental premises of sociopragmatics, rational and intentional participants produce and interpret discursive contributions in the context of CMD. While pragmatics has analysed communicative action as *X counts as Y in context C*, discourse pragmatics has expanded the frame of reference and contextualised participants doing things with words as *X may count as Y in discourse D in context C*. However, when participants do things with words in CMD, their communicative actions may be described as follows: *X may count as Y, but possibly also as Z or Z<sub>n+1</sub> in discourse D in context C*.

The pluralism of communicative action has already surfaced in the definition of communicative action in discourse in general, allowing for alternative interpretations. This is because communicative action in discourse is always communicative action in context, and for this reason hardly ever fully determinate. The context-dependence and embeddedness of communicative action in discourse is captured by the discursive constraints of sequentiality and dovetailedness: “Sequential organization refers to that property of interaction by virtue of which what is said at any time sets up expectations about what is to follow either immediately afterwards or later in the interaction” (Gumperz 1992: 304). These expectations are captured by the Gricean concept of dovetailedness, according to which conversational contributions are expected to be “such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange” (Grice 1975: 45). ‘Dovetailed’ thus means being linked by one or more common goals manifest in prior and succeeding talk (cf. Grice 1975: 48).

Not only speaker-intended meaning is of relevance, but also the uptake of the speaker-intended meaning with respect to discursive contributions being embedded in further discursive contributions. And it is the production of talk – or utterances counting as speech acts – which is *doubly contextual* (Heritage 1984: 242) in discourse (see Gruber, this volume). Moreover, the sequencing of discourse makes manifest the conventional effects of speech acts, as argued for by Sbisà: “When considering a sequence of moves, it is reasonable to view the output of one move as coinciding with the input for the next” (Sbisà 2002: 72).

In the context of CMD with participants being able to select their individual threads and construct their individual discourse, the discourse-pragmatic

constraints of sequentiality and dovetailedness require revisiting. While traditional non-digital discourse is a product in its own right with uptake being made manifest in the ‘next move,’ CMD is both process and product with its inherently pluralistic sequential organisation. That is why the discursive constraints of sequentiality and dovetailedness have been assigned a dynamic interpretation: sequentiality allows for a plurality of sequential organisations and dovetailedness obtains a more individual, participant-oriented interpretation which considers the various stages in the discourse at which dovetailedness needs to obtain for the individual users. The inherently pluralistic constraints of sequentiality and dovetailedness allow for individually constructed threads across frames and metaframes, always including one while excluding another, as has been argued for above in the analysis of context in Section 2.1.

The pluralism of communicative action is a necessary consequence of the contextual constraints and requirements of CMD, in particular of the possibility for a more individual-centred sequential organisation of digital discourse, and hence a more individual-centred interpretation of dovetailedness. Naturally, this has also an impact on the discourse-pragmatic constraints of indexicality and contextualisation with both obtaining more individual-participant-centred conceptualisations.

Pragmatics has not only focussed on the analysis of speaker intentions, as is reflected in Searle’s distinction between I-intention and We-intention (Searle 2010), but also considered the discursive dimension of communicative intentionality by differentiating between I-sociality and Thou-sociality (Brandom 1994), micro intention and macro intention (Fetzer 2004), and intentionality and shared intentionality (Tomasello and Carpenter 2007). The pluralism of communicative action (Cappelen and Lepore 2005; Lewinski and Aakhus 2014) in discourse entails the ethnomethodological premise of accountability of communicative action (Garfinkel 1994). Thus, it is not only the intended purpose and goal which participants would be able to account for in CMD, but also the question of why they opted for the construction of one particular interactional organisation of discourse, and not another one.

The pluralism of communicative action is illustrated and discussed with Excerpt 3 from the Times Online,<sup>9</sup> which is placed below Magid Magid’s inauguration picture; linguistic material relevant to the analysis is printed in italics:

*‘I’m going to be innovative,’* announced the 122nd lord mayor of Sheffield as he took office *last week*. *‘I’m not going to be the normal, stuffy lord mayor.’*

9. See <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/people-watching-magidmagid-dominic-cummings-sandra-bullock-and-harry-styles-jgbjm9pv6> (accessed 25 March 2019).

We'd spotted that. For a start, there was the music at the mayor-making ceremony for Magid Magid: the theme from Superman and the Imperial March from Star Wars. He posed for pictures in a combat jacket and Dr Martens boots while sporting the traditional tricorne hat and chain of office.

*The new first citizen of Sheffield is planning radical innovations.* Magicians and music will be introduced to liven up council meetings, he says. He has written a Christmas song and is planning an attempt to break the Guinness world record for the longest hug.

The excerpt opens with a quotation sourced by Magid Magid supplemented with relevant contextual coordinates making explicit its temporal frame. The reference to a future act of the source and the implication that this is beneficial for the recipients makes the statement a prime candidate for the speech act of promise. However, for recipients who are not in full agreement with the new mayor, the reference to a future act may carry negative implications and thus would be interpreted as a threat. The follow-up in which Magid Magid announces that he is going to be different may support both interpretations, thereby reinforcing the initial interpretation of the quotation. The metacomment ('We spotted that') by the newsmakers seems to voice agreement. However, by echoing the 'innovation' and explicating it by references to a particular choice in music and items of clothing, the nature of innovation is recontextualised as some different kind of radical innovation, as is corroborated with the succeeding paragraph and indexical references to music, a Christmas song and the Guinness world record. This contextualisation of 'radical innovations' invites inferences along the line of the question whether that is really everything, which the new mayor intends to change.

### 3.1 Multilayered participation

In the classical model of communication with a speaker and a hearer exchanging messages, if not speech acts, pluralism of communicative action has not been an issue, which needed to be addressed. This has changed with the analysis of multi-party, multi-frame and mediated interactions, such as drama (e.g., Clark and Carlson 1982), media discourse (e.g., Fetzer 2006) and computer-mediated discourse (e.g., Yus 2011), and with the explicit account of the participants' interactional roles as regards production format and footing, and reception format (Goffman 1981; Levinson 1988). Clark and Carlson (1982) were one of the few who explicitly related the multilayeredness of participation format and communicative action. Analysing drama, they demonstrate how speakers, that is the actors on stage, perform two types of illocutionary acts: classical speech acts, e.g., assertion, promise or apology, directed at the direct addressee on stage, and the

illocutionary speech act type of informative directed at all the others: public side participants (Clark and Carlson 1982: 339) in their terms. Hence, they differentiate between a first class of speech acts defined as addressee-directed illocutionary acts, and a second class of speech acts defined as participant-directed illocutionary acts with the direct participants not being identical with the direct addressees. Their “THE INFORMATIVE-FIRST HYPOTHESIS” states that “[a]ll addressee-directed illocutionary acts are performed by means of informatives” (Clark and Carlson 1982: 333).

The interdependence between pluralism of communicative action and participation does not only result from the difference between what is said and what is meant, but also – if not primarily – from co-authored production formats, and in the context of CMD, co-constructed unbounded discursive contributions which are addressed to multiple recipients who participate in the co-construction of follow-up contributions (cf. Weizman and Fetzer 2015). The truism that pragmatics examines context-dependent meaning obtains yet another layer of complexity with context not only conceptualising and referring to assumedly mutually shared space, mutually shared temporalities and mutually shared discourse, but also to multiple embedded layers of context. This is particularly true as CMD can no longer solely be monomodal. Analysing multimodal – or hypermodal – discourse requires the researcher to account for the multisemiotic resources involved, as well as for their – hyperlinked – interactions.

It goes without saying that the hypertextuality, multilayeredness and dynamics of CMD is also reflected in hyperlinked, multilayered and dynamic constructions of discursive identities, as active participants contributing to the ongoing discourse on the one hand, and as represented and metarepresented discursive identities within the CMD on the other, as is going to be illustrated with the analysis and discussion of Excerpt 4<sup>10</sup> from the Daily Mail Online which contains embedded pictures of Magid Magid as well as tweets, which are placed below their metarepresentation on the same website; linguistic material relevant to the analysis is printed in italics:

Excerpt 4. *Social media users were quick to show how much they appreciated Magid’s modern approach, with one writing: ‘He’s super and a brilliant role model for young people. I am loving your start!’*  
*Another said: ‘Already a big fan of the new lord mayor of Sheffield based on his inaugural portrait alone.’*  
*‘Possibly the most majestic mayor photo ever? Congratulations to the 122nd Lord Mayor of Sheffield.’*

10. See <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5741235/Reality-TV-star-failed-fugitive-Hunted-Lord-Mayor-Sheffield.html> (accessed 26 March 2019).

*Others said:* ‘The appointment of Magid Magid as Sheffield’s new Lord Mayor is just brilliant. I really hope he shakes up the system and shows others what an amazing city Sheffield is.’

‘Sheffield you may be bad at trees but you major perfectly.’

‘Loving the style and confidence from the [new] Lord Mayor of Sheffield.’

Multilayered participation is reflected in the newsmaker bringing in quotations from social media users, which are not only presented in the form of direct quotations with generic sources (‘one writing’; ‘another/others said’) but also as reproduced tweets, which allow media users to utilise them as second-order speech acts, for instance as retweets. Quotations from others sources but the speaker in her/his role as quoter are instances of multilayered participation formats par excellence. They bring in other voices and assign them the status of objects of talk. If multi-agent interaction is taken as the default (Lewinski and Aakhus 2014), pluralism of communicative action holds for both illocutionary and locutionary pluralism.

Pluralism of communicative action is based on multilayered participation, and vice versa. Both are context- and discourse-dependent concepts and derived from the interactional-sociolinguistic premise of sociolinguistic variation, that is to say linguistic variation and alternation are not random or arbitrary, but communicatively functional and meaningful, and the ethnomethodological premise of accountability of communicative action, which says that participants are able to account for their social action by making explicit their discursive goals and purposes. As for the CMD analysed above, newsmakers have accounted for their communicative actions by quoting sources, supporting their argument with pictures and other multimodal modes, and with hyperlinks which invite other participants to validate the newsmakers’ claims and to co-construct collective discourse common ground.

### 3.2 Discourse common ground

Common ground is indispensable for felicitous communication, as has been pointed out by Stalnaker (1999), and it is also indispensable for felicitous communication in the world-wide web. While the reconstruction of common ground is a fairly straight-forward endeavour in the classical model of communication with an exchange between one speaker and one addressee, the hyperlinked and multilayered communicative scenario in CMD with pluralistic communicative actions and multilayered participation requires common ground not only to be multilayered, but also dynamic (see Yus, this volume, on physical-virtual contextualisation of multiple on-going interactions). Against this background, this chapter argues, it seems more appropriate to adapt the concept of common ground to the discursive constraints and requirements of multilayered participation and utilise its context-dependent particularisation: discourse common ground.

Discourse common ground is a context-dependent notion, which administers the contextualisation of discourse, in particular discourse processing, negotiation of meaning and construal of discourse coherence. It contains a set of references to a particular domain of discourse, to domain-specific beliefs and to domain-specific presuppositions – the genre of news discourse and its contextual constraints and requirements, for instance. Because of the multiple embeddedness of discourse in CMD, discourse common ground is related to meta-discourses and their background information and to further sets of domain-specific beliefs. Discourse common ground is related dialectically to more general discourse common grounds, which participants have construed and administered in previous communicative events, and it is related to more general common ground.

Discourse common ground has a dual status: on the one hand, it is a particularised category administering both an individual's processing and contextualization of a particular discourse and her/his construal of discourse coherence for that particular discourse, which is referred to as individual discourse common ground. For communication to be felicitous, however, participants need to negotiate a – at least partially shared – representation of discourse common ground, which is referred to as collective discourse common ground. Collective discourse common ground is negotiated and ratified and thus shared by an assumed set of participants. Individual discourse common ground and collective discourse common ground do not need to be identical, but they need to overlap, to varying degrees. On the other hand, discourse common ground is a generalised category: it administers other kinds of discourse common ground, which the participants have construed and administered in previous communicative events and interactions. All of these kinds of discourse common ground form a network, which is related dialectically.

Discourse common ground is not only relational, but also dynamic. The dual status of discourse common ground as (1) generalised discourse common, and as (2) particularised discourse common ground is also reflected in the differentiation between core common ground and emergent common ground: “*Core common ground* [original emphasis] refers to the relatively static (diachronically changing), generalized, common knowledge and beliefs that usually belong to a certain speech community as a result of prior interactions and experience, whereas *emergent common ground* [original emphasis] refers to the dynamic, particularized knowledge created in the course of communication and triggered by the actual situational context” (Kecskes 2014: 160).

The participants' construction of discourse common ground is performed simultaneously with discourse processing and its interpretation. In the context of CMD, individual participants may follow different hyperlinks and different threads with different levels of embeddedness, concatenating and linearising discursive contributions differently, thus constructing different discursive products.

Excerpt 5<sup>11</sup> from the online paper ‘i News The Essential Daily Briefing’ depicts the opening section and the closing section of news discourse on the new Lord Mayor. It is also positioned below the picture of Magid Magid (cf. Figure 1) and contains one hyperlinked invitation – or lure – coloured in red to access further information about Sheffield; linguistic material relevant to the analysis is again printed in italics.

Excerpt 5. *The august institution Urban Dictionary defines zaddy as “the slang term for a really ‘handsome’ guy who is very appealing and looks really fashionable. He has to have swag and sex appeal and look sexy and attractive.”*  
 They do not include the definitions that they must hold a *position of power*, have a *great backstory* and wear *Doc Martens in formal settings* but even without them, I would like to inform you that **Sheffield’s new Lord Mayor is the dictionary definition of a complete and utter zaddy.**  
 (...)  
 “I hope by the fact *I am a black, Muslim immigrant* – everything the Daily Mail probably hates – people will look and say ‘*In Sheffield we’re proud of doing things differently, and celebrating our differences*’”

As has been the case with the other excerpts analysed above, a majority of the computer-mediated news discourse is composed of quotations. The opening section of Excerpt 5 invites the recipient to draw inferences along the lines that Magid Magid, depicted in his infamous squatting position, is ‘zaddy.’ A conversational inference of this kind is strengthened with the additional information provided, that is ‘position of power,’ which is in discursive congruity with the ‘new Lord Mayor’ and his ‘a great backstory,’ that is his personal narrative as a refugee, his university degree and his love for mountains, his former participation in the reality show ‘Hunted,’ and the ‘wear[ing of] Doc Martens in formal settings’ as depicted in the photograph. The strengthened conversational inference is confirmed by Magid Magid’s description as ‘a complete and utter zaddy,’ which is a strengthened proposition to be added to the collective discourse common ground between the newsmaker and the media audience in their varying interactional roles.

The zaddy-like quality ascribed to the new Lord Mayor is expanded to Sheffield. The hyperlink ‘Sheffield’s’ invites – or lures – participants to access frames about ‘zaddy’ Sheffield with the opening frame providing information about 40 year after the Human League. The closing section of the new report contains a quotation from the new Lord Mayor further strengthening the assumptions about ‘zaddy

11. See <https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/sheffield-lord-mayor-magid-magid/> (accessed 26 March 2019).

Sheffield' and its relevance to the collective discourse common ground, that is Sheffield as a place where 'we're proud of doing things differently, and celebrating our differences.'

The construction and co-construction of discourse common ground in CMD is not arbitrary or random. Rather, newsmakers and other authors and editors as well as participating users guide their recipients in their various roles as 'recipients only' or as 'commenting recipients' or 'commenting co-authors' in their co-constructions of collective discourse common ground. These constructions do not need to be identical mappings, and in the majority of case they cannot be, but they need to overlap sufficiently to contribute to felicitous communication.

#### 4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the contextual constraints and requirements of CMD, considering their particularisation resulting from the interdependencies of its multilayered participation framework, logical typing and pluralism of communicative action. The generalised pragmatic universals of contextualisation, intentionality of communicative action, indexicality of communicative action, conversational implicature, (discourse) common ground, and language – and other semiotic codes – as socially-situated forms and language use as social interaction are also the foundations for the analysis of CMD. However, they need to undergo medium-specific particularisation, adapting to the hypertextuality, multilayeredness and unboundedness of CMD on the one hand, and to its variation in the sequential organisation and pluralism of communicative action on the other.

The multilayeredness of computer-mediated discourse holds for all of its constitutive parts, and for its core concepts, which are not only relational, but rather meta-relational, depending on the stages at which they occur. While “[p]aper-based citations attempt to keep the reader within the article, while providing the address of where the source material resides for the highly motivated researcher, On the net, hyperlinks are less nails than invitations. (...) They beckon the reader out of the article” (Weinberger 2011: 113), but not necessarily back in.

This chapter has argued that the metarelational nature of CMD, and of its contexts which are brought into the discourse and brought about in the discourse can no longer be based on monolithic conceptualisations of participation, intentionality, communicative action and its constitutive parts, in particular uptake, and common ground, but rather requires dynamic, metarelational and multilayered adaptations. Only then is it possible to capture CMD from a holistic perspective going beyond analyses of selected parts only.



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# Cyberpragmatics in the age of locative media

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One of the aims of cyberpragmatics (Yus 2001, 2010a, 2011a, 2013) is to explain the role that interfaces play in the (un)successful outcome of virtual interactions, and their mediation in the management of the relevance-related formula of comprehension. However, many things have changed in the way internet is used nowadays compared to the role that it played in the early years of this century, together with a radical change in the presence of internet in people's lives (a non-stop connection, blurred physical-virtual contexts for interactions, etc.). This chapter will be devoted to today's locative media and the way in which cyberpragmatics can address the impact of location-based media on the quality of today's communication, both in physical and virtual environments.

**Keywords:** locative media, cyberpragmatics, smartphone communication, online check-in, Facebook check-in

## 1. Introduction

The advent of mobile phones liberated us from the tyranny of place. Paradoxically, now locative media (henceforth LM) and location-based services are tying us to physical places again (Chang and Chen 2014: 34), but in a new, pervasive, unprecedented way. This chapter deals precisely with the impact of LM on today's interactions, the quality of interpretation and the overall relevance of location-based communication.

LM may be defined as those apps or interfaces that enable and focus on the physical location of the user while communicating with peers or acquaintances in a virtual environment. They provide users with "a reflexive awareness of the location of themselves and others or their mutual proximity" (Licoppe 2013: 123). They encompass mapping services and social media applications that allow for tagging content and mapping information related to the user's physical location (Frith 2015a: 2). They offer an alternative to conventional cartography and

produce a fold between virtual and physical, data space and geographical space (Drakopoulou 2013), and provide users with “location-specific information for social actors to locate each other’s physical space through their representation on a map on the screen of their mobile devices” (Wang and Stefanone 2013: 438). Furthermore, Fazel and Rajendran (2020: 33) qualify locative media as *socio-formative spheres*; “social” because they collectively and communally construct meanings (through accumulated mutually manifest information of a social kind that is then shared with friends and relatives). And “formative” because these media regulate activities in offline settings, coordinating them and arranging the way users can gather in physical proximities. Thanks to these locative apps, “a user can experience a constant presence of people who are physically absent. These media technologies are contributing to changing relations of physical presence and absence in newly formed urban spaces” (Fazel and Rajendran 2020: 33).

LM have generated alterations, not only in our conceptualisation of place and its relationship with the digital information attached to it, but also in the impact of this physical-virtual connection on what is intended, mutually manifest, interpreted and eventually turns out (ir)relevant in those instances of communication that are mediated by these LM, and this chapter deals with these pragmatic issues. The structure of the chapter is as follows: In Section two some comments concerning “the setting” of LM are provided. Section three is devoted to some general issues of cyberpragmatics, the underlying theoretical framework of this chapter. Section four is devoted to LM-based communication and especially to dissecting the stages of internet-mediated communication when managed through LM: constraints, intended manifest information, mutually manifest information, inferred information and non-propositional effects. Finally, in Section 5 an example is provided summarising the issues covered in the chapter: communication through *Facebook* check-ins.

## 2. The setting

According to Wellman (2001), internet is one more stage in a long evolution of human relationships which, many years ago, were freed from taking place only in anchoring physical environments (e.g., inside villages) and people could choose to engage in relationships based more on personal choices than on physical proximity (e.g., using the car to see a friend). Improvements in transport and technological advances led to what he calls *networked individualism*, where people connect directly to their network of friends and relatives, but without needing a delimited physical space to foster these interactions.

Mobile phones played an important part in this evolution but, at the same time, posed challenges for the correct management of the interface between face-to-face conversations and in-coming phone calls that overlap in various degrees, to the extent that rules of etiquette had to be put forward to manage these parallel interactions (Frith 2014: 893). As analysts such as Hjorth, Wilken and Gu (2012: 54–56) and Licoppe and Inada (2012: 58) correctly describe, the mobile phone allows for new integrations of the absent and the present in subtle ways, and there is a cost in terms of attention devoted to simultaneous physical and mobile interactions, users often being absorbed by the latter and dismissing the person sitting opposite them.

Nowadays, the use of smartphones with non-stop internet connection has increased the challenge for the management of interactions, intended interpretations, mutuality of information and eventual interpretations. Users are always available for typing texts, recording audio files or browsing the web even if other people are also physically co-present and engaged in an oral conversation with these users (Kneidinger-Müller 2017: 329). In short, “mobile media has been posited as altering the way users relate to their physical environment in a confluence of location and digital networks that mediate geographic places” (Saker and Evans 2016: 1171).

Specifically, LM and location-based social networks have brought about a merging of places and virtual information attached to them, together with an emphasis on the user’s physical movement (Hjorth and Pink 2014: 48). In a certain sense, physical places regain the importance that they had lost with the advent of first-generation mobile phones. And, given that this phenomenon has mostly been understudied (Stempfhuber and Liegl 2016: 53), analysts now try to come to terms with this overlay of physical and virtual information. Authors have suggested possible labels that convey this idea of merging physical-virtual sources of information, for example: *hybrid space* (de Souza e Silva 2006), *connected presence* (Licoppe 2004), *digital co-presence* (Berry 2017), *mobile intimacy* (Hjorth and Kim 2016), *spatial self* (Schwartz and Halegoua 2015), *augmented space* (Manovich 2006), *net locality* (Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011), *hybrid mediated spatiality* (Sheller 2012), *hybrid ecology* (Crabtree and Rodden 2008), and *ambient media* (Roberts and Koliska 2014), amongst others.

Of all the labels listed above, in my opinion the one that best captures the essence of today’s convergence between physical place and digital information is *hybrid space*, defined as a conceptual space created by the merging of physical and digital spaces, because of the use of mobile technologies as social devices. A hybrid space is not constructed by technology, but “built by the connection of mobility and communication and materialized by social networks developed simultaneously in physical and digital spaces” (de Souza e Silva 2006: 265–266). Evans and

Saker (2017: 19) value this connotation of ‘hybrid’ engagement that involves more than mere interacting with digital information in space. In hybrid spaces, the information and data carried by digital technologies and physical spaces are combined (Saker and Evans 2016: 1170). Evans (2015: 19) comments that in this space the local and the remote cannot be clearly defined, because the mobile technology pulls in information to inform the situated actor in the local context. The presence and use of this information in a local context have a transformative effect on the experience of space for the user: the presence of the software transforms place. In other words, “the information is part of the experience of that space, refuting the imagined cyberspace/physical space dichotomy” (Frith 2015b: 47). Frizzera (2015: 30) adds that hybrid spaces “make possible the revealing of previous hidden, locked or simply unknown aspects of physical spaces, as well as the creation of new opportunities for expression within, interpretation of, and interactions with our spaces.” A similar term in this respect is *hybrid ecology*. As described in Licoppe and Inada (2016: 266), this term can be understood in a broader or a narrower sense. In the former, it would cover all sorts of screen-mediated situations in which users have to rely on resources on- and off-screen in the course of their activities. In the narrower sense, what appears on the screen is reflexively tied to the specific “here and now” of the user (e.g., when users’ locations are figured on a digital map evolving in real time). They propose the notion of *reflexive hybrid ecologies* to cover this more specific situation, which is characteristic of today’s use of locative media. Therefore, there would be two senses of place, the one inhabited here and now, perceived with one’s usual senses (non-mediated technology), and indices of place mediated by a screen-based design based on various forms of location- or proximity-awareness.

### 3. Cyberpragmatics

*Cyberpragmatics* was coined as a proposal to study internet-mediated communication from a cognitive pragmatics point of view and, more specifically, from the theoretical framework of *relevance theory* (Sperber and Wilson 1995), although other theoretical approaches were also addressed when appropriate (see Yus 2001, 2010b, 2011a, 2013).

One of the aims of cyberpragmatics is to analyse why internet users often find relevance in text-based communication even though several “richer” options of contextualization (videoconference, video calls) are available free of charge. It also analyses how users fill the gap between what is coded and what is interpreted and the role of technological aspects of internet-mediated communication in the eventual assessment of relevance (cognitive effects versus processing effort). Specifically, several aspects are stressed and addressed by cyberpragmatics:

1. In internet-mediated communication, just as in face-to-face communication, the *addresser users* have communicative intentions and have to devise their messages in such a way that the intended interpretation is selected by their *addressee users*.
2. *Addresser users* expect their virtual interlocutors to access some specific contextual information that enables them to reach the intended interpretation of their messages. Similarly, *addressee users* invariably access contextual information as an inherent part of their relevance-seeking inferential activity.
4. An important claim in cyberpragmatics is that the characteristics of the different applications for internet communication (chat rooms, messaging apps, e-mail, web pages...) affect the quality and quantity of contextual information accessed by users, the mental effort devoted to interpretation, and the choice of an interpretation.
5. Much cyberpragmatic research focuses on the users' ability to connote their messages with different attributes typically found in oral communication, such as intonation, both in the vocal (e.g., repetition of letters and creative use of punctuation marks) and the visual (e.g., emoji) channels of oral interactions. Again, a certain level of oralisation will inevitably have an impact on the users' search for relevance. Therefore, cyberpragmatics analyses the challenge that users face when they attempt to compensate for this lack of orality. And very often more effort has to be devoted to tracking down underlying intentions, feelings and emotions conveyed by text-based utterances.
6. An interesting focus of cyberpragmatic research concerns how advances in the level of contextualization provided by the interface (e.g., video calls enabled within a messaging app) generate (or not) better balances of cognitive effects and mental effort in the user's search for relevance. In theory, these improved interfaces should aid internet-mediated communication by reducing the effort related to the use of the interface and by aiding in the correct choice of interpretations, but this is not always the case.
7. Another area of research within cyberpragmatics concerns the social side of virtual communication, especially the way internet-mediated communication is used to sustain and assess identity, group membership and (personal) social networks. In these cases, the "social benefit" obtained from these forms of internet-mediated communication offsets the effort required to keep this level of commitment to the other users.

Furthermore, as a consequence of the specificity of internet-mediated communication, in previous research an extension of cyberpragmatic research (and, in parallel, of relevance-theoretic research) has been proposed by adding elements that play a part in the eventual relevance of internet-mediated communication,



but are not tied to the relevance of the content being communicated (Yus 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). The first one is called (*non-intended*) *non-propositional effect*, which refers to feelings, emotions, impressions, etc. which may be overtly intended, or leak non-intentionally from the act of communication, and add (positively and negatively) to the interest derived from utterance interpretation or to have an impact on the mental effort required for processing the utterance.

Secondly, internet communication is affected by a number of interface-related and user-related qualities that may also alter the eventual estimation of the relevance of the act of communication. These are mainly related to the users' management of the interface, the kind of relationship existing between interlocutors, the user's personality, etc. They affect the eventual (un)successful outcome of internet-mediated communication. In this sense, the following term was also proposed in previous research: *contextual constraint*, restricted to aspects that *underlie* or *frame* communication and interaction (i.e., they exist prior to the interpretive activity) and constrain its eventual (un)successful outcome.

This pair of terms allows us to explain why some users spend hours exchanging utterly useless messages, why some users feel frustrated upon finding it extremely difficult to manage an interface in order to achieve their communicative goals, etc. In a sense, these added elements operate at a different level from proposition-centred interpretations (explicit, implicated, etc.).

#### 4. Communicating through locative media

As was commented upon above in passing, mobile phones liberated us from the anchorage of place, but now LM are bringing places back to the forefront of human interests while interacting with smartphones. In Özkul's (2015: 103) words, "mobile communication technologies, in general, and locative media, in particular, do not only cause a feeling of detachment from places; they simultaneously afford and renew attachment to places as part of being mobile."

It is true that humans have not completely detached from physical place, even though mobile communication has accentuated this process. Meyrowitz (2005), for instance, has reiterated the fact that "we are always in place and place is always with us." However, physical places are indeed re-interpreted in smartphone interactions. On top of physical places, mobile apps spread a layer of location-based maps and information in which the user is turned into a dot navigating across digital layouts and layers of digital information. A typical case in this respect is the use of maps on the smartphone as part of "wayfinding in urban spaces," so pervasive today that many analysts have warned that these apps hinder participants' cognitive mapping abilities (Pieber and Quan-Haase 2019). Widely popular digital

mapping services such as *Google Maps* combine with various information services and apps such as *Yelp* to deliver context-relevant information, such as identifying nearby places to shop or eat. These apps visually display on the smartphone screen places nearby that may go unnoticed by users, affording people unfamiliar with the area a greater sense of what is available. The information provided through these apps is sometimes generated by the users themselves and also as paid-for services. Users also add, rate, and review locations that they visit, generating a very personal array of location-based information. Nunes (2019: 221–222) adds that the map positions the user in a set of relations between physical and computing information. Users are aware of their physical surrounding but also understand the world around them by way of this information overlay conveyed by the app while representing their position on a dynamically changing map upon the smartphone screen. The user's body couples with both device and physical space, creating a complex mapping that materialises affordances of place that do not exist in the physical world, but which are now articulated through the actions of the app.

Crucially, another layer of information is spread over these layouts, made up of users' personal choices, check-ins, tagged venues and attached comments and reviews (Hjorth 2014: 33), to the extent that a particular user's background knowledge on and engagement with a specific venue linked to a physical location may differ from other users' background knowledge, and this asymmetry has consequences on what the user intends to communicate via location sharing (intends to *make manifest*, in relevance-theoretic terms) and what inferences other users make upon finding this location-centred information, together with unintended inferences and “leaked” non-propositional effects (feelings, emotions).

Several authors also underline the importance of this layer of digital information over physical places. For instance, Frizzera (2015: 33) comments that “mobile media bind virtual and real objects and offer very real experiences, which in turn challenge our perception of what is the real space... eventually leading to a transformation of spaces into meaningful places.” Similarly, Özkul (2015: 103) comments that what we now perceive about a place is beyond what is physically in front of us, which results in enhanced awareness of multiple meanings of places, as users can explore many aspects of a city that are not explicitly there in its visible physical side. An example is dating apps for casual encounters (i.e., hook-ups). The apps *Grindr* and *Tinder* analysed by Licoppe (2020) exhibit a dependence on location awareness. Users create profiles and these become accessible through the apps, based on spatial proximity. In the case of *Grindr*, “when a user connects to the website, he sees a mosaic of other profiles, ranked mostly according to spatial proximity. As he moves, his homepage “evolves accordingly, displaying transient, mobility-driven arrays of potential partners” (Licoppe 2020: 76). Here, proximity impacts who can be contacted since potential partners appear to others in a way

that indexes their mutual proximity. Location is indeed essential in these apps, especially *Grindr*, where users are offered the option to send their location when engaging in a chat conversation with potential lovers, as a way to promote future encounters offline. This is one clear example of how apps make accessible pictures or profiles of nearby strangers to which they provide onscreen access, as well as electronic chat resources to possibly interact with them. These users, due to the availability of some information conveyed through these apps, are labelled *pseudonymous strangers* in Licoppe (2016).

Besides dating apps, several features offered within certain messaging apps also incorporate the users' location as part of their aims and management. For instance, *WeChat* incorporates several location-centred features: *Shake*, which allows users to literally shake their phones to instruct the app about the user's desire to be matched with others who are shaking their smartphones at the same time, preferably in the vicinity although it also applies to users across the globe. As such, it is almost a near-synchronous interaction with others completely by chance. Another feature is *Look Around*. It allows a user to find other nearby *WeChat* users who have also used this feature and sorts users by distance and the user can choose who to send messages to. Predictably, as soon as this feature is clicked on, the user's location is immediately shared with those users, some of whom may be total strangers, with clear privacy issues involved. A third locative feature in *WeChat* is *People Nearby*, a service that reads in the current geographic location of the device to locate a list of other people using this feature and are in the same vicinity. The user can then request to establish a *WeChat* friendship relation with any of the users on the list (Xue et al. 2017: 358). Informants in Wang, Li and Tang (2015) provide possible reasons for using these location-centred features of *WeChat*, including satisfying curiosity, killing boredom, meeting other people, and supporting offline interactions (when used with friends or co-workers).

In some cases, this use of location information may allow users to create new forms of attachment to places, and in the case of these apps for casual physical encounters there is certain mutual manifestness regarding the reasons and purposes of getting connected in a physical environment. However, these attachments may not be identical to the user's audience's ones, especially in the case of feelings and emotions attached to the location being tagged or shared, a very personal emotional bonding that has been labelled *place attachment*, defined as "bonding that occurs between individuals and their meaningful environments" (Scannell and Gifford 2010: 1).

In any case, due to the popularisation of LM and location-based social networks, the physical place has regained a greater importance and has been re-interpreted, although the meanings attached to them are no longer straightforward (i.e., as in purely objective information on a physical place on a map), but

socially managed and connoted through users and their peers or acquaintances (Humphreys and Liao 2013), aided by new place-related media practices (Hjorth 2017: 141) and new ways in which location data are presented to users. This new place configuration underlies Goggin's (2012: 198) concept of *locational turn*. In short, location and physical place have become the currency of networked interactions (Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011). As Hjorth and Pink (2014: 44) argue, the more LM becomes a key part of media practices among users, the more the way in which we conceptualise and understand the complexity of place inevitably shifts accordingly. LM do not only transform how we experience mobility but also shape the fabric of what we see as constituting place. Crucially, users' background knowledge on the social connotations arising from LM use differ from user to user, and therefore the objective attributes of place end up blurred, the obviousness of the physicality of place turning into a mental abstraction: place "does not refer to actual localities or online configurations, but acts as an organizing concept with fluid boundaries through which we can view and consider different configurations of online/offline combinations and the threads of sociality and visibility that traverse them" (Hjorth and Pink 2014: 46). In this sense, Lemos (2010: 405) suggests the term *informational territory* for the mediation of digital information attached to physical places. This territory "changes the place because all places are dependent on the synergy between imaginary, subjective, corporeal, technological, legal territories" (Lemos 2010: 406). De Souza e Silva's (2006: 272) term *hybrid space*, already mentioned in this chapter, is also relevant here, since it is "constituted by a mobile network of people and nomadic technologies that operate in noncontiguous physical spaces."

In the next sub-sections, I will outline the implications of LM and this new conceptualization of place for the different areas of internet-mediated communication: the framing user- and interface-centred contextual constraints (Section 4.1), the user's intention to make manifest certain information through LM (Section 4.2), the desired objective of mutual manifestness among users upon having access to LM-related information (Section 4.3), what addressee users eventually infer (Section 4.4), and the non-propositional effects (feelings, emotions, both intended and unintended) that may be part of or "leak" from LM-centred acts of communication (Section 4.5).

#### 4.1 Contextual constraints in communication through locative media

With the advent of LM, many users are checking in on their locations, tagging venues, commenting on their qualities and sharing this information with others. But the quality and quantity of these sharing strategies are influenced by a number of user- and interface-related contextual constraints that frame and have an impact

of the eventual information shared. As was summarised above, the term *contextual constraint*, as conceptualised within cyberpragmatics, is restricted to aspects that underlie the acts of communication and the users' interactions (i.e., they exist prior to the interpretive activity) and "constrain" their eventual (un)successful outcome. They frame, as it were, communication and have an impact not only on the quality of interpretation, but also on the willingness to engage in sustained virtual interactions. Constraints are placed outside communication (i.e., they precede it, framing it), but their influence in virtual interactions makes it necessary to include them in whatever analysis is carried out to determine the eventual relevance of internet-mediated acts of communication.

Among user-centred constraints, a first important constraint is the user's personality, identity and self-concept. In general, the online environment is more prone to self-disclosure due to its cues-filtered quality. If we add personality traits such as narcissism and extraversion, typically linked to the person's desire to be liked and acknowledged by others, the result is bound to be an increase in the generation of LM-mediated information. As Papangelis et al. (2020: 5–6) underline, "the manner in which certain locations or activities are annotated and communicated are performative and are part of an ongoing negotiation and presentation of identity that is both directed at their friends but is also part of a conscious effort to control and curate a narrative of identity that is stable, affirms the users' self-identity, and presents this 'self' on the users' terms with regard to location."

Besides, we have to take into account the user's preferences when selecting what location-centred information to share as a possible constraint. Furthermore, a possible constraint is the user's emotional attachment to the place in question (Evans and Saker 2017: 56), together with the user's background knowledge on the place being shared, which may differ from other users' knowledge, and this asymmetry may impact the user's decision to make or not the information manifest to others. Furthermore, a related issue concerning decision to share LM-related information has to do with group adequacy. As Chang and Chen (2014: 34) comment, part of the reason why people use location-based services is because of a subjective norm set by their friends. In other words, they disclose on location-based services because their friends do, and they want to fit into the norm of their peer group. In this sense, broad cultural factors may play a part in the user's decision to share LM-centred information (Misra and Stokols 2012: 312). Finally, a possible constraint is the user's need to address privacy issues.

Regarding interface-related constraints, we may distinguish between the interface's "affordances" (i.e., the availability of actions that may be performed through the interface depending on its design) and the "constraints" imposed on the user's task due to the good or bad design of the interface (i.e., link coherence, arrangement of frames and tags, user-friendly menus and expected actions

on the screen, etc.). Among the former, a constraint may be the difference between a mobile app and its desktop counterpart (e.g., *Facebook*) and how their design options affect the sharing of location. Typically, the mobile version will be better for these purposes, since users are situated in and move through space carrying their smartphones, and hence they can bind together spatial information from their sensorial apparatus and contextual data from mobile media to make sense of the surrounding space (Frizzera 2015: 33). Besides, it should be noted that the default affordances of the interface may be altered by the users, as happened with *Twitter*, whose users improved its interface by adding hashtags and re-tweeting beyond the initial design of the interface. Finally, ease of use of the interface also affects the user's willingness to engage in sharing location-based information (see Huang and Hsu 2013).

#### 4.2 The user's (intended) manifestness upon using locative media

It is logical to assume that when a user shares location-based information with other users, there is some underlying intention to communicate some information to them. In relevance-theoretic terms, the user will hold the intention to make manifest (and possibly *mutually manifest*) a set of assumptions (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 58). Furthermore, users may intentionally use LM-based acts of communication in order to obtain specific interpretations, but these acts may also generate unwanted interpretive outcomes. In any case, what is exactly what a user might intend to make manifest by using some location-based information?

To start with, manifestness is selective. For example, one of the uses of broadcasting one's location is to meet up with people in physical space. However, many users selectively choose the target of this location, and they resort to the affordances of the app for this selective strategy (de Souza e Silva and Frith 2012; Schwartz and Halegoua 2015: 1648). In this sense, Tang et al. (2010: 86–87) divide target selection into one-to-one (sharing with a single user), one-to-few (with a small group), one-to-many (with a large group), and one-to-all (with everyone).

In general, though, location-based information may puzzle some users, who find little relevance in the information shared or why the user is at a particular location. Apparently, the physicality of place keeps some users wondering why this obvious information is shared with them. However, there is much more to the meaning of a shared location than meets the eye. As summarised in Cramer, Rost and Holmquist (2011), the value of location technology is about how this is used, read, viewed and manipulated. Sharing one's location and knowing the whereabouts of others is not only a practical tool for coordination and communication, but also an emotional and moral affair. It is also used to express moods, lifestyle and events, to replace a resource for subsequent interactions, and to exchange

enjoyment and friendship. People may of course think that the information shared is inherently interesting, probably as part of self-presentation and favouring unplanned interactions. Location-sharing can also serve as “a reassurance, communicating and knowing that all is well and as it ‘should be’, bringing a sense of connectedness, togetherness and identity and moral position within the group you share your location with” (Cramer, Rost and Holmquist 2011: 58).

Kim (2016: 398) also lists a number of possible intentions underlying location sharing, including the display and expression of one’s identity (more on this below), desire to be connected and acknowledged by others, or to provide objective information on locations. Many users welcome fresh information about locations such as bars or shops. As de Souza e Silva (2013: 119) correctly argues, users value the tips and comments that previous users left attached to that location. A combination of information and location is created, becoming an intrinsic part of the location, a *hybrid space* in her terminology. This information has at least a double function, namely to influence users’ mobility patterns through the city, and to change the character of locations. By doing so, users “validate” places (de Souza e Silva and Frith 2013: 35), telling friends which locations are worth visiting, a relevant filtering strategy. Nowadays, a common feature of LM is that “individuals can also access other people’s interpretations of those locations and interact with digital information that has become part of that location.”

Among the reasons for sharing locations, in my opinion aspects of the user’s personality such as self-disclosure and self-management are among the most important motives (Noë et al. 2016: 344; Saker 2017). Schwartz and Halegoua’s (2015: 5) term *spatial self* is interesting here, a “theoretical framework that explores the presentation of the self, based on geographic traces of physical activity.” It refers to “a variety of instances (both online and offline) where individuals document, archive, and display their experience and/or mobility within space and place in order to represent or perform aspects of their identity to others” (Schwartz and Halegoua 2015: 5). In a way, therefore, the spatial self provides a way of conceptualising the active use of location-related information as a modality of self-presentation. Beldad and Kusumadewi (2015: 103) add that location-sharing applications enable users to manage their online identities and images and thus its use would surely be based on the impression management benefit it affords. Previous research has also indicated that the need to present a positive and interesting impression of oneself is one of the main reasons why people use these applications. Similarly, Özkul (2015: 108) comments that “users of mobile and locative media can show with what places they associate themselves. By controlling (what) to share and (what) not to share (about) a specific place, one does not only communicate different aspects of place-making, but can also present different aspects of the self.”

Another interesting identity-related term concerning LM is *presentation of place*. Sutko and de Souza e Silva (2011) propose this term to explain the performance of identity via LM technologies. However, for Schwarz and Halegoua (2015: 1645), the term tends to focus on “the impressions of a physical place provided by its visitors or the social construction of place through location-based social media, rather than the harnessing of place to perform identity to a social network.” De Souza e Silva and Frith (2012) further expand on this concept by arguing that the presentation of location might encourage homophily, bonding, and trust among those who frequent certain locations and participate in location-based social media.

### 4.3 Mutual manifestness through locative media

According to relevance theory (and cyberpragmatics) the objective of communication is not simply to make manifest information, but to make it *mutually manifest* between the interlocutors. This idea is at the heart of so-called *ostensive-inferential communication* (“the communicator produces a stimulus which makes it mutually manifest to communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of this stimulus, to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions,” Sperber and Wilson 1995: 63), and also links to a long debate within pragmatics about what information is shared between interlocutors, how this information is interactionally managed (with terms such as *shared knowledge*, *mutual knowledge* or *common ground*) and, crucially, how interlocutors are aware of each other’s mutuality of this information (see Fetzer, this volume, Section 3.2, on common ground).

Clark, Schreuder and Buttrick (1983; see also Kecskes 2014: 152) define common ground as the speaker designing their utterance in such a way that they have good reason to believe that the addressees can readily and uniquely compute what they meant on the basis of the utterance along with the rest of their common ground. However, for Sperber and Wilson (1995), this notion, and parallel ones such as *mutual knowledge* do not really account for what is at stake in the mutuality of information during an act of communication. As summarised in Yus (1998, 2006), Sperber and Wilson reject the traditional notion of mutual knowledge because it generates an endless recursion (A knows that *p*, B knows that A knows that *p* and so on). Instead, they propose the notion of *mutual manifestness* (see Sperber and Wilson 1990). People make different representations of their surrounding reality. These representations are called *cognitive environments* in relevance-theoretic terminology. They are created through the addition of information which is manifest to the individual at a particular moment and in a specific context: “a fact is manifest to an individual at a given time if, and only if, the individual is capable



at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 40). In the course of interaction, speakers are open to a great amount of contextual information and assumptions which are mutually manifest to both interlocutors, and then a *mutually manifest cognitive environment* is created. Therefore, during communication speakers have to guess the characteristics of their interlocutors’ cognitive environments.

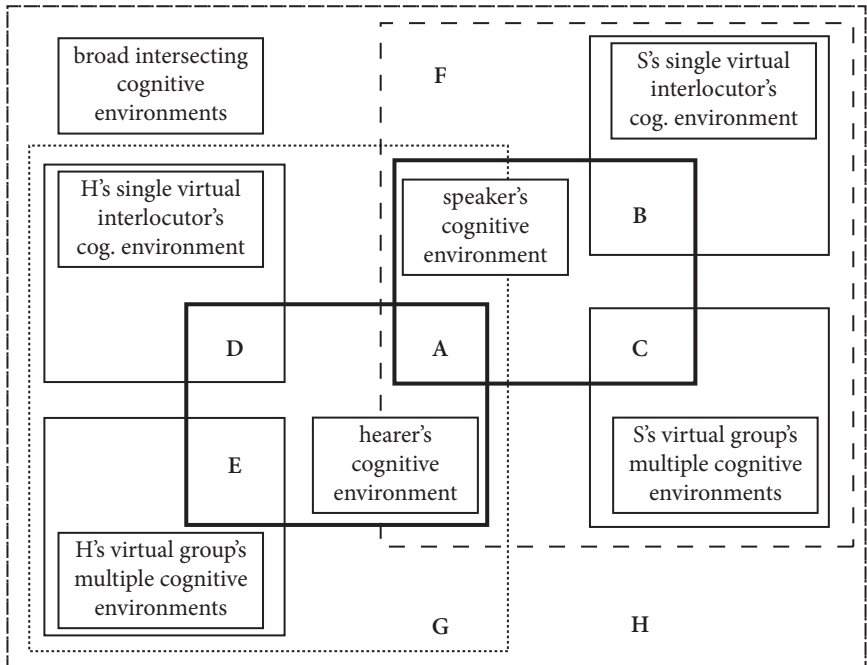


Figure 1. A chart of mutual manifestness in mixed online-offline interactions

Needless to say, today's frequent situation in which a person is having a face-to-face conversation while, at the same time, being engaged in parallel interactions with other people through the mobile phone (e.g., texting on a mobile messaging app) poses a challenge for a correct management of overlapping areas of mutuality (i.e., mutually manifest assumptions) with “overlapping interlocutors.” And, as Kneidinger-Müller (2017: 329–330) correctly states, social norms and expectations about availability and smartphone usage behaviour during face-to-face interactions have to be considered when analysing reasons for parallel communication habits in these social encounters, which Diamantaki et al. (2010: 66) label *multifocused gathering*. They correctly comment that participants in these multiple interactions have to agree at least that they are part of the same “definition of the situation.” Besides, communicative interactions entail parallel interactions with the physical and social context that contains them. For these authors, context also

plays a part, both imposing context-specific conventions (principles that govern the moves used to initiate, conduct, and end an encounter), and sociotemporal conditions, which are at work in any social encounter, together with the cultural and social context from which any interaction emerges.

A possible situation concerning face-to-face versus virtual mutual manifestness is depicted in Figure 1, in which, a speaker and a hearer are engaged in a face-to-face conversation and both may also be having virtual text-based conversations with a single interlocutor or a group of interlocutors, as is the case with WhatsApp groups:

First, the speaker and hearer have their own personal cognitive environments, depicted as the central bold-lined squares in the middle of the Figure. The intersecting area (A) is the interlocutors' mutual cognitive environment, made up of assumptions which are mutually manifest to both of them.

Second, the speaker and the hearer may also be having a text-based conversation with a single user through their mobile phone, for instance by texting on a mobile messaging app. In this case, a mutual cognitive environment exists between the speaker and this single user (B) and between the hearer and that single user (D).

Third, both speaker and hearer may also be engaged in an interaction with a group of people within a mobile messaging app. If this is the case, then there would be a broad mutual cognitive environment between the speaker and the users within that group (C) and between the hearer and their own group of text-based interlocutors (E).

Fourth, a possible interactive configuration is the one in which the speaker has a mutual cognitive environment both with a single virtual interlocutor and with the users within a mobile messaging group (F, depicted as a square with “- - -” lines) while talking face-to-face with the hearer. The same would apply to the hearer and their single/group interlocutors (G, depicted as a square with “.....” lines).

Fifth, another possibility is that all of the interlocutors involved might share a broad cognitive environment, made up of assumptions that are mutually manifest to all possible interlocutors (H, depicted as a square with “. . . .” lines). For instance, the two interlocutors in physical co-presence might be accessing the same messaging group and those in the group may also know about these interlocutors' presence while interacting as a whole broad group.

Finally, a possibility which has not been reproduced in Figure 1 (for the sake of visual clarity) is the one in which the speaker and the hearer are having a conversation in a physical scenario and, at the same time, both are having a virtual, text-based conversation with the same group of users through a mobile messaging app.

In the case of LM, mutual manifestness between a user and their peers, friends, or acquaintances is, no doubt, one of the main objectives of sharing location-centred information, this time through a single virtual medium (e.g., *Facebook*), but

also with possible asymmetries between predicted and actual areas of mutuality of information among the users involved as addressees of the sharing behaviour by the initial user. Albrechtslund (2012: 394) comments that the simple action of sharing a location is meaningful, since it carries meaning for the network and contributes to a distributed experience of the place, as the stream of shared information reaches people regardless of where they are located in physical space, together with the enlargement of the shared knowledge in the network about the whereabouts of different people. Besides, as Hine (2000) argues, this focus on location is part of the broader, typical interest of humans in grounding interactions within a mutual context, that is, even internet-based communications and interactions root their meanings and contents in mutually agreed contexts of production and experience, or pre-established patterns of cognitive interpretation that try to establish meanings and contents on assumed or projected definitions of place.

However, the merging of physical and virtual sources of manifest information through LM makes it more difficult to work out what is mutually manifest to all users involved in the act of sharing locative information. For example, different users relate differently to the confluence of physical location and digital networks, which has implications for what is expected to be mutually manifest. Since users live in the hybrid threshold of physical and virtual realms, they also have access to parallel sources of information. Evans and Saker (2017: 19) comment that this 'hybrid' engagement involves more than interacting with digital information in space, since digital information in space is related to a specific location in which that information is accessed and contextualised. New approaches to space (alongside new social possibilities and, I would add, new challenges) could emerge from the use of LM due to the 'hybrid' spatial engagements that they create.

Frith (2015b: 48) adds – in line with my idea of hybridisation as challenge for mutual manifestness – that people permanently contribute to the layers of information present in these physical spaces, the mobile interface becoming a screen through which people gather information about the spaces through which they move. And because these spaces are hybrid and filled with socially produced information, people have new possibilities to add to the social construction of physical space. Again, to this statement, I would add that users also face new challenges regarding the underlying intention of LM-generated information and what mutual manifestness is both assumed and intended. This is an inevitable consequence of the fact that the overlap of physical and digital information, so typical of hybrid spaces, makes possible “the revealing of previous hidden, locked or simply unknown aspects of physical spaces, as well as the creation of new opportunities for expression within, interpretation of, and interactions with our spaces” (Frizzera 2015: 30). Schwartz and Halegoua (2015: 1655) point in the same direction when they remind us of the heterogeneous quality of personal attachments of physical

place: “Places have multiple meanings to the same person or to different types of people, and these meanings may change over time. Representations of the spatial self can provide an entry point into accessing and reading these polyvocal interpretations and meanings of place.” Again, different users may erroneously envisage similar mutual manifestness of information on a location with all of their friends, but asymmetries (and hence misunderstandings) are bound to arise in the processing of this hybrid information.

#### 4.4 The relevance of inferred information out of locative media

One important question for a cyberpragmatic analysis of LM is where its relevance to other users, if any, lies. In general, locations may be used to invite other users to gather there, or simply provide users with substantive information, etc. In any case, apart from the relevance stemming from the very processing of that information, it is evident that some users do find this shared information worth the processing effort, because these users even alter their physical activity and whereabouts upon being communicated that kind of LM-centred information (de Souza e Silva and Frith 2013: 36). For instance, Bertel (2013) shows how Danish smartphone users change plans on the fly after receiving spatial information from other users, what he called *flexible alignment*. Hence, the pattern is that nearby friends get system notifications of a user’s physical location, which encourage users to perform certain physical actions in real time (Schwartz and Halegoua 2015: 1648).

This alteration of physical activities is typical of today’s smartphone users, who are always on the move and ready to alter plans if some piece of information turns out relevant. For Hjorth and Pink (2014: 43), people are “always in movement, move through their environments, and they get caught up in the movements of others. Yet they are also mobile in the very sense that they are made by mobile technologies that are ever-present in that they move with people and make possible the very making and experiencing of the emplaced sociality and visuality that characterize locative media use.”

By altering one’s whereabouts and by being informed of features of a particular location, addressee users may also find relevance in the upgrade of information that a shared location contains. Frith (2015a: 85) remarks that reading about someone’s positive experience of a place can impact how people view that place, and the smartphone interface turns into a screen through which people can view a relevant, peer-validated representation of their surroundings. In short, “location-based composition can impact the impressions people form about the identity of locations” (Frith 2015a: 85; see also de Souza e Silva and Frith 2012, 2013). Özkul (2015: 104) also stresses that places acquire different meanings, not only for the ones who share locational information but also for those who receive it. Hence

locational information is an important attribute -relevant, in our terminology- of a place, influencing our understanding of places. Dourish and Bell (2011, in Frith 2013: 257) similarly note that location-aware mobile technologies can become a lens through which individuals “read” their surrounding space. And the main relevance of LM-based information lies primarily in the way that digital technologies can render the everyday world legible in new ways.

In a sense, then, the relevance of LM-centred information is separated from the objective place and shifts into the initial user’s and addressee users’ experiences of that place. Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2012) value this source of relevance since nowadays locations with digital information are “attached” to them are probably more visible (and relevant) for location-aware phone users than other locations that don’t show up on a mobile map. These authors add that the user’s attention is somehow freed up to an ecology of foci which are constructive of people’s experiences in urban spaces (Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2012: 95).

#### 4.5 Non-propositional effects meant or leaked from the use of locative media

As was stated above, certain non-propositional qualities may radically influence the satisfaction from the processing of internet discourses, even if these discourses do not provide users with objectively relevant information, as happens in general with phatic communication on the Net (see Haberland 1996 for a critical review of the term *phatic communication* – as distinct to *phatic communion* – and its implications for pragmatics, and Yus 2019). Certainly, in online communication there are many kinds of interactions and ways of processing of content that may have little informational value, and the eventual relevance does not depend (or not only) on the information itself but also on the derivation of certain non-propositional effects. These may be meant but they are often outside the actual act of communication and beyond the communicative intentions of the user who uses the LM, but nevertheless affect its eventual (ir)relevance.

In previous research, the term (*non-intended*) *non-propositional effect* was proposed, referred to feelings, emotions, impressions, etc. that may or may not be overtly intended by the communicator, are generated from the act of communication and add (positively) to the cognitive effects derived from discourse interpretation or (negatively) to the mental effort required for processing. These effects may be assessed consciously by the addressees, or lie beyond their awareness, but in any case they influence eventual relevance (see Yus 2011b, 2015a, 2015b, 2017, 2018a, 2018b). Several possible non-propositional effects generated by LM-based acts of communication are listed below.

a. *Impact on the user's self-concept and identity*

Location-based information is useful to coordinate meetings, facilitate chance encounters and allow for updates on the qualities of venues associated with specific locations, but it also plays a part in the identity construction of users, the formation and maintenance of social presence and social capital, and all that through specific identity-centred feelings and emotions enacted within virtual groups (Bertel 2016: 163). Despite the apparent simplicity of LM, their impact should not be dismissed, because it operates not only as a means of information dissemination but also for ego-oriented psychology that gratifies self-identity (Wang 2013).

b. *Sense of community and group membership*

In Yus (2007), it is claimed that virtual groups and communities exhibit similar features to the ones found in delimited physical gatherings, and feelings of group membership are intensely valued in virtual communities nowadays, since many of the collective activities that traditionally occurred in physical scenarios, are now generated within groups and users' gatherings on the Net. In Yus (2018a), it is argued that sustained virtual interactions not only generate connectedness, but also feelings of in-group membership and communal support, of being "attached" to the other members of the group, that is, an awareness of "the group members' affective connection to and caring for a virtual community in which they become involved" (Cheng and Guo 2015: 232). Carr, Wohn and Hayes (2016: 386) also emphasise the importance of social support for internet users, especially in the case of adolescents, always with a need of being socially valued and acknowledged. In this sense, Campbell (2020: 106) mentions the case of the traffic-centred app *Waze*, which supports location and information sharing at the wider community level to help drivers optimise their travels with insights about routes, traffic, and road conditions. A difference is drawn between *microcoordination* (flexibly making plans at the individual-level through smartphones) and this kind of collective achievement through community-level smartphone information-sharing, which he calls *macrocoordination*.

Similarly, LM-mediated information may generate an offset of feelings related to virtual communities and group membership. Humphreys (2010) proposes the term *parochialization* for the feelings of commonality among friends through the app *Dodgeball*. Another conclusion was, in the same way that was suggested in Section 4.4 above, that users of that app frequently changed their movements through the city depending on what social and spatial information they had received on their mobile phones, altering or adapting their usual walks in the city if it became apparent that a friend or friends were nearby. These findings support the idea that mobile social networks are often used to transform the ways they come together and interact in public space.

Weaker ties that heterogeneously contribute, with LM information, to the information attached to a physical place, may also produce feelings of social or group connection, even if these users are not friends offline or even have not met personally. Schwartz and Halegoua (2015: 1649) comment on the so-called *character of a place*, “a social construct that is continuously created and adjusted by the plethora of visitors to that location and the connotation of that place.” Crucially, when users choose to broadcast their location in relation to a specific venue, they are relating themselves with the values and, most notably, with social groups that are represented by that specific physical place. In this way, users are building their social online identity through attaching themselves to the specific information collected on a physical place.

c. *Feeling of being connected, of co-presence*

Many users engage in frequent acts of communication (typically trivial ones) because they eventually obtain a mutual awareness of friends and peers and a feeling of connectedness (Frith and Saker 2017). What used to be obvious in physical co-presence, is managed nowadays through persistent online interactions, many of which are casual and trivial. The notion of *ambient awareness* (Thompson 2008) is related to this idea, since it refers to an awareness of the others arising from non-stop dialogues and uploaded content, often fragmentary, which nevertheless gives users a more or less thorough picture of their friends (Lin, Levordashka and Utz 2016). According to Levordahska and Utz (2016: 147), the term “ambient” emphasises “the idea that the awareness develops peripherally, not through deliberately attending to information, but rather as an artifact of social media activity.” In this sense, today’s pressure to send messages compulsively, including those related to physical locations, also has to do with an attempt to obtain other users’ awareness of the initial user. This would be the case of text messages, but also of images, photos (e.g., selfies or photos of dishes, landscapes, etc.), and shared locations (e.g., Facebook check-ins, see next Section) that are meant to generate a sort of *presence in the absence* (Zappavigna 2016: 272), a non-stop feeling of co-presence.

Licoppe’s (2004) concept of *connected presence* is also interesting. It is related to the impact of communication technologies on ongoing and endless mediated interactions “that combine into ‘connected relationships’ in which boundaries between absence and presence eventually get blurred” (Licoppe 2004: 136). Mobile phone-mediated relationships would tend to be detached from the actual places in which these relationships occur. Sustained connection is guaranteed through a device that is both technological and social. Rather than constructing a shared experience by telling each other about small and big events, interlocutors exchange small expressive messages signalling a perception, a feeling, or an emo-

tion, or requiring from the other person the same type of expressive message” (Licoppe 2004: 147).

d. *Personal feelings associated with place*

Different users comment on or tag locations for other users. Addressee users contrast this information with their own background knowledge of information regarding that location, and a number of (personal) relevant effects may be produced in this mental inference of place, including an update of information, the erasure of previously held information and, also important, the growth of new feelings and emotions attached to the place being broadcast. I agree with Özkul (2015: 112–113) in the foregrounding of the use of location information that allows users to get empowered with the feeling of having local knowledge of a new place. Additionally, by sharing locational information, users can also establish a personal relationship with a place, including user-specific feelings or emotions, and project what that place might mean for others when they see that information. For this author, remembering feelings and emotions that a place used to generate, rather than the physical attributes of a place, can also contribute to place attachment.

## 5. An example: Cyberpragmatics of *Facebook* check-ins

*Facebook* check-ins are a good example of LM-mediated information. As can be seen in Figure 2, a typical *Facebook* check-in includes, at the top, the name and profile picture of the user, the name of the location and information on the place and time of the check-in. In the middle, a comment by the user justifies the publication of the check-in or provides additional information on the qualities of the place. The text of the user on the left justifies the presence at the location (“with the family visiting parks”), while the one on the right comments about a visit to a musical as part of a number of places of entertainment which have already been visited. Besides, a map shows the reader the exact location of the venue checked in. Finally, at the bottom the logo, the name of the venue, and the number of positive reviews displayed as 1 to 5 stars are provided, together with the number of reactions that the check-in has triggered, number of comments, and typical *Facebook* actions (provide a reaction, share...).

Upon finding the notification of a user’s check-in, the addressee has to assess its relevance, that is, whether the information provided is worth its processing effort. Although some possible sources of relevance have been listed in Section 4.2 above, many users keep wondering what the point is in checking in at a location. For example, some informants in Bertel (2016: 167) showed puzzlement at being notified about a user’s check-in, which means that they “often express difficulty in



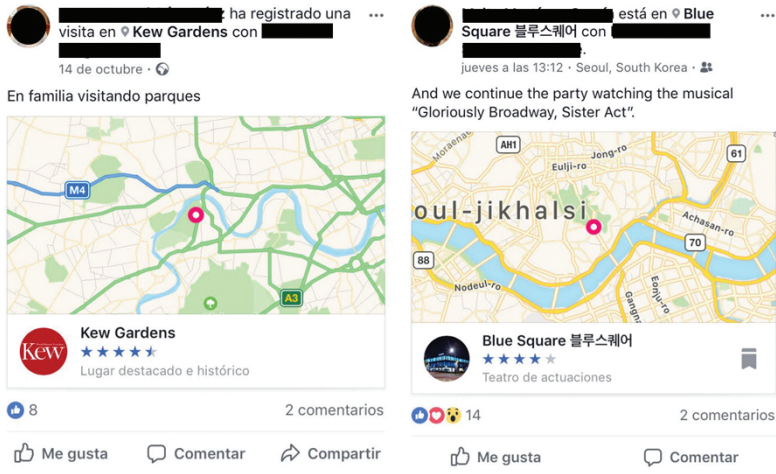


Figure 2. Facebook check-ins

making sense of the practice of checking in; although they understand what the technology does, they question the relevance of using it and its utility to them” (see also Frith 2014: 898). Below, some possible areas of pragmatic research (matching those in Section 4 above) are listed.

First, just like any form of internet-mediated communication, the broadcasting of check-ins is also constrained by interface designs and user-related issues (what was labelled *contextual constraints* in Section 4.1 above). Regarding the former, Frith (2014: 898) analysed the app *Foursquare* and concluded that the social norms surrounding how participants treat the check-in as a piece of information are also shaped by its diverse design elements and how people take advantage of those elements. And Cramer, Rost and Holmquist (2011: 64) stress the role of users in increasing the range of communicative options offered by the interface (or overcome negative interface-related constraints), since the flexibility offered in the types of venues that can be shared opens up a service to creative usage and appropriations not considered in the design. Concerning the latter, the user’s personality and readiness for self-disclosure and self-management also constraint the number of check-ins produced.

Second, there must be an informative intention underlying the user’s check-in on *Facebook*. Simply informing of the user’s actual location seems irrelevant, as has been underlined several times in this chapter. Normally, the user expects some inferred meanings regarding that specific location and not others. Possible intentions listed in Noë et al. (2016: 344) include establishing a social connection with friends, discovering new places to visit, keeping track of already visited places, fighting boredom and gamification. More generally, Tang et al. (2010) differentiate

the *purpose-driven use* of a check-in (mainly for coordinating actions) from its *social-driven use* (more related to social communication). However, there may also be no specific reason, so a continuum exists between the fully intentional end and a more casual end of the continuum, with more automatic or non-reflexive productions of the check-in. Bertel (2016: 164), for instance, argues that some users are fully aware of the communicative effect of their check-ins, and they even augment the basic check-in by attaching texts or photos as well as tagging others that are with them at the time of the check-in. By contrast, checking in may in part be something one ‘just does’ from time to time without having a specific reason to do so and without thinking too much about it. Bertel (2016: 164) speculates that this may be due to the novelty of the check-in and the “because I can!” factor sometimes associated with acquiring a new technology.

Another possible intention underlying the check-in is the users’ self-display and self-management by letting others know that they have chosen precisely that location and not any other, and with expectations of audience validation from friends, peers or acquaintances. Schwartz and Halegoua (2015) agree with this idea, and propose that people probably use the places that they visit to build an online representation of themselves. Hence, a link is created between the characteristics of people and the locations that they choose to affiliate with through check-ins. Graham and Gosling (2011) also demonstrated that impressions of a place and its visitors could be inferred from the *Foursquare* user profiles of its visitors. Participants were able to accurately predict the personality of a typical visitor of a specific location, based only on the profiles of actual visitors (see also Wang and Stefanone 2013: 440; Noë et al. 2016: 345).

Finally, check-ins may be interpreted as the user’s attempt to invite other users to engage in an interaction (offline or virtual) regarding the location communicated (Licoppe 2014: 114), also related to what in Yus (2014) was called *interactivity trigger*, texts or visual discourses explicitly published with the intention to trigger users’ responses, interactions or reactions, as is the case with new profile photos, breaking news on one’s life or, in this case, a specific check-in.

Third, an essential goal of check-ins is not only to make manifest some information (if any), but also -and crucially- to make this information mutually manifest, thus enlarging the portion of the users’ cognitive environments that is shared by all of them and filled with mutually manifest assumptions. Schwartz (2015: 95–96) proposes the term *documentation of relationship* for the action of checking in, because check-ins are often accompanied by other metadata such as photographs and tips that result in a rich documentation of the user’s daily interactions and whererabouts. Besides, this place attachment promotes a collective attachment to a place or, in our terminology, a mutual manifestness of the qualities

of the location as check-ins are automatically broadcast to the user's friends, who become aware of the places checked-in and the experiences therein.

Fourth, the addressees of check-ins infer the verbal-visual information and expect to obtain some cognitive reward out of these publications. In this case, the relevance of check-ins is affected by the quality of the ties binding the users sharing the publication. Bertel (2016: 167), for example, finds differences between contacts in traditional mobile communication and *Facebook* contacts. The former are mostly made up of strong ties with people with whom the user to some extent shares everyday life. In this case, exchanging location information may be useful, for instance, for everyday coordination of activities. The latter, by contrast, are more extensive and diverse, consisting of both strong and weak ties, and it is less clear how broadcasting locations ends up relevant to the array of users being notified of that position of the initial user. Curiously, when location information is presented alongside or presented implicitly as part of more complex content, for instance entries with photos and descriptions, sharing a location may be both interesting and useful; it clearly adds to the experience and interpretation of the attached content (e.g., a photo on holidays) if the addressee user knows where it was taken. The decontextualised location on *Facebook* that is recorded through a check-in, however, is often experienced as being irrelevant by the respondents. Predictably, different users will come up with different (ir)relevant interpretations of the same notified *Facebook* location (Tang et al. 2010: 87).

Finally, non-propositional effects (feelings, emotions, impressions...) may "leak" from the act of communication involved in *Facebook* check-ins. Among others, users may use them to create and maintain a sense of presence and ambient intimacy on the *Facebook* network of friends, as well as to form social capital within a *Facebook*-managed virtual group or community. Authors such as Crawford (2009: 259) argue that sharing mundane everyday activities may produce *ambient intimacy* among networked contacts, where "small details and daily events cumulate over time to give a sense of the rhythms and flows of another's life." The *Facebook* check-in would work in a similar way, producing a vivid sense of co-presence with the user who is at that particular location.

## 6. Concluding remarks

Location sharing through LM is an interesting feature of today's hybrid interactions at the threshold of physical and virtual environments. It has brought back the importance of physical place even though they are mediated by smartphones which, initially, liberated people from their anchorage to place.

An in any instance of virtual communication, as viewed from a cyberpragmatic framework, location sharing is constrained by interface- and user-related contextual constraints, and is the outcome of the user's willingness to make mutually manifest some information regarding physical location and to manage a number of actions with other users. The addressees also infer the information provided in the shared location and derive a number of (ir)relevant effects from it. Finally, users may also obtain a number of non-propositional effects regarding the action of sharing a location, ranging from feelings of co-presence to feelings of group membership, among others.

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# Interpreting emoji pragmatics

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This chapter describes the methods and the overall findings of the Understanding Emoji Survey, which we administered online in early 2018 to determine how social media users interpret the pragmatic functions of popular emoji types in the discourse context of comments posted to public Facebook groups. The findings generally validate Herring and Dainas's (2017) taxonomy of graphicon functions for emoji, although survey respondents ( $n = 523$ ) overwhelmingly preferred one function, *tone modification*, over the others. Moreover, preferred interpretations of pragmatic function varied according to emoji type. Based on these findings, we argue for the importance of analyzing emoji meaning from the perspective of pragmatics.

**Keywords:** context, discourse, emoji, emotion, Facebook, interpretation, pragmatic functions, semantics, survey, tone

## 1. Introduction

The popular press (at least in the English-speaking world) is currently rife with speculation that emoji are becoming a new, global “language.”<sup>1</sup> However, in order for a set of symbols to become a language that can be used to communicate effectively with other people, users of the symbols must agree on their meanings, and a number of studies have shown that even within the same culture, internet users often disagree in their interpretations of emoji (e.g., Miller et al. 2016; Tigwell and Flatla 2016). Starting from the assumption that the basic function of emoji is to express emotion, most of these studies have focused on the emotion, sentiment, or mood conveyed by individual emoji in experiments involving emoji presented

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1. See, e.g., Cohn (2015), Oliveira (2017), and Thompson (2016). Emoji are small, colorful graphical icons used in text fields in digital communication and that represent facial expressions, objects, actions, and symbols. The word emoji comes from Japanese *e* ('picture') + *moji* ('character').

either in isolation (e.g., Miller et al. 2016; Jaeger and Ares 2017) or in the context of Twitter tweets (e.g., Miller et al. 2017). A limitation of this approach, however, is that it views meaning as residing solely on the semantic level, in the emoji icons themselves, rather than in emoji-in-use. Emoji do not only express emotions such as ‘happy’ or ‘sad,’ or ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ sentiment; they also have pragmatic functions whose meanings derive from the contexts in which they are embedded, such as tone modification, illustration or repetition of accompanying text, and performance of virtual actions (e.g., Herring and Dainas 2017). Thus research that seeks to understand how emoji are interpreted in authentic contexts of use – which is where most people encounter them, rather than as isolated tokens – needs to account for their pragmatic functions.

To address this need, we conducted an online survey, the Understanding Emoji Survey, to determine how social media users interpret the pragmatic functions of 13 popular types of emoji (smiles, frowns, winks, etc.) in the discourse context of comments posted to public Facebook groups. For each emoji-containing comment, respondents selected from a list of functions that was adapted from Herring and Dainas’s (2017) taxonomy of graphicon functions. This chapter describes the survey study methodology and reports on its overall findings. Drawing on example survey items and the responses they received, we demonstrate that although the semantics of individual emoji inform their pragmatic uses, understanding emoji semantics is often insufficient to understand the intended meaning of emoji-containing messages. Further, different emoji types specialize to varying degrees in expressing particular pragmatic functions.

Another goal of the survey was to compare our interpretations, as researchers analyzing the functions of emoji-in-use, with those of ordinary social media users, as a validity check. The survey included anonymized examples of emoji-containing Facebook comments that we had found challenging to classify in earlier research.<sup>2</sup> The respondents’ interpretations of these examples turned out to be less nuanced than ours: Tone modification was their default interpretation, although the other categories from the Herring and Dainas (2017) pragmatic function taxonomy were selected by a majority of respondents for at least some survey items, thereby validating the taxonomy. Agreement rates among respondents and between respondents and the researchers varied according to emoji type and function. Even with this variance, the agreement levels far exceeded random chance, especially when we accounted for respondents’ preference for tone modification. From this, we surmise that intersubjective agreement on other, less challenging emoji uses should be even higher, increasing the generalizability of the survey findings.

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2. See, e.g., Herring and Dainas (2017) and subsequent unpublished research.

In the last sections of the chapter, we revisit the issue of emoji ambiguity and consider the effectiveness of providing social media discourse context to clarify emoji users' intended meanings. Based on our findings, we also (re)evaluate the status of emoji as a "language" with shared conventions and meanings.

## 2. Background literature

### 2.1 Emoji as language

Scholars of language and communication are increasingly joining journalists in advancing the claim that emoji are developing into an independent, visual language. There is evidence for this claim on multiple levels. Emoji use in social media is on the rise (Pavalanathan and Eisenstein 2016; Pohl, Domin and Rohs 2017), including uses of emoji alone without any accompanying text. Emoji can serve various structural linguistic functions, such as letter replacement and word replacement (Cramer, de Juan and Tetreault 2016; Dürscheid and Siever 2017), as well as substituting for entire propositions (Herring and Dainas 2017). Because they mostly appear at the end of sentences, they can also mark sentence boundaries (Cramer, de Juan and Tetreault 2016), functioning like punctuation. Indeed, Pohl, Domin and Rohs (2017) argue that although emoji lack a phonetic interpretation, they are themselves a form of text:

What makes emoji special as a means of adding visuals to texts is that they *are* text. Instead of sending images of smileys or airplanes, characters representing them are transmitted (they form a logographic writing system). Hence, in contrast to images, they can be used in places such as URLs, email subjects, or usernames. (Pohl, Domin and Rohs 2017: 5)

In addition, sequences or strings of emoji exhibit grammar-like properties, such as subject- or stance-first word order (e.g., Steinmetz 2014; Danesi 2017). Danesi (2017) also suggests that some strings of emoji have an iconic conceptual structure, and he notes the practice of calquing, whereby emoji are directly mapped onto morphemes, words, or utterances of the verbal language. The relationship of emoji and emoji sequences to the text they follow can also be described in syntactic terms (Cramer, de Juan and Tetreault 2016; Pohl, Domin and Rohs 2017).

Most scholars stop short of considering emoji a fully-functioning language, however. They point out that emoji mostly denote concrete objects, anthropomorphic facial expressions, and (occasionally) actions, and that emoji sets lack icons for abstract concepts and grammatical categories such as tense and number, articles, and conjunctions, which verbal languages typically possess (e.g., Cohn 2015; Dürscheid and Siever 2017). Moreover, using only emoji, one could not embed

propositions inside other propositions or refer to strings of events other than in chronological sequence.

Difficulties also exist at the level of meaning. As Miller et al. (2017: 152) note, “in order to avoid miscommunication incidents, people must interpret emoji characters in their exchanges in the same way (and they must know that they are interpreting them the same way).” However, a number of studies have found that people vary in their understanding of emoji semantics. These studies are discussed in the following section.

## 2.2 Emoji semantics

Most research on receiver interpretations of emoji has focused on emoji semantics, either in isolation or in very limited discourse contexts. As an example of the first type, Miller et al. (2016) asked Amazon Mechanical Turk<sup>3</sup> users to rate the sentiment and also describe the meaning of various isolated emoji renderings. They found within-platform disagreement on sentiment in 25% of emoji renderings, as well considerable variation in both within- and across-platform semantic descriptions of emoji. Tigwell and Flatla (2016) had 70 participants situate eight Android OS emoji renderings and eight Apple OS emoji renderings on a two-dimensional space, where the vertical axis represented intensity and the horizontal axis represented a scale of negative to positive sentiment. They found individual differences along both scales for each emoji. Further, the Apple and Android renderings of the same emoji displayed distinctly different sentiment and intensity scores.<sup>4</sup>

Similar studies have been conducted in non-Western contexts. Annamalai and Abdul Salam (2017) surveyed Malaysian students for their interpretations of isolated WhatsApp emoji renderings. Not only were there varying levels of agreement among respondents on what a given emoji means, but the respondents often did not describe the emoji as intended by the Unicode Consortium, the organization that approves emoji for inclusion in Unicode and standardizes their definitions.<sup>5</sup> In another study, Jaeger and Ares (2017) surveyed the dominant consumer interpretations of isolated facial emoji by Mainland Chinese participants. Out of 33

3. Amazon’s Mechanical Turk is a marketplace for crowdsourcing discrete on-demand tasks that computers cannot currently complete but that are easy for humans. The “Turk” refers to Wolfgang von Kempelen’s 1769 chess playing “automaton” which was dressed in stereotypical Turkish gear. It was later revealed that the “Turk” was a human chessmaster secretly manipulating the machine, hence modern “Turkers” are a remote human workforce behind the machine.

4. In this chapter, we include sentiment and intensity, along with emotion, under the general domain of semantics.

5. See <http://unicode.org/reports/tr51/>

emoji, some (15) mapped to one emotion, another group (10) mapped to multiple related emotions, and a final group (8) had multiple unrelated meanings.

In studies that consider emoji semantics in context, the context is usually a single Twitter tweet (Barbieri et al. 2016; Miller et al. 2017). For example, Miller and colleagues (2017) collected public English language tweets containing misinterpretation-prone emoji. They filtered the tweets to exclude retweets, user mentions, hashtags, URLs, and other attached media. Amazon Mechanical Turkers rated the sentiment of the emoji in the context of the tweets, but agreement did not improve compared to Miller et al. (2016). In fact, the tweet context actually decreased the rate of agreement for some emoji. However, it is not clear what role the context of the tweet itself played in the study's results, considering the length restrictions on tweets (140 characters at the time of the study), the fact that no prior discourse context was included, and the fact that tweets containing retweets and hashtags – common interactive components of tweets – were excluded.

### 2.3 Explanations for semantic ambiguity

Aside from insufficient context, a number of explanations have been proposed for the semantic ambiguity of emoji. First, some emoji are inherently more ambiguous than others. Miller et al. (2016) found that the grinning face with smiling eyes (😄), the unamused face (😏), and the smirking face (😏) (as rendered by Apple iOS, like some of the emoji in the present study) had the most disparate agreement rates, whereas raters agreed most on the sentiment of the heart eyes (😍), sleeping (😴), and crying face emoji (😭). Similarly, for Jaeger and Ares's (2017) Chinese social media users, the tears of joy (😂), blushing face (😊), grimacing face (😬), and smirking face mapped to multiple unrelated meanings, while the throwing [sic] a kiss (😘), loudly crying (😭), winking (😉), heart eyes (😍), smiley (😄), and the tongue out (😜) faces mapped predominantly to just one emotion. The varying levels of ambiguity in emoji may be a feature that is inherent to depictions of facial expressions (Choi, Hyun and Lee 2020).

Further, as has often been pointed out, emoji render differently across platforms. The Unicode Consortium creates a code for every emoji but does not specify how to render them. While the letter A is almost always recognizable as the letter "A" regardless of its rendering, emoji are more open to interpretation. Research shows that variations in rendering can significantly alter the perceived meaning of some emoji (e.g., Miller et al. 2016; Tigwell and Flatla 2016). This creates opportunities for miscommunication.

Finally, social and cultural factors may affect how users interpret emoji. While studies have not found strong gender differences in emoji interpretation (Jaeger



et al. 2017; Herring and Dainas 2018), age may (Gullberg 2016; Herring and Dainas 2020) or may not (Jaeger et al. 2017) be a factor. Experience with emoji (Jaeger et al. 2017) and familiarity with one's online interlocutors (Tigwell and Flatla 2016) may also make emoji easier to interpret. Finally, the language and culture of the community of users may influence emoji usage and meaning (e.g., Barbieri et al. 2016).

In a departure from other researchers, Pohl, Domin and Rohs (2017: 2) suggest that the ambiguity of emoji may in fact be a strength: "Emoji meaning is fluid and subject to contextual and cultural ... interpretation. It is this malleability that makes emoji attractive from an expressive point of view." This observation underscores the importance of studying contextualized interpretations of emoji-in-use.

## 2.4 Emoji pragmatics

Compared to emoji semantics, less research has focused on the pragmatic functions of emoji. However, numerous studies have identified pragmatic functions of emoticons, the antecedents of emoji (e.g., Walther and D'Addario 2001; Lo 2008; Yus 2014; Liebman and Gergle 2016). For example, research has shown that emoticons help clarify a sender's intended meaning, tone, emotion, attention, and self-presentation (Lo 2008; Ganster, Eimler and Krämer 2012). Yus (2014) created a taxonomy of pragmatic functions of emoticons that includes mitigating, intensifying, or contradicting the propositional attitude expressed in the sender's text. Emoticon and emoji use typically conveys a metamessage of positivity and playfulness (Dresner and Herring 2010); however, such is not always the case. Thompsen and Foulger (1996) found that emoticons have a mitigating effect on flaming, but that the effect diminishes as negativity increases. Matulewska and Gwiazdowicz (2020) describe aggressive uses of emoji in cyberbullying, distinguishing between emoji with inherently negative semantics (e.g., gun, angry face) and pragmatic uses of positive emoji to support acts of aggression and bullying. As this research suggests, emoji and emoticons share pragmatic functions, especially tone marking (Herring and Dainas 2017), and they do not appear to affect message interpretation differently (Ganster, Eimler and Krämer 2012). Despite this, users perceive emoji as more appealing, familiar, clear, and meaningful (Rodrigues et al. 2018). Emoji also have a stronger influence on the perceived mood and commitment of the sender (Ganster, Eimler and Krämer 2012) than emoticons.

There is evidence that lay users are to some extent aware of the pragmatic functions of emoji beyond simply expressing emotion. Kelly and Watts's (2015) interviewees reported using emoji to maintain or end conversations, to be playful, and to build rapport through shared idiosyncratic uses. Participants in Gullberg's (2016) focus group agreed to differing extents that emoji could serve to enhance emotion, confirm receipt of a message, manage the conversational climate (as a

signal of friendliness, anger, or sincerity), maintain relationships, and express one's personal aesthetic.

The above studies were based on qualitative interviews and focus groups. In contrast, only three studies to our knowledge have attempted a systematic accounting of the pragmatic functions of emoji. Cramer, de Juan and Tetreault (2016) collected the most recently sent messages containing emoji from 228 participants, along with user-reported descriptions of the emoji's intended meaning and function. The user descriptions revealed three categories of motivation for emoji use: to add emotional or situational meaning, to add tone to text, and as a social tool used to add flair, manage the conversation, and maintain relationships. The researchers also identified three functions of emoji use: repetition of text, complementary usage, and text replacement. Na'aman, Provenza and Montoya (2017) attempted to train a classifier to identify three high-level categories – Function, Content, and Multimodal – of emoji in tweets based on annotations by four computational linguistics graduate students. The classifier performed poorly, particularly with the Multimodal label, which is most akin to our understanding of pragmatic functions, because there was low agreement among coders on these variables. Na'aman, Provenza and Montoya (2017) concluded that it is difficult to interpret emoji functions even in context. Herring and Dainas (2017) adopted a more fine-grained, grounded theory approach in describing pragmatic functions of graphical icons (*graphicons*<sup>6</sup>), including emoji, in comments posted to public Facebook groups. In addition to tone modification, they found that emoji perform virtual actions, express emotional reactions, mention (repeat or illustrate) textual content, riff or elaborate playfully on prior messages, and appear together in narrative sequences.

While Herring and Dainas (2017) were able to reach a high level of agreement in coding graphicons after discussion, their taxonomy is based on researcher interpretations, which may not correspond to how the pragmatic functions of emoji are understood by a lay audience or the intended receivers. For one thing, researchers may spend time scrutinizing instances of emoji use where most social media users would gloss over them. Yet there has been, to our knowledge, no systematic comparison of researcher interpretations of emoji to those of lay users. In the present study, we survey lay users about their interpretations of emoji functions in context, using a modified version of the Herring and Dainas (2017) taxonomy of pragmatic functions, and compare them to our researcher interpretations.

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6. Graphicons are graphical icons, including emoji, emoticons, stickers, images, GIFs, and video clips, that can be used to convey propositional content in message exchanges (Herring and Dainas 2017).

### 3. Research questions

The general research question we seek to answer is: How do social media users interpret the pragmatic functions of emoji in the discourse contexts in which they occur?

Specifically, we address three questions:

RQ1: Which emoji functions are chosen most often, and for which emoji types?

We are interested to know if some pragmatic interpretations of emoji are preferred over others, and also whether there are associations between the type (or the rendering) of an emoji and the functions it expresses.

RQ2: To what extent do users agree among themselves on emoji functions?

Addressing this question should shed light on how ambiguous the functions are, and how subject they are to misconstrual. It should also provide a basis for evaluating the efficacy of discourse context in resolving pragmatic ambiguity.

RQ3: To what extent do user interpretations of emoji functions agree with the researchers' interpretations?

We address this to test the validity of our previous analyses and to validate the taxonomy of pragmatic functions proposed in Herring and Dainas (2017).

### 4. Methods

#### 4.1 Survey design

##### 4.1.1 *Survey items and discourse context*

To construct the Understanding Emoji Survey, we collected 46 different examples of emoji and their relevant prior discourse context from 14 public Facebook groups. These groups were selected for their relatively high density of graphicon content as compared with other public Facebook groups.<sup>7</sup> Each example of emoji-in-use consisted of the message in which the emoji appeared and the previous message(s) to which it most likely responded, as determined by the researchers after reading the full comment thread. Due to space limitations and to reduce possible distractions, we kept this context to a minimum, while preserving the essential contextual information from the comment thread.

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7. The Facebook groups that provided examples were: EmojiXpress, CatGIFs, AnimeGIFs, Nihilist Memes, Grumpy Cat Memes, Smiley, Stickers, StickersFB, Rise of the Guardians, The Chronicles of Narnia, Star Wars, Percy Jackson, Jared Padalecki, Selena Gomez.

The most relevant discourse context was typically a post to the Facebook group to which the emoji-containing message responded. This is because public Facebook comment threads are usually prompt focused, meaning that most users respond directly to the prompt or initial post of a thread rather than to other users (Herring 2013). Only a few examples (10.9%) required reference to prior local (non-prompt) messages. The original prompt often contained a large colorful image, GIF, or video together with text. In such cases, to minimize distraction, we substituted a brief verbal description of the prompt for the original multimodal prompt (e.g., Figure 1).

Each survey item included a Facebook comment containing (typically) a single emoji. In the rare cases where an item included two or more different emoji, the instructions directed respondents to focus on only one of them. Initially, items were selected based on the difficulty we had encountered in coding those items in previous research. To these, we added items to expand the representation of emoji types and pragmatic functions. The selected messages were anonymized and simplified for the survey. We replaced user IDs with pseudonyms that preserved the gender and nationality implied by the original names, in case that information was relevant to the interpretation of the messages. For some items, we modified the text of the message to make the topic of discussion accessible to a wider variety of users. For example, we changed a reference to a lesser-known book series to a better-known book series.

Figure 1 shows an example of an emoji-containing message as it appeared in the survey, along with its prior discourse context.

[Prompt: Image announcing that a new book in a series is now available]

**Alyssa Mueller:** Either my parents won't buy it or I'm not getting it until the 28<sup>th</sup>, which is my birthday

**Cecelia Silva:** My baby's birthday is also the 28th. Lol had to throw that out there 😊 happy early birthday

**Figure 1.** An emoji-containing message and its prior discourse context

#### 4.1.2 *Emoji types*





















The emoji included in the survey represent 13 of the most common emoji types (smile, big smile, frown, wink, blush, grimace, tears of joy, heart, heart eyes, blowing a kiss, crying, tongue out, and “meh”),<sup>8</sup> which were rendered in the survey to match the emoji that appeared in the original Facebook messages. For some types,

8. We use these shortened terms henceforth, rather than the Unicode labels, for the sake of brevity.

the emoji renderings varied across examples. We assume this is because the emoji were posted from different platforms (the Facebook website or the mobile app) or from different mobile platforms (e.g., Apple or Android), since emoji renderings differ on each of these (Miller et al. 2016). To preserve the original context, in the survey we used a combination of Apple iOS 10 renderings and screenshots of the emoji as they appeared on Facebook (Table 1).

Our pool of 46 messages included two to five examples of each emoji type. Four balanced versions of the survey were created, each consisting of the same example question at the beginning and 12 items drawn from the 45 remaining messages, with three items being repeated once. The repeated questions were ones that we determined from our experience and a pilot study to be most challenging; these were placed toward the end of the survey. Thus each version of the survey contained at least one example of most of the 13 emoji types and had a similar progression from easier-to-code items to more difficult ones.

**Table 1.** Emoji types and emoji included in the survey

Label	Emoji	Label	Emoji
“meh”		Heart Eyes	
Big Smile		Kiss	
Blush	  	Smile	
Crying	  	Tears of Joy	
Frown	 	Tongue Out	 
Grimace		Wink	 
Heart			

#### 4.1.3 Pragmatic functions

Herring and Dainas (2017) identified eight pragmatic functions of graphicons: Tone Modification, Reaction, Action, Mention, Riff, Sequence, Ambiguous, and Other (See Table 2 for a description of each function). Emoji constituted the most frequent graphicon type in that study, and emoji were used in all eight functions. Thus this taxonomy is well-suited to the analysis of emoji alone.

The original taxonomy was derived using a rigorous grounded theory approach. We allowed the eight functions to emerge from our dataset of Facebook comments. Then we successively refined our observations into a systematic coding scheme consisting of exhaustive, logically-independent categories. Interrater reliability measures were calculated and proved acceptable, and we discussed disagreements until consensus was reached; this process led to further refinements to the coding scheme.

However, the rigor of this process notwithstanding, the pragmatic function taxonomy is based on observations by researchers, who may tend to perceive more fine-grained distinctions than ordinary social media users, in that the latter normally do not spend as much time interpreting each instance of emoji use. Thus one goal of the current study is to investigate whether or not the identified functions are also recognized by lay users and thus can be said to have real-world validity. In order to achieve this, we simplified our definitions of each function and translated them into language that is more accessible to a lay audience. For example, rather than asking the respondents if an emoji was functioning as a “mention,” the survey asked if the emoji was “being used to illustrate the text of the message comment.”

We modified the pragmatic function taxonomy in several respects for the purposes of the Understanding Emoji Survey. First, we separated the Tone Modification code into two codes: *tone modification* proper, or the use of an emoji to attribute a manner, attitude, or emotion to the text it accompanies, and *softening*, the use of an emoji to hedge the illocutionary force of the accompanying text (cf. Dresner and Herring 2010) in order to mitigate, “soften,” or render more polite the act performed by the text. We included this function because softening is sometimes associated with emoticon and emoji use in the CMC literature (e.g., Baron and Ling 2011; Eisenclas 2011).

Second, we added two logically possible categories that we expected might be chosen by some respondents. *Decoration* indicates that the emoji is merely being used as decoration without adding other meaning to the message. *Physical* action indicates that the message sender was physically making the facial expression or doing the action depicted by the emoji. We also added the option “*I don’t know*,” and renamed the Ambiguous function *multiple functions*. Respondents who chose *multiple functions* or *other* were asked to write in an explanation.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, we determined that two of the codes from the original taxonomy were unnecessary, given the examples included in the survey and our focus on emoji rather than graphicons more generally. We omitted the Riff function, which we previously found to be associated more with larger graphicons like GIFs. We also omitted Sequence, since it applies only to two or more different emoji in a row, and no such examples were included in the survey.<sup>10</sup>

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9. We did not include aggressive or negative use (cf. Matulewska and Gwiazdowicz 2020) as a function in this survey because no examples of such usage occurred in our Facebook data. However, survey respondents were free to write it in under *other* or *multiple functions* if they felt it was appropriate.

10. Several survey items had two or more emoji in a row, but they were the same or semantically similar emoji repeated for emphasis.

**Table 2.** Formal and lay descriptions of pragmatic functions of emoji based on Herring and Dainas (2017)

Function	Formal descriptions (Herring and Dainas 2017)	Survey options: The emoji shows that the user is...	Additional clarification
Tone Modification	Graphicon directly modifies text, clarifying how a message should be interpreted	Associating a specific tone (e.g., happy or some related tone) with their comment	That is, the emoji tells the reader how the comment is intended to be interpreted.
Softening	N/A	Softening their comment	For example, making the comment less forceful or more polite.
Reaction	Graphicon used to portray a specific emotion in response to something that has been posted	(Virtually) expressing an emotion in response to previous content, not necessarily related to the text of their comment	That is, reacting directly to the prompt.
Action	Graphicon used to portray a specific physical action	(Virtually) saying [Text of Message], and then performing a virtual action (e.g., smiling)	That is, performing each part of the comment in sequence, one part after the other.
Mention	Mentioning a graphicon rather than using it, e.g., use: "I'm so excited! :-)," mention: "That jerk had the nerve to send me a :-)"	Illustrating the text of their comment	That is, the emoji is a graphic illustration of some word(s) in the comment.
Riff	Graphicon is a humorous elaboration on, play on, or parody of a previous graphicon or comment.	N/A	N/A
Sequence	A series of consecutive graphicons (often of the same type) that convey a narrative of some kind, as opposed to a composite message	N/A	N/A
Physical Expression	N/A	Literally (physically) doing what the emoji expresses (e.g., smiling) while typing their comment	At the time the message was typed, the Facebook user was actually feeling or doing what the emoji expresses.

Table 2. (continued)

Function	Formal descriptions (Herring and Dainas 2017)	Survey options: The emoji shows that the user is...	Additional clarification
Decoration	N/A	Just using the emoji as decoration.	The emoji has no function. except to make the text more visually interesting or appealing.
Ambiguous	The graphicon has mul- tiple, distinct meanings	More than one function is equally plausible (Specify/ Explain your choices)	After considering all of the options, you think there is no one best answer.
Other	Cases that cannot be ac- counted for by the coding scheme	Other (explain)	None of the above options captures how you think the emoji functions in this comment. Instead you think...
“I don’t know”	N/A	I have no idea	You totally give up

Table 2 shows the formal definitions of the pragmatic functions identified by Herring and Dainas (2017), as well as the general function descriptions shown to the survey respondents. Not shown are the specific versions of the function descriptions we crafted to match each item in the survey. The last column in Table 2 shows the clarification of the pragmatic function meanings provided in the example question at the beginning of each version of the survey.

#### 4.1.4 Multiple-part items

In the majority of survey items ( $n = 37$ ), the list of function options appeared directly below the emoji-containing message. In addition to items of this basic type, we also created nine multi-part items, in which there was a preliminary question that respondents had to answer before being asked about the pragmatic function of the emoji in the message. Of these, six were cases where the emoji was located in the middle of a textual string rather than at the end or the beginning. Respondents first had to answer which part of the message the emoji was associated with. Based on their answer, they were then shown a customized version of the pragmatic function options. If they chose “I have no idea” for the first question, they were advanced to the next item in the survey (Figure 2).



[Prompt: Announcement of the next Chronicles of Narnia movie – The Silver Chair]

**Sara Conti Giordano:** Ahhh... The Silver Chair. ❤️ When is this supposed to show?

The emoji in this comment is most closely associated with:

- The first part (what comes before it)
- The second part (what comes after it)
- Both
- Neither
- I have no idea

**Figure 2.** First part of a multiple-part survey item

The other three multiple-part questions featured the grimace face emoji. Many studies have found that this emoji is prone to ambiguity and misunderstanding; we have also found it difficult to interpret in our research. In order to get a sense of how the grimace emoji was perceived in context, we asked respondents first to identify what emotion/attitude they thought the emoji was expressing. Respondents were then shown a customized version of the pragmatic function options based on their answer to that question. If respondents chose “I have no idea” for the first question, they were advanced to the next item in the survey (Figure 3).

[Prompt: "New Stickers! Rilakkuma by Sanrio" above an image of a series of stickers involving bears and chicks]

**Alice Williams Bateson:** Update Facebook 🤨

What best describes the meaning of the above emoji?

- Grimacing/Forced smile
- Happy/Grinning widely
- Angry/Fierce
- I have no idea

**Figure 3.** First part of a grimace face multiple-part survey item

#### 4.1.5 Pilot study

As part of the process of developing the survey, we created two pilot versions, each containing 23 emoji items drawn from the original pool of 46 messages. These versions were shared with 14 individuals<sup>11</sup> in the fall of 2017. The results of the pilot study were used to refine the survey instrument. For example, based on feedback that the survey took too long, we shortened it to 13 questions and created four versions of the survey instead of two. Based on confusion that some respondents had about the simplified descriptions of the pragmatic functions, we fine-tuned the de-

11. The participants in the pilot study were graduate students in information science and friends and family of the researchers, ranging in age from 25 to 62.

scriptions and added a sample question at the beginning of the survey containing the expanded definitions of the pragmatic functions in Table 2.

#### 4.1.6 *Final survey structure*

The final survey was created using Qualtrics,<sup>12</sup> a cloud-based survey tool. Respondents took the survey using Qualtrics' online interface, and the outputted results of the survey were collected using Qualtrics software.

When a potential survey respondent clicked on the link to the online survey, they were provided with the study information sheet<sup>13</sup> and were asked if they agreed to take the survey.<sup>14</sup> If they selected "I agree," they were considered to have given informed consent, and they continued to take the survey. If a respondent selected "I do not agree," they were sent to the end of the survey and thanked for their time.

The continuing respondents were next shown a block of demographic and social media usage questions. Questions asked about the respondent's gender, age, first language, and country of residence. The questions about social media practices included whether the respondent had an active Facebook account at the time. If so, they were asked about their posting frequency, emoji use, and time spent on Facebook. All respondents were asked "In general, how confident are you that you understand the intended meaning of emoji (other than reaction emoji)<sup>15</sup> when you see them in social media?"

Following these questions was the sample emoji item described earlier, presented with expanded definitions of the pragmatic functions (see Table 2). Each continuing survey respondent saw this sample item. Next, each respondent was randomly assigned one of the four versions of the emoji item blocks by the Qualtrics Survey Software. Items were presented one at a time.

After finishing the block of emoji items, the respondent was asked to rate how difficult it was to interpret the emoji in the survey and to rate their confidence in their own answers. They were also asked which graphicons they normally used (i.e., emoji, emoticons, stickers, images, GIFs, video clips) and what other social media platforms they had accounts on. The last question in the survey was open ended and asked "Do you have any other comments about emoji use in social media?"

12. Versions available between August 2017 and February 2018. Copyright © 2005 Qualtrics. <https://www.qualtrics.com>.

13. The information sheet stated that respondents should be between 18 and 75 years old.

14. The study was approved by the Indiana University Internal Review Board on 9 August, 2017.

15. Reaction emoji are a limited set of emoji that appear when a user hovers over Facebook's 'like' button. They were not included in the survey because they are 'likes' rather than emoji-in-use.

## 4.2 Distribution

The Understanding Emoji Survey ran between 11 January and 20 February, 2018. The link to the survey was shared with students and colleagues at a large North American university as well as with friends, family members, and strangers via social media sites (i.e., Facebook, Tumblr, Reddit, Twitter, and Ravelry). Initial respondents were encouraged to share the link on their social media accounts as well as with other people they felt might be interested in the survey, and in this way, the survey was distributed to a wider audience.

## 4.3 Quantitative measures

The survey responses were analyzed in Microsoft Excel 2013. The results are presented using descriptive statistics.

The frequency distributions of the responses to the multiple-choice items, normalized as percentages, are presented in charts (e.g., Figures 4–14) and/or described in prose. For the open-ended questions, including the ‘other’ and ‘multiple choice’ options where respondents were asked to provide further details, the authors jointly conducted thematic content analysis to group the responses into categories (Bauer 2000). The results of one of these analyses are presented in Table 6; other results are discussed in prose.

Three kinds of agreement measures were also calculated. The first measured the degree to which the respondents agreed among themselves on their preferred (top) function codes (Table 3). The second measured the degree to which the respondents agreed among themselves on their top choice of function code (regardless of what it was) for each emoji type (Table 4). The final measure assessed the extent to which the respondents’ coding choices agreed with the researchers’ coding choices (Table 5). The details of these calculations are described in the *Agreement* section further below.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Respondent demographics

In all, 658 surveys were collected. In order to maximize the amount of usable information, we analyzed the responses from all surveys in which a respondent selected both a gender<sup>16</sup> and chose a function code for at least one emoji item be-

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16. The survey findings are analyzed by gender in Herring and Dainas (2018) and by gender and age in Herring and Dainas (2020).

yond the sample question. 523 surveys met these requirements and were used for the analyses reported in this chapter.

The gender breakdown for the 523 surveys was 352 females, 121 males, and 50 'other.' The average age was 28.6 (range: 18 to 70+). Most of the respondents (74.2%) were native English speakers; the next most common native language was German (5.5%). Three-quarters (75%) of the participants reported their country of residence as the U.S., while 4.4% were based in Canada, 4.2% in Germany, and 2.7% in the U.K.

## 5.2 Respondents' social media usage

The survey respondents were active Facebook users and active emoji users. Most respondents ( $n = 445$ ; 85.1%) reported having an active Facebook account. Of these, 74.4% ( $n = 331$ ) said they check Facebook at least once a day, and 67.6% reported posting or commenting on Facebook at least once a month. The majority of these respondents also reported using emoji on Facebook (not including the reaction emoji available after each Facebook post and comment) 'sometimes' (38.9%), 'often' (31.2%), or 'in every message' (1.6%). Only 19.1% indicated that they use emoji 'rarely,' and 9.2% said they 'never' use emoji. Respondents reported using emoji most 'mainly in private chat' (42.2%), followed by 'in any kind of message' (34.3%), and least often 'mainly in [non-private] posts and comments' (14.8%). Only 8.5% of respondents with a Facebook account indicated that they did not use emoji on Facebook.

The respondents were confident emoji interpreters. Of all who started the survey, the vast majority reported being 'very confident' (55.4%) or 'somewhat confident' (39.2%) of their ability to understand the intended meaning of emoji (other than reaction emoji) when they encountered them in social media. Only 5.4% reported being 'not at all confident' in their ability to understand the meaning of emoji. After responding to the survey items, however, the respondents reported somewhat less confidence. Of the 454 people who finished all of the emoji items, 34.6% reported being 'very confident' in their answers, 62.5% reported being 'somewhat confident,' and 2.9% reported being 'not at all confident.' The lower degree of (strong) confidence is perhaps not surprising, given that many of the survey items were included precisely because, in our estimation, they were difficult to interpret. Nonetheless, 15% of respondents reported that the survey was 'very easy,' 52% said it was 'somewhat easy,' and 20.3% found it 'neither easy nor difficult.' Only 12.3% reported that the survey was 'somewhat difficult,' and only 0.4% reported that it was 'very difficult.'

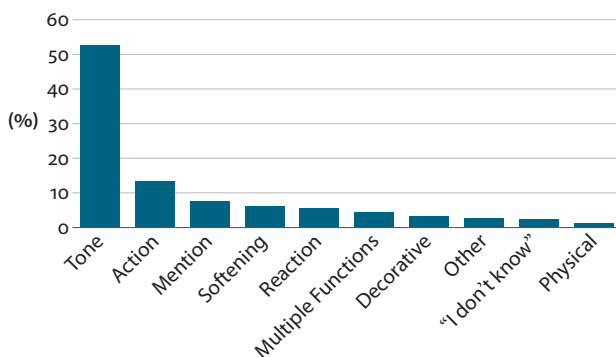
The survey respondents were active social media users. On average, respondents reported having accounts on three social media platforms, not including

Facebook. Out of the 433 people who reported this, the majority reported having an Instagram account (62.1%), a Twitter account (59.6%), and/or a Tumblr account (57.7%). Smaller numbers reported having a Snapchat (44.6%), WhatsApp (33.5%), Reddit (20.6%), or Imgur (5.1%) account, and 17.1% of users reported having at least one account on some other social media platform besides the ones listed in the survey.

### 5.3 Respondents' interpretations of pragmatic functions

#### 5.3.1 Overall

The function chosen most often in response to the emoji survey items was *tone modification* (52.6%). *Tone* was the predominant choice for 39 out of the 49 items included in the survey. *Tone* was followed by *action* (13.4%), *mention* (7.8%), *softening* (6.3), *reaction* (5.5%), *multiple functions* (4.4%), *decorative* (3.3%), *other* (2.7%), “*I don't know*” (2.5%), and *physical* (1.4%), as shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Overall distribution of pragmatic function codes ( $n = 6,330$ ) chosen by the survey respondents

*By emoji type.* When broken down by emoji type, each pragmatic function had a distinctive emoji profile. Hearts and kisses were especially interpreted as expressing virtual *actions* (Figure 6); smiles and winks as *softening* the force of a message (Figure 7); grimaces and tears of joy as *reactions* to a prompt (Figure 8); and kisses as *mentions* that illustrate message content (Figure 9). Even *tone* marking was associated more with certain emoji (tongue out, crying, frown) and less with others (e.g., grimace, kiss) (Figure 5). As for the additional options that we included to supplement Herring and Dainas's (2017) taxonomy, big smiles and hearts were interpreted as *decorative* by some respondents (Figure 10), and some respondents interpreted the heart eyes emoji as describing a *physical action* (described in the survey as “looking adoringly” at one's computer screen) (Figure 12). Finally, the

fact that a number of respondents chose *multiple functions*, *other*, or “*I don’t know*” suggests that for some emoji items, the respondents were either not satisfied with the options provided in the survey, or the functions of those emoji were especially difficult to interpret. The tears of joy emoji, in particular, was said by several respondents to have *other* functions (e.g., laughing in a mocking way) (Figure 14), and the grimace emoji received the most “*I don’t know*” responses (Figure 11).

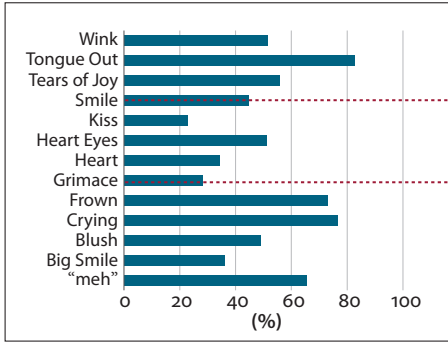


Figure 5. Tone

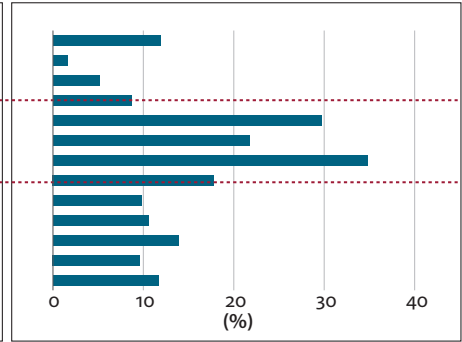


Figure 6. Action

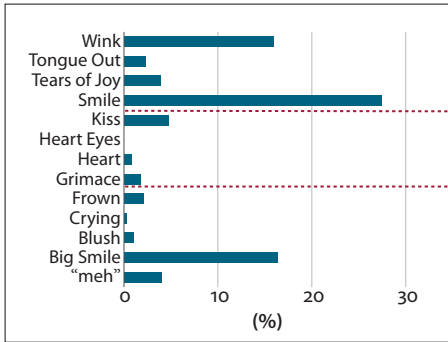


Figure 7. Softening

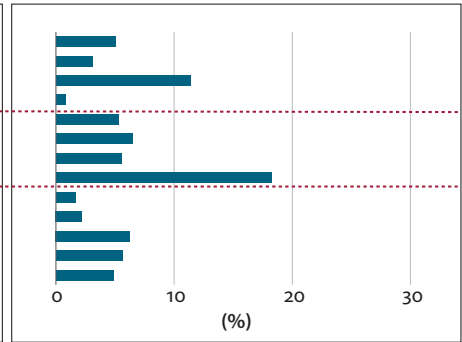


Figure 8. Reaction

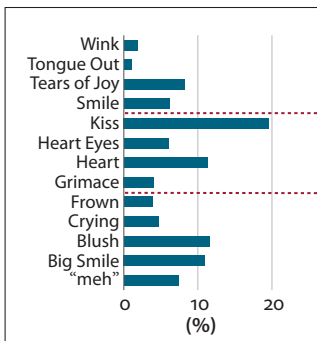


Figure 9. Mention



Figure 10. Decorative

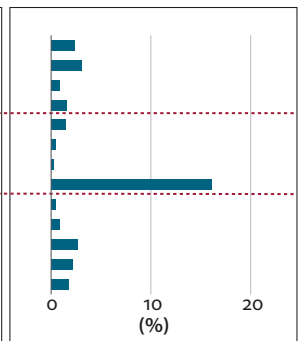


Figure 11. “I don’t know”

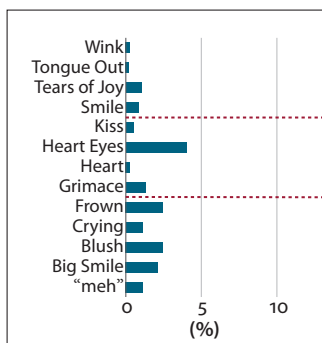


Figure 12. Physical

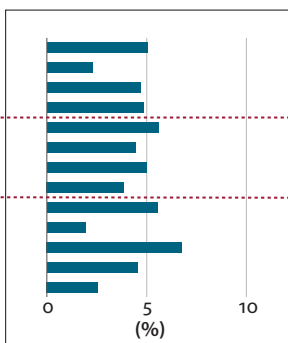


Figure 13. Multiple



Figure 14. Other

### 5.3.2 Individual items

The survey did not generate enough replies to conduct meaningful quantitative analysis of interpretation of function by emoji type at the level of individual emoji items. Nonetheless, we observed variation among the items within a given emoji type, albeit not always where variation might be expected. For the five emoji types with different renderings (blush, crying, frown, tongue out, and wink; see Table 1), respondents choose the same top function (*tone*) for each individual item. Conversely, the big smile, grimace, and heart were rendered exactly the same in all survey items, yet the items elicited different functional interpretations – for example, the three heart items had *action*, *tone*, and *mention* as their respective top function choices. We infer from these examples that the local discourse context, rather than the emoji themselves, determined the respondents' interpretation of the emoji's function.

The importance of context is also highlighted in cases where there is a mismatch between the semantics of an emoji in isolation and how that emoji functions pragmatically in a Facebook comment, as in the four examples that follow. Each example starts with a table that displays the Unicode label for the emoji and the semantic labels applied to that emoji in isolation by participants in previous studies. This is followed by a survey item containing that emoji, a bar chart showing our respondents' choices of pragmatic function for that item (with the researchers' preferred interpretation circled), and a bar chart showing respondent choices for all survey items containing that emoji type.

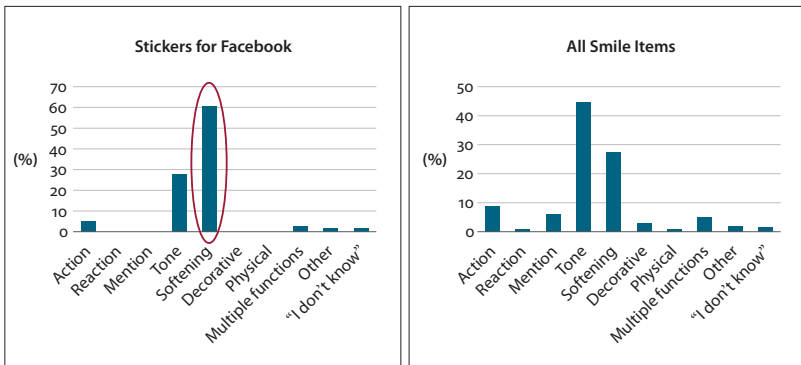
(1)

Rendering	Unicode	Jaeger and Ares (2017)	Internet sources (from Jaeger and Ares 2017)
😊	slightly smiling face	happy (53%) content/satisfied (31%) pleasure (28%) good (25%) fun (20%)	smile, joy, happy, grinning

[Prompt: Image of a sticker store page featuring a few examples of the sticker set]

**Margaret Blakey:** I still can't get that one. Any idea when?

**Stickers for Facebook:** Just wait, pls! it'll slowly appear in your Sticker store! It's system is similar to fb interface Update, some people's fb is updated, and others still not. please be patient! 😊



Previous research (Jaeger and Ares 2017) found that the slightly smiling face in isolation has meanings such as “happy,” “content,” “good,” and “joy.” However, the smiling emoji as used by Stickers for Facebook in Example 1 cannot be interpreted as expressing positive emotion. The text of the message expresses the commenter’s irritation and perhaps frustration with Margaret Blakey asking (potentially repeatedly, given the word “still”) when a new sticker set will become available. The emoji serves to soften or mitigate Stickers for Facebook’s irritated response; accordingly, *softening* was the preferred interpretation of both the survey respondents and the researchers. *Tone* was selected more often for smile-containing survey items overall, though, suggesting that the contexts of the other smile items were different from that for Example 1.

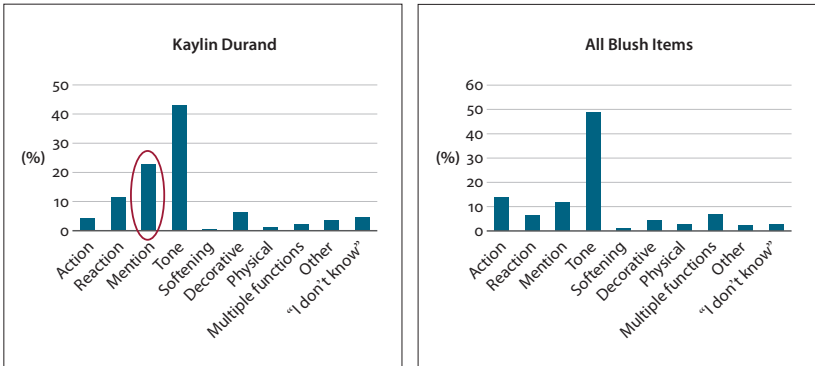


(2)

Rendering	Unicode	Jaeger and Ares (2017)	Annamalai and Abdul Salam (2017)
😬	Flushed face	Surprised/shocked (37%)	Surprised (40%) Flushed (32.9%) Shocked (27.1%)

[Prompt: Video of bloopers from the television show Supernatural]

Kaylin Durand: Are my eyes vibrating?? 😬



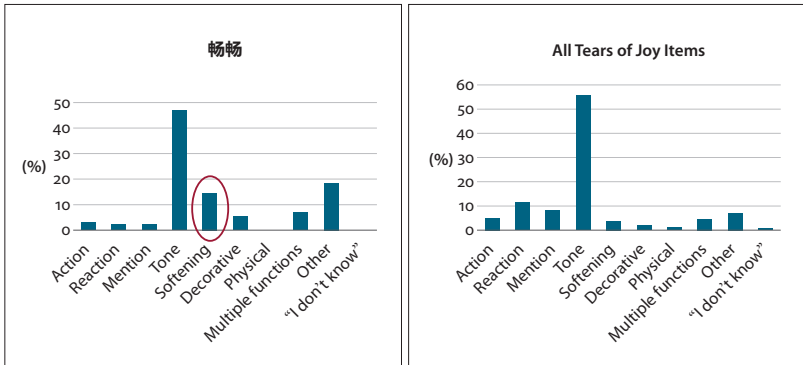
In previous research on emoji interpretation (Annamalai and Abdul Salam 2017; Jaeger and Ares 2017), the flushed face presented in isolation was ascribed meanings such as surprised, shocked, and flushed. While it is possible that Kaylin Durand in Example 2 was shocked or embarrassed by the video of bloopers (humorous out-takes) from the American television show Supernatural, it seemed more likely (to us, and to many of our survey respondents) that Kaylin chose this emoji to humorously illustrate vibrating eyes, since the eyes of the emoji appear to be vibrating. This would be an example of the *mention* function. For this and the other blush emoji examples, though, *tone* was the preferred respondent interpretation.

(3)

Rendering	Unicode	Jaeger and Ares (2017)	Annamalai and Abdul Salam (2017)
😂	Face with tears of joy	happy (30%) excited (21%)	tears of joy (87.1%) funny (12.9%)


[Prompt: Image of a new book (play script), Harry Potter and the Cursed Child]

畅畅: I want to buy~ But, my country haven't translation. And my English isn't good. 😊



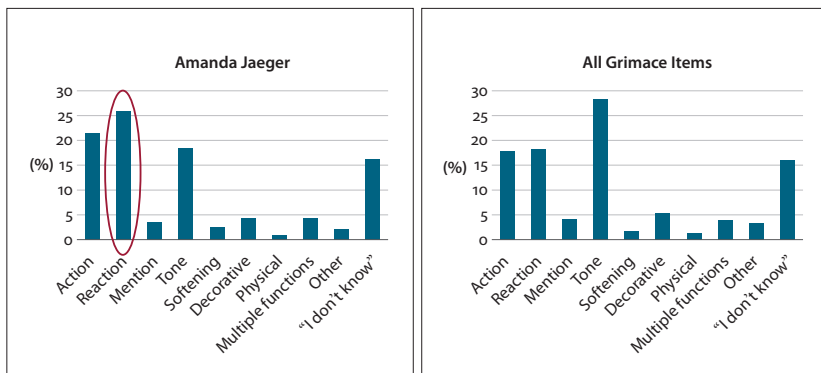
The tears of joy emoji, in isolation, expresses joy, happiness, excitement, and amusement (Annamalai and Abdul Salam 2017; Jaeger and Ares 2017). However, none of these meanings is clearly present in 畅畅's use of the emoji in Example 3; rather, the commenter is describing negative circumstances: lack of a translation of a book they want to read and inability to read it due to their poor language skills. We (the researchers) interpreted this emoji usage as softening or mitigating what could otherwise be construed as a complaining or whining comment. The survey respondents preferred tone ("associating a highly amused tone with their comment"), which was the preferred function for the tears of joy emoji items overall, and nearly 20% of respondents chose other; softening was their third choice. Cultural differences in interpretation may be at work here. When the second author presented this example in a talk recently, a Chinese woman in the audience recognized the softening use of the tears of joy emoji and said it is not uncommon among Chinese social media users.

(4)

Rendering	Unicode	Jaeger and Ares (2017)	Internet sources (from Jaeger and Ares 2017)
	grimacing face	surprised/shocked (18%)	surprised, awkward, nervous, grimace

[Prompt: Image of a malevolent looking cat sitting in a box that says "Sour Puss"]

Amanda Jaeger: Abdul Rahal 😄😄😄



The grimacing face emoji, considered in isolation, is thought to express surprise, awkwardness, or nervousness (Jaeger and Ares 2017). Survey respondents who agreed among themselves that ‘grimacing/forced smile’ was the meaning of the emoji in this item did not, however, agree on the pragmatic function of the emoji. A narrow majority chose *reaction* (to the prompt), as did the researchers, but *action*, *tone*, and “*I don’t know*” were also popular choices. A similar lack of consensus is evident for all grimace face items. Thus this emoji is ambiguous functionally as well as semantically.

#### 5.4 Agreement

The charts in examples 1–4 show varying levels of respondent agreement, both among themselves and with the researchers’ interpretations. To assess agreement levels overall, we first calculated the degree to which the respondents agreed among themselves on their top choice of function code for all the survey items. This was done by first counting the number of items where each function was the predominant choice. The total number of respondents who agreed with the predominant code was divided by the total number of respondents who selected a code for those items; the results are shown in Table 3.

Excluding *multiple functions* and *other*, there are eight non-overlapping function options. Five of these were selected as top choices for at least one item. Unsurprisingly, respondents most often chose *tone modification* as their top choice, and they agreed most on that choice at 59.7%, whereas they agreed least on *reaction* (only 25.9% of respondents chose it for the two items where it was the top choice). Thus there was considerable disagreement on the assignment of the five top pragmatic functions.

Nonetheless, all of the percentages are well above the level of chance, given the number of possible code options provided in the survey. If the answers had been evenly distributed across the eight non-overlapping function codes, we

would expect each option to be selected 12.5% of the time. Or, since we know from Figure 4 that function codes were not evenly distributed, if we take that distribution as a baseline and adjust it to exclude *multiple functions* and *other*, the expected percentages would be as shown in the right-most column of Table 3. For all functions except *tone*, which is only slightly more preferred as a top choice than it was selected overall, the actual percent agreement on top choice functions is between two and seven times greater than would be expected based on the adjusted overall distribution of the function codes. From this we may conclude that respondents tended to converge on functional interpretations of the emoji items, even though they did not approach 100% agreement.

**Table 3.** Inter-respondent agreement on top choice of pragmatic function

	Items on which respondents agreed with themselves	Codes assigned to agreed-upon top functions	Total codes assigned to items	% (actual)	Expected % (random distribution)	Expected % (adjusted distribution)
Action	3	186	369	50.4%	12.5%	14.5%
Mention	3	139	360	38.6%	12.5%	8.4%
Reaction	2	59	228	25.9%	12.5%	6.0%
Softening	3	168	375	44.8%	12.5%	6.8%
Tone	39	3058	5124	59.7%	12.5%	56.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50*</b>	<b>3610</b>	<b>6456</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>62.5%**</b>	<b>91.4%**</b>
Average				55.9%		

\*There was a tie between *softening* and *tone* for one item, and each code was counted.

\*\*Excluded from these totals are the percentages for *decorative*, *physical*, and “*I don’t know*,” which were not top choices for any item.

The degree of consensus among respondents varied by emoji type. Respondents agreed most on the function of the tongue out emoji (82.5%), followed by the crying (74.9%) and frown (73%) emoji. These are emoji for which *tone* was the most common top function choice. The respondents had the lowest level of intersubject agreement on the functions of the grimace (32%) and big smile emoji (38%), for which the top choices included *reaction*, *softening*, and *mention*. These results were calculated by dividing the total number of respondents who chose the predominant choice for each item for each emoji type by the total number of function codes that were assigned to each item for each emoji type (Table 4).

Next we assessed the extent to which the respondents’ coding choices agreed with ours. This involved calculating the number of items for which the respondents’ predominant function choice and our choice were the same. When only

**Table 4.** Inter-respondent agreement on top choice of pragmatic function by emoji type (with number of survey items for each emoji type)

	Survey items	Codes for top choice	All possible codes	%	Top functions
Tongue Out	4	400	485	82.5%	tone
Crying	4	658	878	74.9%	tone
Frown	4	356	488	73.0%	tone
“meh”	3	230	351	65.5%	tone
Tears of Joy	4	278	490	56.7%	tone
Smile	5	318	598	53.2%	tone, softening
Wink	3	194	377	51.5%	tone
Heart Eyes	2	127	248	51.2%	tone
Blush	5	296	606	48.8%	tone
Kiss	5	267	607	44.0%	action, tone, mention
Heart	3	156	362	43.1%	action, tone, mention
Big Smile	3	142	374	38.0%	tone, softening, mention
Grimace	4	149	466	32.0%	tone, reaction
<b>Total (Avg.)</b>	<b>49</b> <b>(3.8)</b>	<b>3571</b> <b>(274.7)</b>	<b>6330</b> <b>(486.9)</b>	<b>56.4%</b>	<b>n/a</b>

their first or top choice was considered, the respondents agreed with our *tone modification* codes in 100% of cases, although the respondents coded more examples as *tone* than we did. The agreement rates for the other functions were between 33.3% and 43.3% (Table 5). Examples 1 and 4 above illustrate items where the respondents' first choice agreed with our choice.

However, the distribution of respondents' function codes is skewed in favor of *tone* at the expense of other functions. To adjust for this, we calculated a second agreement measure in which we considered whether either the first or second choice of the respondents agreed with our choices. This raised the agreement rate dramatically on *virtual action*, for example, from 33.3% to 83.3%, and it raised the overall level of agreement between researchers and respondents from 67.3% to 95.9% (Table 5). Example 2 above illustrates an item for which the respondents agreed with us on their second choice. On only four items (8.2%) did the respondents not agree with our interpretations in either their first or second choice; Example 3 above is one such case.

**Table 5.** Number and percentage of questions for which respondents agreed in their first- or second-most-frequent choice with the researchers' top code assignments

	Researcher choices	Agreed w/ researchers on 1st choice	%	Agreed w/ researchers on 1st or 2nd choice	%
Action	6	2	33.3%	5	83.3%
Mention	7	3	42.9%	7	100.0%
Reaction	6	2	33.3%	4	66.7%
Softening	7	3	42.9%	6	85.7%
Tone	23	23	100.0%	24	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>67.3%</b>	<b>45<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>91.8%</b>

† This value is one less than the sum of the numbers in the column, because the respondents had *tone* as their top choice one more time than the researchers did, and that was not counted as an agreement.

## 5.5 Multi-part questions

The survey included two kinds of multiple part questions. In the four out of six cases where an emoji was located in the middle of a textual string rather than at the end or the beginning, 80% or more of respondents felt that the emoji was most closely associated with the first part of the textual string. This is consistent with the tendency of emoticons and emoji to appear at the end of textual strings (Provine, Spencer and Mandell 2007; Cramer, de Juan and Tetreault 2016). Respondents associated a variety of pragmatic functions with these emoji, except for *reaction*, which was described in the survey as an emotional reaction unrelated to the text of the message. For the other two multi-part items of this type, respondents slightly associated the emoji with the first part of the text in one, and slightly associated it with the second part in the other. In these examples, the favored pragmatic functions differed depending on how respondents interpreted the positioning and scope of the emoji, although there were not enough data to identify any recurring patterns.<sup>17</sup>

For the other kind of multi-part question, where the first part concerns the emotion/attitude expressed by the grimace face, there was less consensus. The interpretation “grimacing/forced smile” was preferred in all three examples, but only between 48% and 72% of respondents agreed on this categorization. Moreover, in two items, the second choice interpretation was “happy/grinning widely,” and in the third it was “angry/fierce.” Overall, 12.3% of respondents said that they did not know what the emotion/attitude of the grimace face was. There was also little consistency in pragmatic functions associated with each emotion/attitude. This was particularly evident in one grimace item that was repeated in two of the survey

17. The emoji differed in each of the six cases.

versions; interpretations of pragmatic function differed in the two iterations of the same example. (One multi-part positioning item was also repeated, but its responses did not show much variation.) These findings support previous research on the ambiguity of the grimace face emoji.

## 5.6 Open-ended responses

If respondents chose *multiple functions*, as they did 257 times, they were asked to list which functions the emoji expressed. The most common combination of functions indicated was *tone* and *virtual action* (18.7%). This confirmed our intuition that these two functions are closely related, because we also sometimes had difficulty deciding between them in our previous research. The next most common combination mentioned was *tone* and *softening* (14.8%), which also makes sense, given that *softening* can be considered a subtype of *tone modification* (and was not distinguished from it in the original Herring and Dainas taxonomy). Most responses invoked one or more of the functions provided in the survey. Respondents were most likely to include *tone modification* (79%) as one of the *multiple functions* in a given example, followed by *virtual action* (33.9%) and *mention* (22.6%); this distribution mirrors the overall distribution of function choices in Figure 4. Other combinations of functions were idiosyncratic and did not fall into consistent categories, and 11% of combinations were indicated only once. Finally, some portion of the respondents appeared not to have understood the functions provided, because they used the Multiple Functions free response box to write in their own description of a single function that matched one of those already provided (10.1%).

Respondents who chose *other* ( $n = 157$ ) were also asked to describe the function of the emoji. The largest portion of *other* responses (51.6%) repeated the function categories provided in the survey, such as *tone modification* or *virtual action*, with slightly different wording or different descriptions of the emoji. The next most common *other* function (12%) mainly described the emotion conveyed by the emoji. The remaining *other* function descriptions fell into three main groups: (1) meta-pragmatic emoji functions such as signaling friendliness, playfulness, or sarcasm (cf. Dresner and Herring 2010); (2) descriptions of the content of the message, rather than the function of the emoji; and (3) item-specific observations (e.g., word replacement, emoji misuse, evaluation, apology).

Of the 433 people who arrived at the end of the survey, approximately 25% responded to the open-ended question asking if they had additional comments about emoji use in social media. The results of a rough content analysis of those comments revealed eight basic categories. The frequencies of these categories are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Classification of comments in response to the question, “Do you have any other comments about emoji use in social media?”

Comment categories	#	%
I Love and Use Emoji (Like This)	28	27.5%
Emoji as a New Language	16	15.7%
Emoji are Annoying	14	13.7%
Ways Emoji Could be Better	14	13.7%
Comments on the Survey	9	8.8%
Emoji Rendering Problems	8	7.8%
Age Differences in Emoji Use	7	6.9%
Other Responses	6	5.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The comments were also revealing about respondents’ folk understandings of emoji meanings and use. Some respondents asserted that emoji always or mainly express emotions:

*Always used to express a mood. Emojis are used to express emotion, mood, and represent items. When you tag a person and put a loving emoji next to it, it is the feeling of those emoji that are connected to the person. Emojis are great for their purpose of expressing feelings.*

Other respondents focused on the tone modification function of emoji, e.g., *I think it helps convey tone, whereas plain text alone can make that difficult and Sometimes words can’t convey the proper tone; thats why emojis are so important.*

Still other comments seemed to acknowledge that emoji fulfill other pragmatic functions, e.g., *It’s an interesting way of conveying intent without words, and it’s interesting to see how a certain emoji can convey different meanings. (i.e., sarcastic use vs. genuine use).* Finally, a few respondents highlighted the importance of the wider context to emoji interpretation, e.g., *Like any other form of communication, context matters, and the age, educational and cultural background of the person using the emoji are significant to its interpretation.*

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Research questions revisited

The overarching research question in this study was: How do social media users interpret the pragmatic functions of emoji in their naturally-occurring discourse



contexts? Specifically, we first asked: Which emoji functions are chosen as interpretations most often, and for which emoji types? The most common function chosen by our survey respondents was overwhelmingly *tone modification*. At least 20% of respondents thought that the emoji was functioning as a *tone* modifier in every item, with very few exceptions. Thus *tone modification* appears to be the basic ‘meaning’ of emoji. Indeed, one could interpret almost every item in the survey as tone marking, and the message would still be interpretable. We might even go so far as to suggest, based on these results, that popular face-representing emoji add tone by default, and that the other functions are in addition to tone marking. This would capture the intuitions of the respondents who selected *multiple functions* and specified *tone* in addition to another function. *Virtual action* was the second most common overall function selected by the survey respondents, consistent with previous research on the use of emoticons and emoji to represent nonverbal behavior (e.g., Derks, Bos and von Grumbkow 2007; Novak et al. 2015), followed by *mention*, *softening*, and *reaction*. With the exception of *softening*, none of the options that we added to the original Herring and Dainas (2017) taxonomy of pragmatic functions were chosen as top functions for any survey item.

The pragmatic interpretations preferred by the respondents varied by emoji type, as shown in Figures 5–14. About 38% of the emoji types in the survey (big smile, grimace, heart, kiss, and smile) included items for which the top choice of pragmatic function was something other than *tone modification*. However, inter-respondent agreement rates were generally higher for emoji types that favored *tone* (e.g., “meh,” blush, crying, frown, heart eyes, tears of joy, tongue out, wink) (see Table 4). If inter-respondent agreement is taken as a measure of the ambiguity of an emoji, emoji types that mainly express *tone* tend to be less ambiguous than emoji that express other functions.

These findings correspond to some extent with the findings of studies of emoji semantic ambiguity. Emoji with high agreement rates for pragmatic function include the crying and tongue out faces, consistent with Miller et al.’s (2016) and Jaeger and Ares’ (2017) findings that these are some of the least ambiguous emoji semantically. The blush and grimace emoji, which we found to have low inter-respondent agreement, were similarly identified by Jaeger and Ares (2017) as especially ambiguous. However, we found the tears of joy emoji to be less ambiguous pragmatically than Jaeger and Ares (2017) found it to be ambiguous semantically (it marks *tone*, independent of how one interprets that tone). Moreover, the kiss emoji is pragmatically somewhat ambiguous (Is it performing a virtual action? Imbuing the text with a loving tone? Illustrating the word ‘kiss’ in the message?), whereas semantically it is unambiguous (Jaeger and Ares 2017). Interestingly, variations in rendering did not noticeably impact how the emoji in the survey were

interpreted, despite the fact that some individual emoji of each type appear quite distinct (see Table 1).

The previous paragraph partially answers our second research question, which asked: To what extent do users agree among themselves on emoji functions? The survey respondents agreed on their top interpretations at a rate higher than chance, although agreement varied according to emoji type, as noted above. The respondents agreed most on *tone modification* and least on *reaction* and *mention*. Most lack of agreement resulted from some respondents choosing *tone* as the default while other respondents chose less common functions. However, even those lower rates of agreement were higher than chance. Thus, although the survey respondents were probably unfamiliar with many of the pragmatic function options they were asked to discriminate among, they were able to achieve a significant level of agreement on their interpretations.

At the same time, overall agreement rates on functions did not exceed 60% (see Table 3). While differences in methods mean that this number cannot be compared directly with the numeric results of previous semantic studies of emoji ambiguity, this percentage shows that there is considerable overall variability in the interpretation of emoji functions, even when local discourse context is provided, leaving room for misconstrual and ambiguity.

Finally, in response to the third research question – To what extent do user interpretations of emoji functions agree with the researchers’ interpretations? – the respondents agreed with some of our interpretations for each of the five most commonly-selected functions: *tone modification*, *virtual action*, *softening*, *mention*, and *reaction*, even when we interpreted agreement strictly and considered only first choices, and when both their first and second choices were considered, respondents agreed with most of our interpretations (see Table 5). They agreed most with us on *tone* and least on *action* and *reaction*. These findings validate the distinctions proposed in the taxonomy of pragmatic functions (Herring and Dainas 2017), while also revealing that the distinctions are not all equally robust. *Tone* clearly outweighs the others and, as suggested above, has a special status.

## 6.2 Emoji ambiguity: Pros and cons

Previous research has found that individual emoji tend to be semantically ambiguous (e.g., Miller et al. 2016). Our findings show that emoji tend to be pragmatically ambiguous, as well, and that some emoji are more functionally ambiguous than others. That said, it is unclear how much of an impediment misconstrued emoji pragmatics are to successful communication. The flexibility of emoji use could be an advantage, rather than a disadvantage, as suggested by Pohl, Domin and Rohs (2017). It allows users to be suggestive and to leave their meanings open to

interpretation, which might be desirable in some contexts. However, it could also be a disadvantage if the message sender believes that they have communicated clearly, but the recipient interprets the message in a different way.

Interlocutors may not realize that they have not understood a communication as it was intended. Even though we found mixed levels of agreement, the respondents reported generally high levels of confidence in their responses. Kruger et al. (2005) identified a tendency for people to be overconfident in their ability to communicate seriousness, sarcasm, anger, sadness, and humor over plain text email, as well as in their ability to understand what was intended. Because of this overconfidence, interlocutors may not realize that they have misunderstood, and communication may suffer as a result. However, this problem is not limited to emoji; it also occurs in spoken communication (Gumperz and Tannen 1979).

### 6.3 The role of discourse context

Context plays an important role in discourse understanding. Our findings underscore the importance of the local discourse context in determining emoji meanings. This context matters more than the rendering of the emoji, as illustrated by the heart emoji items in the survey (which render the same but occur in different contexts and have different interpretations). Context also sometimes counts for more than emoji semantics, as illustrated in Examples 1–3, where the semantics of the emoji in isolation is marginally or not at all relevant to the intended meaning of the emoji in the messages. This is not to imply that emoji semantics plays no role in the interpretation of pragmatic functions. In the case of *tone marking*, for example, the actual tone conveyed (e.g., positive, loving, teasing, playful, disgruntled) is usually cued by the sentiment of the emoji as well as the context. However, the semantic meaning of an emoji alone is often insufficient to allow a recipient to interpret the intended meaning (the illocutionary force) of an emoji-containing message.

Earlier, we suggested that the context of a tweet in previous studies may have been insufficient to determine emoji meaning. The context we provided was richer. Although the Facebook messages themselves were sometimes brief, we included prior context, as well as user IDs that preserved gender and ethnicity information. Even so, our emoji items had varying levels of contextual information, and the amount of available context appears to affect the interpretability of the emoji. For example, the heart and grimace emoji items tended to have limited context and correspondingly lower rates of agreement on their functional interpretation.

## 6.4 The status of emoji as a language

Meaning in language resides not just in the semantics of lexical items but also in the pragmatics of their use. This study reveals emergent patterning for emoji at the level of pragmatics, a level not previously considered in the debates about emoji as language. Our findings strongly suggest that rather than simply expressing emotion, *tone modification* is the basic function of emoji.

Emoji that function as *tone* modifiers, along with *action* and *reaction* emoji, could conceivably be categorized as paralinguage, features that accompany verbal language that “contribute to communication but are not generally considered to be part of the language system.”<sup>18</sup> Paralinguage includes facial expressions and gestures. Many emoji are faces, and some emoticons and emoji reportedly function like gestures (Liebman and Gergle 2016; Na’aman, Provenza and Montoya 2017; Gawne and McCulloch 2019).

However, some emoji functions in the taxonomy used in this study do not clearly fit the characterization of paralinguage (e.g., mention, decoration, some narrative sequences), suggesting that while emoji can fulfill paralinguistic functions, their pragmatic range is more expansive. Moreover, emoji are technically text (Pohl, Domin and Rohs 2017). Unlike paralinguage, they are written (typed); there are a finite number of them; and they can substitute for words and punctuation (Albert 2015). Like punctuation, they are illocutionary force markers (cf. Dresner and Herring 2010). As such, emoji must be considered to be part of online language at the pragmatic level.

This conclusion does not mean that emoji constitute a stand-alone language system. Evidence from the literature indicates that emoji meanings and structural patternings, at least in English-language contexts, are not (yet) conventionalized (e.g., Tatman 2016). Currently their usage is flexible; their intended meanings can be open ended and imprecise, as suggested by the variation in our survey responses. An exception is *tone* marking, which appears to have become the conventional (default) interpretation of emoji use.

## 7. Conclusions

The Understanding Emoji Survey asked survey respondents to apply a taxonomy of pragmatic functions to examples of emoji use in their local discourse contexts. Lay users were able to assign pragmatic functions to emoji, despite not having seen the categories of the taxonomy before, legitimizing the taxonomy but also revealing

18. Source: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/paralinguage>

the privileged status of *tone modification* as the default interpretation of emoji-in-use. It follows, therefore, that researchers interested in how social media users understand emoji should not restrict their study to emoji semantics but should also consider the pragmatic functions that motivate their use. Also important is the finding that emoji are not functionally interchangeable: Different emoji types specialize to some extent for specific functions. This exploratory study has provided preliminary insights into the functional specialization of 13 popular emoji.

The study also contributes to emoji research methodologically. Miller and her colleagues used surveys effectively to collect evidence of how people understand emoji semantics. Our study showed that surveys can also be used to assess lay user understandings of the pragmatic functions of emoji-in-use. Further refinement of the survey method could lead to more systematic study of which emoji are typically used for which specific functions, as well as teasing out the contributions to overall meaning of the semantics versus the pragmatic functions of emoji.

A limitation of this study is that the context provided for the Facebook messages was local discourse context only. A thorough study of emoji pragmatics requires consideration not just of the local discourse context,<sup>19</sup> but also of situational, interpersonal, and cultural contexts. Cultural aspects of emoji interpretation have received some attention; for example, Barbieri, Espinosa-Anke and Saggion (2016) found that the same emoji were interpreted differently by social media users in two Spanish cities, which the authors suggested was due to cultural differences. Further studies of emoji interpretation should investigate differences in pragmatic functions across cultures. Even so, as Cramer, de Juan and Tetreault (2016) note, it may not be possible to interpret some emoji usage correctly without understanding the sender's intention due to idiosyncrasy (e.g., in-jokes, private language). A possible way around this is to supplement survey and experimental research with focus groups and interviews, ideally with the individuals who used the emoji.

An important variable is respondent age. A number of respondents commented at the end of our survey that there are generational differences in emoji usage and understanding. Indeed, Herring and Dainas (2018) found that the responses of the 'other' gender, which comprised the youngest group of respondents, differed from those of the male and female respondents, who were somewhat older on average. More recently, Herring and Dainas (2020) analyzed the survey results based on respondents' self-reported age and found systematic generational differences in some emoji interpretations. This is an area in need of further investigation.

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19. Including the context of the thread. In this study, because of the prompt-focused nature of the Facebook threads, we typically judged the other comments to be irrelevant to the interpretation of a given emoji-containing comment.

In other future research, the pragmatic function taxonomy – expanded to include *softening* – could be used to classify emoji meanings on other social media platforms, in order to support and generalize from the present findings. Manual analysis could be supplemented by automated analysis based on the taxonomy to allow larger amounts of data to be analyzed. Researchers should also investigate the private usage of emoji in texting and chat, as public comment threads may not be representative of other kinds of message exchanges.

Finally, the taxonomy could be applied to study how social media users understand other types of graphicons-in-use. Emoji are currently the most popular graphicon type, but on some platforms stickers, GIFs, and image macros are prominent features of computer-mediated communication (Herring 2018). Their interpretations by lay social media users have yet to be explored.

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# Speech acts and the dissemination of knowledge in social networks

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This paper analyzes how social network users engaged in discussions under a public post contribute to knowledge dissemination through their verbal behavior in the light of an Austin-based speech-act theoretical framework. We first argue that such a framework can be applied not only to face-to-face interaction, but also to internet-mediated communication, since it identifies kinds of illocutionary acts on the basis of recognizable procedure patterns which can be made manifest through different communication channels. We then examine to what extent the performance of different kinds of illocutionary acts contributes to knowledge dissemination through the achievement of their characteristic effects or other aspects of their procedure patterns. For each of four main classes of illocutionary acts, we discuss examples from comments on Facebook posts concerning health- and politics-related issues.

**Keywords:** knowledge dissemination, internet-mediated communication, social networks, speech acts, illocutionary acts, presupposition accommodation, John L. Austin

## 1. Introduction

The internet is fast becoming the most dominant global communication medium.<sup>1</sup> In particular, with the diffusion of Web 2.0 platforms,<sup>2</sup> there have been radical

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1. According to *Internet Live Stats*, as of 1 July 2016, there were approximately three and a half billion people using internet, defined as “individuals who can access the Internet at home, via any device type and connection,” which is nearly half of the world’s population; in 2006 there were only one and a half billion users (Internet-released data; available at [www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/](http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/); accessed 22 March 2018).

2. Web 2.0 is an expression coined by Darcy Di Nucci (1999) and then elaborated upon by Tim O’Reilly and his working group in 2004 (see O’Reilly 2007).

changes in the ways in which people exchange information (as well as opinions) and connect with each other. Indeed, the passage from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has determined the shift from a one-way communication to not only two-way but multi-way communication over the internet. A key aspect of Web 2.0 then is interactivity. Nowadays, online media platforms such as social networks, blogs, web-based communities, and video or photo sharing sites are the easiest way for people around the world to interact with each other and exchange and spread information.<sup>3</sup> Thanks to these platforms, individuals, companies and institutions can share every kind of input, be it textual, visual, and/or audio, more quickly and cheaply, when compared to traditional media, and can interact with their target audience quite easily. While the World Wide Web is rightly seen as a huge source of information, social media platforms make possible the selective dissemination of information by content producers (whether individuals, companies or institutions) and the goal-oriented selection of information by their users. Moreover, the interactive nature of these platforms offers users the opportunity to give and receive feedback and therefore make corrections and objections or provide explanations and clarifications. Thus, the environment constituted by these platforms has great potentialities for knowledge dissemination. However, alongside with (pretty) reliable content producers, such as online editions of reputable newspapers, press agencies, scientific journals etc., there is a huge number of unofficial or unknown content producers that, trying to mimic the former, spread biased or false contents as well as hoaxes and rumours. The question then arises of how to distinguish between actual expressions of knowledge, mere opinions, misinformed contributions, and fake news or hoaxes. As we shall see, reference to conditions and effects related to the performance of speech acts, although primarily studied in pragmatics in the context of face-to-face interaction, can help understand the mechanisms underlying the dissemination of content and its (often uncritical) acceptance on the Web.

In this paper, we shall be focusing on how social network users contribute through their verbal behavior, directly or indirectly, to the dissemination of knowledge. From a speech-act perspective, the dissemination of knowledge cannot be reduced to mere transmission of information, but involves (among other things) the recognition and attribution to the participants of such states as rights, obligations, entitlements, or legitimate expectations. As the descriptive tools to account for this, we shall be using an Austin-based speech-act theoretical framework, which identifies kinds of illocutionary acts on the basis of recognizable procedure

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3. According to *Digital in 2018*, a report published by the company *We Are Social*, as of January 2018, there were approximately three billion two hundred million active social media users (Internet-released data; available at <https://www.slideshare.net/wearesocial/digital-in-2018-global-overview-86860338>; accessed 22 March 2018).

patterns, and defines illocutionary acts as bringing about “conventional” effects, that is, effects that cannot be produced without some kind of agreement (overt or tacit) between the relevant participants in a conversation.<sup>4</sup> So, we will analyze the ways in which and the extent to which the performance of illocutionary acts of various kinds by social network users commenting on public posts contributes to disseminating knowledge as well as to related activities such as raising unwarranted claims to knowledge or deciding what information is worth disseminating as knowledge (obviously enough, although the interactional dynamics at work may well be the same, actual dissemination of knowledge occurs only insofar as the disseminated content amounts to genuine knowledge). In our analyses, we shall rely on a corpus consisting of comments on Facebook posts concerning issues about health and politics, from which we shall draw and discuss examples.<sup>5</sup>

Up to now, only a few studies have used speech act theory or related taxonomies to analyze communication in social networks because the conceptual tools provided by speech act theory are traditionally regarded as being designed principally for the analysis of face-to-face interaction.<sup>6</sup> However, as will become clear in what follows (or at least so we hope), conceptual tools originally developed to analyze oral communication in face-to-face interaction such as the preparatory conditions of speech acts and the effects of their performance, can be used also to

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4. We maintain that speech act theory, understood in the way outlined above, enables the analyst to describe the interactional dynamics with particular focus on the aspects of the interactional relationship that concern the participants’ rights, obligations and other states depending on intersubjective recognition, including the possession of socially recognized knowledge. We maintain, moreover, that our use of speech act theory can be combined without inconsistency with contributions from other pragmatic approaches focusing, for example, on conversational cooperation and implicit meaning, or the organization of conversational sequences, or the tracing of different “voices” and participation roles.

5. Some of these examples have been already discussed in another paper exploring the role of credibility, be it actual or discursively established, in the dissemination of knowledge in social networks (Labinaz and Sbisà 2017).

6. While research on computer-mediated communication has a long history (e.g., a particularly productive strand of research in this field has focused on linguistic forms and discourse patterns of email communication), it is only with the emergence of Web 2.0 platforms that scholars in pragmatics and related fields have increasingly focused their attention on the enormous amount of data that the internet has made available for their research purposes. In particular, relying on various methodological techniques and conceptual frameworks, they have examined, among other things, how social network users participate, relate and negotiate activities and identities on social media platforms (see for example, Herring 2004; Graham 2007, 2016; Yus 2011, 2014; Herring and Androutsopoulos 2015). However, there have been very few attempts to analyze the communicative dynamics taking place on these platforms from a speech act theoretical perspective (see Dresner and Herring 2010; Carr et al. 2012; Simpson 2017).

clarify the communicative dynamics among social network users and shed light on how they deal with knowledge-related matters.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 focuses on Facebook as an interactional environment in which people perform different kinds of speech acts contributing to the dissemination of knowledge to varying extents and in different ways, and considers the role played in knowledge dissemination by two of Facebook's main features, namely liking and sharing. In Section 3, we argue that an Austin-based speech-act theoretical framework can be applied to internet-mediated communication as well as face-to-face interaction, and expound our model of illocutionary act performance, which can be adapted to account for communication through different channels. In Section 4, we look at Austin's classes of illocutionary acts and examine four of them as to their characteristic procedural steps, as well as their possible knowledge-disseminating effects. For each class, we give some examples gathered from comments appearing under two posts on the Facebook page of *La Repubblica*, which is one of the most popular daily newspapers in Italy.<sup>7</sup> We conclude with Section 5, which discusses and compares the various ways in which and extents to which speech acts belonging to the classes considered contribute to the dissemination of knowledge and related phenomena in social networks.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Social networks and speech acts

Social networks are online services, platforms or sites where users can communicate with each other in different ways: each social network has its own specific features. For example, Twitter is mainly used to communicate by means of short messages (see Gruber, this volume), while Flickr and Instagram are used for sharing elaborate photos and graphics, and so on. As is probably well-known, Facebook is

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7. This Facebook page was chosen for two main reasons: (i) it is freely accessible to all Facebook users so that anyone can comment on its posts without having to click the "like" button in advance (in fact, on most Facebook pages, clicking the "like" button is a default condition for being able to comment); (ii) given the high number of "likes" and of commentators, the discussions about the posts of *La Repubblica*'s Facebook page can be regarded as highly representative of the communicative dynamics taking place in social network discussions under public posts, at least as far as Italian-speaking users are concerned.

8. Throughout the paper, whenever the gender of speakers, or authors, addressees and targets of comments is unknown, the pronoun "she" (plus "her," "hers" and "herself") will be used to refer to the speaker or the author of a comment and "he" (plus "him," "his" and "himself") to refer to the addressee or the target of a comment. When referring in general to social network users reading a comment, we will always use the plural form "the readers."

presently the most widely used social network (see Yus, this volume, for an analysis of Facebook check-ins).<sup>9</sup> Its popularity and success derive from the fact that it offers its members a huge number of different opportunities to interact with each other. Among other things, its users can create a personal profile, as well as pages dedicated to public figures, business organizations or discussion groups; they can add other users to their list of friends, post verbal messages containing whatever they like, but also images, videos and so on, make comments on their own or other users' posts, reply to other users' posts and comments either by making new comments or by using the function "reply," and also like and/or share posts and/or comments they agree with or are interested in.

Here, we will not be dealing with what people do on the walls of their personal profiles, but with their comments and reactions on public posts. Indeed, it is in these posts that the interactional nature of Facebook can be most fully appreciated: when commenting on public posts, Facebook users can start a discussion (and hence an interaction) with other users about any topic they want. Unlike face-to-face verbal interactions, which are characterized by the co-presence of the interlocutors and their alternated, sequential turn-taking, under a Facebook public post, several discussions may develop side by side and appear on the screen as intertwined, since each comment, by making a point of its own, may prompt a series of responses, which do not need to be posted one immediately after the other.<sup>10</sup> As a consequence, the flow of comments and responses under public posts is often characterized by a lack of thematic cohesion and progression. This makes it difficult for an occasional reader to get an overall sense of how the discussion develops. Be this as it may, what matters here is that comments and replies under a post may feature speech acts of various illocutionary forces, such as assertions, forecasts, reports, explanations, arguments (in favor or against), questions, assessments, endorsements, criticisms, advice, praises, objections, challenges, insults etc. These speech acts, which are recognizable from their linguistic indicators and their roles in the discursive context, play different roles as regards the expression and transmission of knowledge. Some of them (such as asserting) aim to provide

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9. According to the the report *Digital in 2018*, the total number of monthly active Facebook users amounts to about two billion two hundred million people (Internet-released data; available at: <https://www.slideshare.net/wearesocial/digital-in-2018-global-overview-86860338>; accessed 22 March 2018).

10. This participation structure is not only characteristic of Facebook interaction, but also of other social media platforms such as YouTube. According to Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2018: 136), what characterizes interactions taking place on these platforms in particular is their polylogical nature, encompassing both instances of one-to-many interaction and intergroup discussion (see also Bou-Franch, Lorenzo-Dus and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2012).

knowledge of facts. Others are used to support or question decisions, but also claims to knowledge (such as arguing for or against and challenging), make decisions for or against some line of conduct or opinion (such as endorsing), or express one's attitudes, feelings or perspectives.

At the time of our study, Facebook provided only two options for non-verbally reacting to a post, namely the "like" and "share" buttons.<sup>11</sup> Both buttons enable its users to agree with or endorse a certain content, thereby contributing to its dissemination. On the one hand, Facebook users can click the "like" button to show that they like and therefore agree with the content of a post, comment or reply: the numbers of likes on a certain post, comment or reply can be seen as an expression of how popular their contents are. On the other, Facebook users can click the "share" button to approve the content of a certain post by making it appear on their own wall, thereby directly contributing to its dissemination.<sup>12</sup> However, there is a significant difference between liking and sharing, and performing a speech act. Although both can be considered as actions, liking and sharing are simple gestures with pre-determined effect which do not require the satisfaction of pre-conditions (apart from being connected to Facebook as a user, all you have to do is click the right button) while as we shall see in the next section, a given speech act or more precisely the illocutionary act it comprises requires some kind of overt or tacit agreement among the relevant participants in order for its performance to be successful. We shall return to the "share" and "like" functions in Section 4.3, when we will consider the differences between them and the act of espousal conceived as a commissive illocutionary act. We will now present the Austin-based speech act theoretical framework which we will use in our analyses.

### 3. An Austin-based speech act theoretical framework

The same piece of information can be conveyed in slightly different ways, which amount to performing different speech acts, such as assertions, claims, conjectures, guesses, or conclusions. For example, when making an assertion, a speaker is making a claim to knowledge: the assertion presents its content as constituting

11. In 2016, Facebook has made available, in addition to the standard "like" button, five other possible reactions to a post: "love," "haha," "wow," "sad" and "angry." In our analysis, we will not refer to these reactions because the materials, which were collected in 2015, do not include them.

12. The fact of sharing a content, be it a text, an image or a video, does not always contribute to disseminating its content as constitutive of knowledge: indeed, if whoever shares it accompanies it with a critical or questioning comment, other users will have every reason to be wary of that content and/or its source.

knowledge, while a conjecture does not present its content as justified in a way appropriate for knowledge. Now, generally speaking, we can characterize differences between performing one speech act as opposed to another along two main lines. On the one hand, not everyone is entitled to perform any speech act whatsoever, or at least not in any circumstance. On the other, those people who are acknowledged as entitled to perform certain speech acts undertake, in so doing, certain specific obligations. One could argue, then, that the difference it makes to perform one speech act instead of another can be accounted for in terms of what a speaker and her audience can do (have a right, are entitled or are allowed to do) and what they turn out to be committed or obliged to as a result. More generally, it can be said that all speech acts involve rights and obligations (or similar states) (Sbisà 1984, 1989). Depending on the kind of speech act that has been performed, the speaker and her audience will find themselves in a certain situation as regards what they can or should do, which, following Sbisà (1984, 1989), we will refer to by the more general expression “deontic states.” In this perspective, communication is not mere transmission of information, but consists of ways of acting by which the speaker and her audience recognize, attribute to, or remove from each other deontic states. So, transmission of information is embedded in a complex dynamics, within which people, while presenting themselves and recognizing each other as possessing certain deontic states, also raise, accept or reject claims to knowledge.

Communicative situations such as those occurring on online media platforms, more specifically under public posts, where people usually do not know each other and where it is often unclear who is talking to whom, may be thought to make the development of such dynamics more difficult to follow than in situations allowing for face-to-face interaction. Here too, however, linguistic illocutionary indicators do their job and allow users to realize what deontic states are to be attributed to what participants (be they known or anonymous and only identified by their nicknames). The main difference from face-to-face interaction is that in internet-mediated communication, and in discussions on social networks in particular, the uttering of a sentence to perform a certain speech act does not consist in issuing a vocal utterance, but in typing the sentence in a certain box (for example, on Facebook, there is a white box that says “Write a comment,” where comments on a post have to be typed). All those gestural, proxemic, paralinguistic, and prosodic indicators which accompany the oral utterance of a certain sentence and help us understand what the speaker is doing in issuing it, are missing. Social network users have at their disposal, in order to make up for this lack of non-verbal indicator, such devices as acronyms (for example, “LOL” means “laughing out loud”),



uppercase letters (which is interpreted as “shouting”), and emoticons/emoji (e.g., “😊” represents a smile).<sup>13</sup>

In investigating whether or how a certain communicative event taking place on a social network can give rise to knowledge-disseminating effects, we shall start by focusing on the speech acts it comprises and especially on the one hand on the felicity conditions of the illocutionary forces they feature, on the other, on how they affect the relationship between their authors and their audience. At this point, J. L. Austin’s conception of the illocutionary act and its effects may well come in handy (see Austin 1975). As suggested by him, and argued for more recently by Sbisà (2007, 2009), we can conceive of all illocutionary acts as having conventional effects: in particular, every type of illocutionary act is associated with a socially accepted procedure, which can be conceived as a script or a pattern comprising a certain kind of linguistic utterance and designed to produce a characteristic conventional effect (see Sbisà 2009, 2018; Witek 2015).<sup>14</sup> Together with the effect to be achieved by the illocutionary act, the procedure also establishes the features of the initial state to which the act applies (amounting to its preparatory conditions, such as the speaker’s being in the appropriate position or having a certain capacity or competence, and the appropriate circumstances of its execution) and the steps to be carried out in order to be recognized as performing it (essentially, in the cases of interest for us, using a linguistic form that makes the act recognizable). Conventional effects are such insofar as they come into being in virtue of intersubjective (and therefore social) agreement, which is made possible by the securing of uptake: in other words, the speaker must execute the procedure for performing a certain illocutionary act correctly and completely enough to be understood as having executed it.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, the successful execution of a procedure re-

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13. Dresner and Herring (2010: 255) have argued that “[...] in many cases emoticons are used not as signs of emotion, but rather as indications of the illocutionary force of the textual utterances that they accompany.” According to them, in these cases the use of emoticons usually has a mitigating function, downgrading the force of the speech act being performed. For example, the presence of a winking icon may be taken to downgrade a request to a less face-threatening speech act, while that of a smile emoji may downgrade a strong complaint to a plain assertion (see Dresner and Herring 2010: 255–259).

14. We will not discuss here in what sense this procedure is to be regarded as conventional (on this question see Strawson 1964; Millikan 2005; Sbisà 2007; Witek 2013).

15. This means that an act cannot take effect unless uptake is secured. Note that actual uptake is a sufficient (but not necessary) condition for uptake to be secured. Indeed, uptake can be said to be secured not only when the addressee recognizes the act the speaker purports to perform in uttering a certain sentence, but also when the speaker has done everything possible to get the addressee to understand the force of her utterance (Sbisà 2009).

quires both the satisfaction of the preparatory conditions for the act's performance and a linguistic form suitable for making it clear what procedure is being invoked. On the other, due to the general tendency to accept speech acts at their face value in default conditions, that is, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, an addressee will not usually consciously check whether the preparatory conditions are satisfied, so that the use of a suitable linguistic form will suffice to let the illocutionary act take effect. What occurs in these cases is usually called "accommodation" (Lewis 1979): the satisfaction of the preparatory conditions is tacitly accepted or "accommodated" by the audience. Note that the preparatory conditions for executing a procedure often entail the speaker and her audience possessing specific deontic states, for example of entitlement or authority. In this case, the accommodation of preparatory conditions does not merely introduce into the context new beliefs about what is the case in the world, but amounts to the attribution of the required deontic states to speaker and audience. Of course, since (as said above) the illocutionary effect is achieved thanks to the intersubjective agreement between the speaker and her audience, it may be suspended or withdrawn if it is discovered that one of the preparatory conditions was in fact not satisfied.

In face-to-face interaction, even the partial execution of a procedure pattern (for example, the utterance of a declarative sentence) may be understood by the audience as the performance of an illocutionary act (for example, asserting), especially if the speaker is already familiar to the audience and known to meet the requirements for that performance (e.g., to be competent on the assertion's subject matter). When social network users interact under a public post, instead, they are usually foreign to one another or even completely unknown, so that each ignores who will read her comment and, conversely, realizes that she herself will turn out to be unknown or unfamiliar to her audience. Not by chance, we have noted that when the latter situation is the case, users display a tendency to make explicit assurance to the readers as regards their entitlement to perform the illocutionary act whose procedure they are invoking.

Summing up, in the perspective we are adopting, the procedures for performing illocutionary acts of different kinds require different initial states to be the case, which include the speaker and her audience possessing specific deontic states, and are designed to produce different conventional effects, involving the assignment or withdrawal of specific deontic states. If we are to understand whether and how illocutionary acts of different types can contribute to the dissemination of knowledge in social networks, we have to examine their characteristic procedural steps as well as their characteristic effects.

#### 4. Illocutionary act types and their contributions to the dissemination of knowledge

In examining kinds of illocutionary acts and their respective contribution in terms of knowledge dissemination, we shall be relying on Austin's classification of illocutionary acts (see Austin 1975: 150–163), as partially revised by Marina Sbisà (1984, 1989).<sup>16</sup> As arbitrary as it may seem,<sup>17</sup> this classification has the great advantage of being flexible enough to be applied not only to the core (or prototypical) acts belonging to each class, but also to non-prototypical ones, that is, those illocutionary acts that can be assimilated, under different respects, to prototypical members of more than one class and that are so frequent in our everyday communicative interactions, be they face-to-face or internet-mediated. In fact, as Sbisà (1984) has pointed out, Austin's goal was not to provide a clear-cut theoretical classification of illocutionary acts, but rather to describe fuzzy and partially overlapping sets of illocutionary act types, each of which has some prototypical cases at its core (see Austin 1975: 150–151). In order to provide a classification of this kind, Austin did not focus on the means for performing illocutionary acts of different types, particularly the standard linguistic forms of the sentences to be uttered, but grouped illocutionary act types together according to similarities in their overall procedure patterns, including initial conditions (such as the required speaker's authority or competence) and/or their characteristic effects (such as the speaker's commitment or the addressee's obligation). It should also be pointed out that, although Austin elaborated his classes by organizing into (fuzzy) sets those illocutionary act types that are identified by natural language illocutionary verbs, the characterizations of his classes can also be used as descriptive tools to account for those occurrences of illocutionary acts that do not fit exactly any illocutionary verb available in the natural language in which the conversation occurs (Sbisà 2001).

Austin distinguishes five classes: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behavitives, and expositives (Austin 1975: 151). Reference to these classes enables us to account for a wide range of communicative and relational activities, and their effects on the deontic states of speaker and audience. As should become clear in what follows, it also yields rich descriptive resources to account for the ways in which the performance of illocutionary acts of various kinds contributes to the dissemination of knowledge.

16. This revised version of Austin's classification of illocutionary acts has already been used by Sbisà (1987, 1989, 1990, 2006) to analyze different cases of face-to-face interaction.

17. Alternative speech act classifications have been proposed by, among others, Searle (1969, 1975), Bach and Harnish (1979), Searle and Vanderveken (1985), and Alston (2000).

In the next sub-sections, we present the characteristic procedural steps and typical effects of four of Austin's classes along with their possible contribution in terms of knowledge dissemination. We leave aside the class of expositives, that is, those illocutionary acts that contribute to the organization and clarification of discourse (Austin 1975: 152, 160–162), because this class cuts across the other four (so that each illocutionary act that one may want to characterize as expositive can also be collocated in one or other of the other four classes) (Austin 1975: 152, 161–162; Sbisà 1984: 126–130; cf. also Searle 1975: 352–353). For each of the four classes of verdictives, exercitives, commissives, and behabitives, we then discuss some examples taken from comments appearing under two posts on the Facebook page of *La Repubblica*, as explained above in the Introduction to this paper. These examples are meant to illustrate the kinds of utterances that can be found in a discussion under a public post on a social network, whose communicative dynamics affects matters of knowledge and knowledge dissemination.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4.1 Verdictives

Verdictives can be characterized as acts of judgment based upon evidence or reasons, which may be official or unofficial, final or provisional, and may concern facts or values (Austin 1975: 152). They have a key role in the dissemination of knowledge. Indeed, the characteristic effect of verdictives might reasonably be described as producing and transferring knowledge (Sbisà 1984: 104–105; 2020). To perform such an ordinary verdictive concerning facts as a plain assertion, the speaker has to appear as possessing the appropriate competence to make it, and therefore as a potentially reliable informant about its topic. This means that in making an assertion, its content is presented as the result of an epistemically reliable judgment so that, unless special conditions obtain, the addressee will get knowledge about whatever subject matter that assertion is about. The knowledge acquired by the addressee is thus grounded in the speaker's act of judgment and behind that, in her epistemic position, which can be specified in terms of publicly recognizable possession of cognitive abilities and criteria of judgment about the subject matter at issue. It should be pointed out that verdictives not only commit the speaker to consistency, that is, to her subsequent behavior being consistent

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18. The example sources are listed in the Appendix. Keenly aware of the issues and concerns related to privacy that this kind of analysis can give rise to, we have removed any personal information regarding the Facebook users engaged in the discussions we have analyzed, including their names, surnames, and nicknames. Accordingly, our analysis will deal with utterances issued by enunciators having certain characteristics and qualifications, without being recognizable as specific individuals.

with the verdictive made, but also to giving evidence or reasons in defense of it, if appropriately challenged, and entitle the addressee to issue further, related verdictives on the basis of the received one, or to use its content (in whole or in part) as a reason for action. So, in terms of deontic states, the speaker incurs in two commitments that can be specified as “oughts” (that is, the obligations to be consistent with her verdictive and to give evidence or reasons in support of it if requested to do so), while the addressee inherits an entitlement that is describable as a “can” (that is, getting knowledge about whatever subject matter the verdictive made is about, the addressee can use it as the content of further, related verdictives or as a reason for action).

It is to be noted that the knowledge referred to here as produced and disseminated by verdictive illocutionary acts depends on intersubjective (or social) agreement, thereby amounting to what is recognized as knowledge in a certain situation. It should be borne in mind, then, that any piece of knowledge produced in using verdictives is defeasible in the light of new information, that is, if new information inconsistent with it is made available and found reliable, ceases to be recognized as knowledge. What characterizes knowledge in its relationship to verdictives is at any rate, that its content is presented as the result of a competent judgment based on criteria comprising evidence or reasons. So, the audience does not merely acquire information about how things are, but gets also acquainted with the way in which the speaker was led to deem things to be so. The availability of the criteria leading to the judgment that things are so plays an especially important role in enabling the transfer from speaker to audience of the competence to give judgments on the very same or on similar topics. It could also be claimed that knowledge produced by verdictives, because of its association with evidence or reasons, also includes the resources for having its own correctness tested and therefore for eventually being proven to be genuine or discarded as merely alleged.

Think now of an interactional situation such as a discussion under a public post. When a social network user makes a comment comprising a declarative sentence, whether with a factual or evaluative predicate, she can be taken as attempting to perform a verdictive. Indeed, the linguistic form normally employed by a speaker in order to make the illocutionary act she purports to perform recognizable as a verdictive is (at least, in informal or unofficial situations) the plain indicative mood, associated with the plain, non-modalized declarative sentence form. But the use of an appropriate linguistic form is not enough. In order for the speaker to be successfully recognized as performing a verdictive, she must also have an intersubjectively ratified entitlement to make it, that is, she must be regarded as having access to the elements required to make her claim a competent judgment on the relevant subject matter. However, due to the general tendency to accept speech acts at their face value in default conditions, the speaker may be also

recognized as acting on the basis of some kind of reliable cognitive competence (and so as being capable of taking responsibility for the correctness of her claim) by accommodation on the part of the audience, who thereby let the verdictive take its effect. For example, if a Facebook user writes one of the following sentences

- (1) [Vac] [...] *I vaccini sono veleni e molti bambini si ammalano, le multinazionali farmaceutiche creano malattie per poi vendere vaccini. [...]*  
(Like 7 – October 17 at 6:58pm)  
'[...] Vaccines **are** poisons and many children **get ill** – the multinational drug companies **create** illnesses in order to then sell vaccines. [...]
- (2) [Gre] [...] *la Grecia svaluterà la sua Dracma del 40–50% ed i risparmi dei greci (ovviamente solo quelli delle classi più deboli che non si possono permettere di portare i soldi all'estero...) verranno bruciati sull'altare dell'orgoglio nazionale [...]*  
(Like 4 – June 28 at 7:52am)  
'[...] Greece **will devalue** the drachma by 40–50%, and the savings of the Greek people (obviously only those of the more vulnerable classes who can't afford to move their money abroad...) **will be sacrificed** on the altar of national pride [...]

anyone reading it may believe that the author is entitled to make competent judgments about the effects of vaccines, children's health, and the commercial strategies of multinational drug companies, or to predict the next moves by the Greek government and their consequences. By taking this to be the case, readers take the content of the verdictive as constituting knowledge, not only for the commentator but for them as well.

Since in situations involving communication with unknown people such as those taking place under a public post it is usually unclear whether a participant attempting to perform a verdictive is actually entitled to do so, the readers of a comment can always legitimately challenge the purported verdictive by asking for the author's grounds for it, thereby focusing on the commitment one incurs when making a verdictive:

- (3) [Vac] G., *quello che hai detto è falso. Porta le prove se vuoi dimostrare di avere ragione.*  
(Like 0 – October 17 at 8:34pm)  
'G., what you said is false. **Supply the evidence** if you want to prove you are right.'

Similarly, someone challenging a comment that comprises a verdictive may insinuate that the author of that comment does not have adequate evidence or reasons in support of her claim:

- (4) [Gre] *No, M. Le cose non stanno così e mi meraviglio pure come mai possa dire una tale cosa. Non si è favorevoli alla dracma in alcunissimo modo [...]*  
 (Like 6 – June 28 at 6:58am)  
 ‘No, M. It is not the case that things are so and moreover **I am surprised how you can say such a thing**. People are not in favor of the drachma in any way at all [...]

By pointing out that she is surprised how M. can say that people are in favor of the drachma, the author of (4) is suggesting that (at least in her view) there is no rational basis in support of M.’s claim. In doing so, she is raising doubts about M.’s overall reliability about the relevant subject matter, thereby blocking the effects of M.’s verdictive as to knowledge production and dissemination. In order to avoid attacks of this kind, or more generally, to prevent doubts on the part of the readers about their entitlement to perform a verdictive, those who intend to convey a piece of information as the content of a verdictive often declare their credentials or specify their criteria and the data they are acquainted with, such as in the following examples:

- (5) [Vac] *Sui danni o possibili danni da vaccino ESISTE UNA BIBLIOGRAFIA SCIENTIFICA AMPISSIMA invece, che non finisce mai, altroché!!!!!!!!!!!! cercatela e vedrete!!!!!!!!!!!!... Libri medico-scientifici.. ma quale internet!!!!!!!!!!!! ... Questa è solo una parte, andateveli a leggere [http://www.mednat.org/vaccini/bibliografia\\_vaccini.htm](http://www.mednat.org/vaccini/bibliografia_vaccini.htm)*  
 (Like 0 – October 17 at 8:27pm)  
 ‘Whereas as regards the harm or possible harm caused by vaccines, THERE IS AN EXTREMELY VAST SCIENTIFIC BIBLIOGRAPHY that goes on and on, make no mistake!!!!!!!!!!!! Go and look for it and you’ll see!!!!!!!!!!!!... Medical-scientific books... what do you mean, Internet!!!!!!!!!!!! ... This is just some of it, go and read [http://www.mednat.org/vaccini/bibliografia\\_vaccini.htm](http://www.mednat.org/vaccini/bibliografia_vaccini.htm)’
- (6) [Vac] [...] *ho tre nipoti nati SANI e DIVENTATI AUTISTICI successivamente alla inoculazione di vaccini e conosco, PERSONALMENTE, famiglie di bambini nelle stesse condizioni dei miei nipoti, quello che affermo non l’ho studiato nei libri, lo sto VIVENDO! [...]* (Like 0 – October 19 at 10:06pm)  
 ‘I have three grandchildren who were born HEALTHY and BECAME AUTISTIC after being inoculated with vaccines, and I PERSONALLY know whole families of children in the same situation as my grandchildren, I didn’t study what I’m saying in books, I am LIVING it!’

In (5), while presupposing that vaccines cause (or may cause) damage (by means of the expression *i danni o possibili danni da vaccino* ‘the harm or possible harm caused by vaccines’), the author of the comment grounds her own reliability on the (alleged) existence of a vast body of scientific literature (*UNA BIBLIOGRAFIA SCIENTIFICA AMPISSIMA* ‘AN EXTREMELY VAST

SCIENTIFIC BIBLIOGRAPHY'), consisting of printed volumes rather than on-line materials, information about which is provided by a website that, according to her, is clearly authoritative. Note also that the part of the comment referring to the vast scientific literature is typed in capital letters, which are equated on social media to speaking loudly or shouting (which is why netiquette usually discourages their use when posting messages online), and that there is also an extensive use of exclamation marks, displaying the commentator's annoyance at having to point out things that are so obvious for her. In (6), on the other hand, the author of the comment refers to her personal experience, contrasting it with the expertise that people may acquire by reading (scientific) books. In this case too, the commentator types the keywords of her comment in capital letters, emphasizing the change of health status in her grandchildren (*SANI e DIVENTATI AUTISTICI* 'HEALTHY and BECOME AUTISTIC') and her direct involvement with this issue (*PERSONALMENTE* 'PERSONALLY', *VIVENDO* 'LIVING it'). In both cases, the readers are faced with the commentators' attempts to ground the verdictives they have issued or intend to issue in other comments on some kind of competence they claim to be appropriate (acquaintance with allegedly scientific literature and with real life cases, respectively). This does not mean that the kind of competence referred to by a commentator will be assessed by her readers as sufficient to make the claims she might make on its grounds be taken as competent judgments. It might well be considered insufficient, perhaps because not really pertinent, so that the commentator's verdictives would turn out to be infelicitous.

## 4.2 Exercitives

Exercitives can be described as acts of exercising authority: a speaker can be taken as performing an exercitive only if she is also recognized as having some kind or degree of authority or authoritativeness. When an exercitive is successfully performed, the addressee is affected by one or more changes in the set of deontic states he possesses: he is put under the obligation either to do or not to do something, or is licensed or entitled either to do or not to do something. Many (though not all) exercitives do indeed have a directive goal. On the one hand, these characteristic features of exercitives bear no direct connection to matters of knowledge, so that acts of this class may seem irrelevant to our analysis. At the same time, however, the changes in deontic state that social network users may impose on other users by means of exercitives often presuppose that certain states of affairs in the world (independent of the speaker-audience relationship) are indeed the case. What matters to us here is primarily the effects in terms of knowledge dissemination that presupposition accommodation associated with the performance of exercitives can have. By presupposition accommodation, we mean (following



Lewis's terminology in his 1979) the default tendency, unless special conditions obtain, to take linguistically triggered presuppositions to be satisfied, similar to the by default tendency to take the preconditions of illocutionary acts as holding (see above, Section 3). Linguistic expressions that trigger presuppositions present a certain content as information that should be taken for granted and therefore invite its addition to the conversation's common ground (Sbisà 1999). Consider now the following example from the discussion under a post about vaccines:

- (7) [Vac] [...] *informati sugli effetti devastanti che ha recentemente avuto il vaccino hpv in Inghilterra e negli states..* [...] (Like 4 – October 17 at 6:31pm) '[...] go and find out about **the devastating effects that the HPV vaccine has recently had** in the UK and the States.. [...]'

(7) may reasonably count as an exercitive: more specifically, the author of the comment can be regarded as giving advice to one of the other social network users engaged in the discussion, or perhaps summoning or enjoining him, to search for information (*informati* 'go and find out') about the topic under discussion. Irrespective of whether they might have accepted or rejected that exercitive, those reading (7), who as social network users belong to its intended audience (although not as addressees or targets), are invited to share the presupposition triggered by the nominal phrase *gli effetti devastanti che ha avuto il vaccino hpv* 'the devastating effects that the HPV vaccine has had,' and they will do so unless they decide to challenge not merely what that phrase conveys, but also the felicity of the exercitive *informati* 'go and find out.' Indeed, the use of that nominal phrase in connection to *informati* presents as a known fact that the HPV vaccine has had devastating effects in the UK and the United States, thereby prompting readers to take for granted that such effects did occur. But if it is a known fact that the HPV vaccine has had devastating effects in the UK and in the United States, then anyone should regard herself as entitled to assert it, use it as a premiss for inferences, or use it as a reason for action, as happens with knowledge directly presented as such by a verdictive. Unlike verdictives, however, exercitives' knowledge-disseminating effects depend on presupposition accommodation and occur, therefore, without providing the addressees with evidence or reasons in support of taking the content presented as constituting knowledge. It could be said, therefore, that they can disseminate information contents taken to constitute knowledge, but can hardly increase the audience's competence to give judgments on the subject matter at issue. However, their disseminating effects are not easy to block: while the knowledge-producing effect of a verdictive is accompanied by the speaker's commitment to give evidence or reasons if requested to do so, and can therefore be the object of a serious, contentful discussion, questioning knowledge presented as such by presupposition accommodation requires making the presupposition

explicit (Sbisà 1999). This move is costly for the audience, since it involves, first of all, changing the focus on the speech act from its exercitive character and the deontic state changes it is designed to produce to what is presupposed by the speech act's content and, consequently, challenging the entitlement of the speaker to her exercitive. Only once the presupposition is made explicit can its content be dealt with as the content of an assertion and therefore challenged by means of objections or by asking for the speaker's grounds for taking it to be true.

When discussing on a public post, a commentator uses sometimes exercitives to convey by presupposition accommodation (alleged) knowledge about another commentator's credibility, intentions or mental situation, in order to support (or more often, delegitimize) him as a potentially reliable or benevolent informant, as happens in the following two examples:

- (8) [Vac] A.V.: *piantala di fare disinformazione* [« Mi piace »: 15]  
(Like 15 – October 17 at 6:55pm)  
'A.V.: **stop deliberately misinforming people**'
- (9) [Gre] [...] *passa dallo psichiatra ma con te è tempo perso*  
(Like 5 – June 28 at 7:32am)  
'[...] **have your head examined** but with you it would be a waste of time'

(8) can be reasonably regarded as a command or an admonishment. However, this exercitive implicitly conveys also a criticism leveled at the commentator at whom it is addressed (A.V.), namely, that he is misinforming people, by means of the change-of-state verb *piantala di* 'stop,' which is a presupposition trigger. If someone is admonished to stop deliberately misinforming people, this presupposes (at least, for those understanding the admonishment at its face value) that he has actually been misinforming people. This content is then conveyed as a known fact, not something that is merely believed by the author of the comment, thereby presenting it to the readers as something unquestionable, which they are also entitled to re-use.

Something similar, but not identical to the case just discussed happens in (9). Indeed, the author of (9) can reasonably be taken as advising or recommending the addressee to see a psychiatrist, which is not something one would advise or recommend someone to do without assuming that he may have some mental problem. The *ma* 'but' introducing the doubt that even a psychiatrist could do anything for that person indirectly confirms that this exercitive, as an advice or recommendation, involves (*prima facie* at least) the preparatory condition that it is in the interest, or within the needs, of the addressee to have his head examined: *ma con te è tempo perso* 'but with you it would be a waste of time' insinuates, in partial contrast, that the advice or recommendation might fail to be useful. At any

rate, as long as readers take the advice or recommendation at its face value, they also have to take for granted that the target of the comment probably has some mental problem. And this may be enough to prevent them from taking him as a potentially reliable informant.

### 4.3 Commissives

Commissives are those illocutionary acts that are characterized by the undertaking of a commitment on the part of the speaker. When an utterance is taken as a commissive, its speaker is recognized as committing herself to a certain action or a certain line of conduct (and therefore as undertaking an obligation to do so or to behave that way), while the addressee is granted the legitimate expectation that the speaker will actually do that action or behave that way. Unlike verdictives, commissives do not require that the speaker should be in any particular epistemic position: rather, they presuppose the speaker's capacity (in default circumstances) to perform what she is committing herself to. A speaker who is not recognized as endowed with that capacity cannot be taken to be in a position to issue the corresponding commissive felicitously.

In a discussion on a public post, commentators do not usually perform such core commissives as promises, but often resort to a weaker kind of commissive, corresponding to what Austin (1975: 152,158) calls "espousals": such acts as consenting, siding with, and favoring. Indeed, in debating with others under a public post, commentators may approve of a certain line of conduct or take sides in favor of some opinion or decision. The successful performance of espousals, unlike that of promises, does not commit the speaker to a particular action but to a more general orientation of conduct. However, like in promises, addressees are entitled to entertain certain expectations about the speaker's subsequent behavior: more specifically, to expect the speaker to behave consistently with the approved line of conduct or the opinion or decision in favor of which she took sides.<sup>19</sup>

Espousals play an important role in the dissemination of knowledge, irrespective of whether those performing them have any particular competence or expertise on the subject matter at hand. In fact, they do not contribute directly to the dissemination of knowledge, but aid the dissemination of informative content as knowledge by means of affiliative support. In approving of a certain line of conduct or taking sides in favor of some opinion or decision, one points out that there

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19. Obviously, commentators legitimize readers' expectations in an analogous way also when they disapprove of a certain line of conduct or take sides against some opinion or decision. But the effect supporting dissemination of informative content as knowledge is prominent in the case of endorsements.

is consensus on them and enhances their credibility. Owing to the fact that a certain opinion, decision, or line of conduct is so popular, people may feel entitled to join those who take it to be correct. This mechanism comes close to the one underlying the so-called *ad populum* fallacy, according to which, if many or most people believe a certain proposition, then it must be true.

As hinted at above, the speaker performing an espousal, such as siding with or approving of, need not present herself as competent about the subject at issue (obviously, she might be competent, but this is not needed to perform the espousal felicitously) and is not, therefore, committed to make her grounds available to the audience. Thus, what the audience comes to know in these cases is only that the commentator has approved of or taken sides in favor of something: as to the grounds supporting the opinion or decision so endorsed, the audience is usually deferred to the post or comment that is commented upon or replied to, in case it was a verdictive or, at any rate, specified in some way its author's evidence or reasons.

We would like to point out that clicking the “like” button cannot be regarded as a way of non-verbally performing an espousal, although it may seem so at first sight. On the one hand, it is true that liking contributes to the popularity of a certain comment or post, just like espousals. On the other, however, liking is a way of expressing a feeling, rather than a way of committing oneself to something. As a matter of fact, in the most recent development of the Facebook interface the “like” function has become a “reaction” which comprises five different options: “love,” “haha,” “wow,” “sad” and “angry.” This confirms that the “like” function is closer to behabitives than to commissives. At first sight, the “sharing” function too may seem closely connected to espousals. In sharing a post, one may indeed take sides in favor of its content. This is not always the case, however: people sharing a post do so for various reasons, only one of which is to approve of it or take sides in favor of it. In order to understand what a Facebook user is doing when sharing a post, we need to check whether she has appended a comment on the shared post: this comment might be positive, neutrally explanatory, or critical. Merely sharing a post, then, cannot be equated to espousing its content, but is integral to whatever illocutionary act is performed in commenting on it.<sup>20</sup>

Let us turn now to some examples of commissive illocutionary acts. In discussions on public posts, we often find occurrences of espousals, be they explicit or implicit, in the replies to comments containing strong claims about the topic

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20. Perhaps, only a sharing without comments can legitimately receive a default reading as an espousal (but see Marsili 2020), since by it the social network user contributes to making the shared post accessible to a larger number of users, thus showing that she finds it worth spreading around.

under discussion. In the discussion on the post concerning the Greek bailout referendum, a comment featuring a very strong claim is replied to by a series of comments comprising espousals. The comment is the following:

- (10) [Gre] *LA GRECIA DIVENTERÀ LA CINA DELL'EUROPA CON L'USCITA DALL'EURO.* (Like 27 – October 18 at 2:10pm)  
 'GREECE WILL BECOME THE CHINA OF EUROPE WHEN IT LEAVES THE EURO.'

Among the replies there are the following:

- (11) [Gre] *P.P. ha perfettamente ragione [...] Andate a scovare i dati ufficiali dell'economia italiana, degli investimenti e del cosiddetto debito pubblico (che non è un debito dei cittadini), confrontateli con quelli degli altri paesi prima dell'entrata nell'euro e poi, solo poi, permettetevi di dire che gente come P.P. sbaglia.* (Like 2 – June 28 at 8:40am)  
 'P.P. is perfectly right [...] Go and dig out the official figures on the Italian economy, on investments, and the so-called public debt (which is not the people's debt), compare them with those of the other countries before they became part of the Eurozone, and then, and only then, are you allowed to say that people like P.P. are wrong.'
- (12) [Gre] *Concordo con P.P..* (Like 0 – June 28 at 11:20am)  
 'I agree with P.P..'
- (13) [Gre] *Parole sante* (Like 0 – June 28 at 11:40am)  
 'Very wise [lit. holy] words'
- (14) [Gre] *Concordo con P.P., la Grecia fuori dall'Euro sarà la nuova Cina.* (Like 0 – June 28 at 12:29pm)  
 'I agree with P.P., Greece out of the Euro will be the new China.'

These replies are interspersed with others that are critical of the claim made in the initial comment (10). While it is obvious that some people may feel the need to challenge or criticize that claim, it is really interesting that there are also people who feel the need to express their agreement with it. They use expressions such as *ha perfettamente ragione* 'is perfectly right,' asserting that the author of (10) is right (and thereby making it manifest that the current commentator agrees with her), or even *Concordo con* 'I agree with' (an explicitly performative agreement formula). The expression *Parole sante* 'Very wise [lit. holy] words,' an exclamation phrase that can be considered as elliptic for *P.P. ha detto parole sante* 'P.P. has said holy words,' plays the same function as *ha perfettamente ragione* 'is perfectly right,' with a shade of hyperbole making it more emphatic. We do not know why these commentators approve of what the author of (10) has claimed (apart perhaps from the author of

(11), who lists a number of sources to be checked out by those who might want to challenge (10): but this too does not amount to explicitly providing grounds either for the original claim or for her endorsement of it). However, these commentators' very taking sides in favor of (10) makes it not just the opinion of one individual commentator, but something shared by several people and very likely belonging to the common ground of several possible conversations on the issue. This makes it more likely that other readers too, without further investigation or inquiry about evidence or reasons, take the content of (10) as common ground and deal with it as if it were a known fact. Of course, knowledge is actually disseminated in this way only if it was someone's genuine knowledge in the first place.

#### 4.4 Behabitives

Behabitives can be characterized as illocutionary acts that consist in adopting an attitude or expressing a feeling as a reaction to some event or behavior involving the speaker, the addressee or both. They do not require the speaker's being in some specific position (such as her having a certain competence, authority, or capacity): indeed, it is enough to successfully perform them that the speaker find herself in the appropriate circumstances (often involving a state of debt or obligation, or of need, the satisfaction of which is aimed at or searched for through the adoption of the attitude or the expression of the feeling in which the behabitive consists).

Various kinds of behabitives, among which complaints, protests, challenges, acts of commiseration, wishes, and insults, can be found in discussions under a public post. What they have in common is that each of them makes manifest the speaker's attitude or stance towards her interlocutors as well as towards the matters at issue. In so doing, behabitives provide their audience with knowledge about speaker's attitudes or stances, but such knowledge is not grounded in an act of judgment, nor in the speaker's epistemic position, as in the case of verdictives (Sbisà 1984: 106). Indeed, when a behabitive is performed, what an addressee is entitled to expect, beyond sincerity, is some consistency in the speaker's subsequent attitudes and behavior, but nothing more. For example, a protest can be regarded as a reaction to something that the speaker perceives as unfair and wants to be changed: therefore, the audience is legitimized to expect that the speaker's subsequent behavior will be consistent with this reaction, as well as with the expressed perception of unfairness and the demand that the unfair situation be redressed.

Since behabitives do not require any particular entitlement on the part of the speaker, they can be performed by speakers who do not raise any claim to competence, authority or capacity, or whose claims to competence, authority or capacity have failed to be recognized. Not being competence-based, in the context of discussions under a public post behabitives too cannot disseminate knowledge

directly. But like exercitives (see Section 4.2), they can do so by presupposition accommodation, when the utterances used in performing them trigger presuppositions relevant to the topic at issue and also, more specifically, insofar as they require (and therefore presuppose) that their authors should find themselves in the appropriate circumstances.

The following comment

- (15) [Gre] *poveri greci.... stanno andando a schiantarsi giù dal ponte della dracma per colpa di 4 politici di merda negli anni scorsi e di due idioti oggi al governo. E la cosa che fa più rabbia è che il disastro economico al quale stanno andando incontro lo pagheranno principalmente le classe più deboli che Syriza vorrebbe difendere: a parole* (Like 0 – June 28 at 6:40am)  
 ‘the poor Greeks, they’re rushing to throw themselves off the drachma bridge through the fault of four crappy politicians they had over the past years and the two idiots governing them now. And what makes one really angry is that the financial disaster they are heading towards will be paid for principally by the most vulnerable classes, the ones that Syriza claims to want to defend’

comprises the performance of at least two behabitives: commiseration (*poveri greci* ‘the poor Greeks’), accompanied by the description of the state of affairs prompting the act of commiseration and, therefore, presupposed by it (*stanno andando a schiantarsi* ‘they’re rushing to throw themselves off’); and expression of anger, approximating a protest against the people held to be responsible and linguistically formulated so as to presuppose that the state of affairs prompting the commentator’s reaction actually holds (*la cosa che fa più rabbia è che* ‘what makes one really angry is that’). Thus, that these states of affairs are the case is not properly presented as established by verdictives (such as analyses or forecasts), but is conveyed instead as a presupposition to be accommodated without further investigation.

Behabitives may also contribute to creating or removing conditions favoring the dissemination of informative content as constituting knowledge by means of speech acts of other illocutionary classes.

The following comment amounts to a complaint:

- (16) [Vac] *È sconcertante.... anni di studi, di dedizione, corsi, congressi...tutto affinché la qualità dei tuoi piccoli pazienti sia sempre migliore...e poi...giungi in questo luogo infernale e chiunque avrebbe da insegnarti qualcosa [...]* (Like 56 – Replies 42 – October 18 at 12:18am)  
 ‘It’s shocking... years of study, of dedication, of courses, congresses... everything so that the quality of your young patients gets better and better... and then...you find yourself in this hellish place and everyone has got something to teach you [...]

In (16), the complaint *È sconcertante* ‘It’s shocking’ presupposes the circumstances prompting it, that is, that the author of the comment has spent much time and energy improving the quality of her work as a doctor and that other social network users have a pretentious critical attitude towards her. The presupposed content in this case is not itself a relevant object of knowledge dissemination, but affects the commentator’s entitlement to issue competent, reliable verdictives on such a subject matter as vaccines, the performance of which will in turn produce and disseminate knowledge.

A kind of behabitive often performed in discussions under a public post is insulting. In addressing “bad words” at a target, a commentator reveals her negative, derogatory attitude towards a certain individual, often herself a social network user, or a certain group, often one to which other social network users are assumed to belong. Such derogatory attitudes are often presented as prompted by indignation over something that their targets have said or done: in these cases, the insult may be suitably accompanied by another behabitive, such as a protest or a challenge.

The following two examples feature insults:

- (17) [Gre] *Fanculo a tutti i codardi che accettano una moneta schiavistica INVECE DI RIPRENDERE A NOSTRA SOVRANITA’, PAGATELA VOI QUESTA TRUFFA [...].* (Like 3 – June 28 at 10:35am)  
 ‘Fuck off all you cowards who accept a currency that enslaves you instead of RECLAIMING OUR SOVEREIGNTY, YOU’RE THE ONES WHO SHOULD BE PAYING FOR THIS RIP-OFF [...]’

- (18) [Vac] [...] *sei drammaticamente limitata, hai considerato i danni nel tempo? hai considerato cosa succede al sistema immunitario ? hai mai seguito le statistiche che pongono a paragone vaccini e malattie ??* (Like 1 – October 17 at 7:05pm)  
 ‘[...] you are terribly limited, have you considered the long-term damage? Have you thought of what happens to the immune system? Have you ever looked at the statistics comparing vaccines and diseases??’

In (17), the commentator expresses her strongly negative attitude against those accepting the euro as official currency. However, while expressing this attitude, she also implicitly conveys other pieces of information. In particular, the presupposed fact prompting the speaker’s indignation is that there are people willing to be enslaved by the euro. Indeed, (17) presupposes that there are cowards who accept a currency that enslaves them, and therefore, that there is a currency that enslaves the people who accept it, suggesting in addition that the currency that enslaves people is the euro (which is the currency under discussion), and that those who accept the euro do so out of cowardice (this latter idea is conveyed through a relevance-based



implicature). The subsequent part of (17) expresses what the commentator would want to be done instead and sounds like a protest against the alleged loss of sovereignty and the people responsible for it (who should then pay its costs).

In (18), the commentator expresses her negative, derogatory attitude against one of the other commentators who presents herself as a doctor and defends the use of vaccines in children. The insult *sei drammaticamente limitata* 'you are terribly limited' amounts to an attack on the target commentator's competence and credibility, prompted by the other commentator's opposite firm conviction that vaccines are harmful. This conviction is not explicitly stated in (18), but the rhetorical questions following the initial insult and further challenging the target commentator's competence both evoke it and present its content as taken for granted by presupposition accommodation: indeed, for example, *Hai considerato i danni nel tempo?* 'Have you considered the long-term damage?' presupposes that there is some long-term damage to be considered. As a whole, (18) is clearly aimed at weakening the target commentator's entitlement to perform verdictives and, if its author's epistemic authority is not in its own turn challenged, may be successful in hindering the target commentator from producing and disseminating knowledge in that context.

## 5. Concluding remarks

In this paper, we have examined how and to what extent illocutionary acts of different kinds performed by social network users when commenting on public posts contribute to the dissemination of knowledge. As shown in the previous section, knowledge can be disseminated through the achievement of the characteristic effects of illocutionary acts or other aspects of their procedure patterns. While the knowledge resulting from verdictives depends on the bringing about of their characteristic conventional effect, and espousals, which belong to the class of commissives, indirectly contribute to knowledge dissemination in terms of affiliative support (that is, the greater number of endorsements a comment receives, the more likely it is that its content will be taken as true and as constituting knowledge), exercitives' and behabitives' knowledge-disseminating effects depend on the accommodation of presuppositions associated with their performance. In conflict situations like discussions under public posts, the most direct way to present a piece of information as knowledge is clearly to convey it as the content of a verdictive. In taking sides in favor of the comment comprising this verdictive, other commentators may improve its credibility, thereby reinforcing its knowledge-disseminating effect. However, since the knowledge-disseminating effect of verdictives comes with the author's commitment to give evidence or reasons if requested to do so

(indeed, it is in virtue of the appropriate epistemic position of the author, which must be publicly recognized, that her utterance can provide knowledge), issuing a verdictive is a risky move. Indeed, a verdictive can easily be challenged by means of objections or by asking for the author's grounds for making it, with the possible outcome of hindering or blocking its knowledge-disseminating effect. If so, in order to present some informative content as knowledge, encoding it as a presupposition might be regarded as more effective than conveying it as the content of a verdictive. Indeed, as pointed out above, anyone aiming at questioning knowledge presented as such by presupposition accommodation must make explicit that presupposition, but this rarely happens since it is costly. However, while the informative content conveyed by presupposition accommodation is taken to constitute knowledge, it cannot improve on the readers' competence as is done by knowledge produced by a verdictive. The commitment of a commentator to providing the readers with evidence or reasons in support of her judgment is indispensable to the aim of transferring to them not just any content presented as constituting knowledge, but also the criteria of the judgment itself and therefore, more generally speaking, the competence to produce knowledge on that and similar topics. But the knowledge-disseminating effect based on presupposition accommodation occurs without the author's committing herself to providing the readers with evidence or reasons in support of her judgment.

Unfortunately, in the cases we have examined, social network users performing what appears to be a verdictive rarely make available to their readers the evidence or reasons on which that verdictive is based. Moreover, it is often unclear whether the dynamics of their speech acts, despite involving implicit or explicit claims to knowledge, is actually associated with the commitment to do so on request. This suggests that knowledge dissemination in social networks tends to consist mainly of the circulation of contents that are presented as constituting knowledge, rather than of the sharing and transfer of the mastery of criteria of judgment and in general, of the competence to issue verdictives. But this alone would enable the full development of web 2.0's knowledge-disseminating potentialities.

### **Authorship statement**

The authors have collaborated in the research on which this paper relies, and have discussed all of its parts. However, Sections 1, 2, 3, 4.1 and 4.3 are authored by Paolo Labinaz, while Sections 4, 4.2 and 4.4 are authored by Marina Sbisà.

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## Appendix

Acronym	Title of the posted article	Posted on <i>La Repubblica</i> Facebook Page on...	Likes	Comments and replies	Shares
Vac	Walter Ricciardi: «Non si può tollerare chi nega l'utilità delle vaccinazioni»	17 October 2015	1948	263 comments and 992 replies	551
URL: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/Repubblica/posts/10153717882956151">https://www.facebook.com/Repubblica/posts/10153717882956151</a> (accessed 10 April 2018).					
Gre	Grecia, la UE si prepara al default. Tsipras: sopravviveremo	28 June 2015	226	128 comments and 104 replies	98
URL: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/Repubblica/photos/a.196989226150.171000.179618821150/10153454081031151/?type=3&amp;theater">https://www.facebook.com/Repubblica/photos/a.196989226150.171000.179618821150/10153454081031151/?type=3&amp;theater</a> (accessed 10 April 2018).					

PART II

# The discursive management of self on the internet



# Humour and self-presentation on *WhatsApp* profile status

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Self-presentation encompasses a set of strategies through which individuals communicate an image of themselves to others. Self-presentation has been widely studied both in face-to-face communication and online. Most online research, however, has focused on social networking sites, blogs, chatrooms, etc. while less attention has been paid to other online means of communication such as *WhatsApp*. The aim of this chapter is to analyse self-presentation on *WhatsApp* statuses. More specifically, I focus on the use of humour as a self-presentation strategy in *WhatsApp* statuses and ascertain whether or not there are common patterns with regard to gender or age. To this purpose, a corpus of 206 *WhatsApp* statuses in Spanish was analysed following both a quantitative and qualitative methodology. Results shows the existence of recurrent patterns connected to these variables, which seem to play a crucial role to determine the choice of humour as a self-presentation strategy.

**Keywords:** humour, self-presentation, *WhatsApp*, Spanish, profile status, digital communication, incongruity, intertextuality, age, gender

## 1. Introduction

Self-presentation can be defined as “the process through which individuals communicate an image of themselves to others” (Yang and Brown 2016: 404). It is a dynamic process which develops along five major interconnected dimensions: intentionality, depth, positivity, authenticity and breadth (Kim and Dindia 2011; Yang and Brown 2016). Nowadays, with the ever increasing use of digital communication, self-presentation takes place not only face-to-face but also digitally in the form of the *profile* or *user status*. As rightly argued by Attrill (2012), however, different settings will lead to different types of self-presentation. In the case of *WhatsApp*, for example, the *app* offers users the possibility to choose an



automatically generated self-disclosure from the available options (e.g., at work, busy, available, etc.). However, most users are likely to edit their own status. This interface personalization is hence exploited by users to their own advantage so as to present themselves in a specific light (e.g., humorous, tender, sophisticated, wise, etc.) which makes them unique and different from the others. As Yus (2017a: 78) points out:

An example is interface personalization, which in theory should generate an offset of positive effects in the way the user feels that he/she is treated as a unique individual whose specific preferences and usage patterns are attended to by the app. Users like to feel part of the group, network or community, but they also like to “stand out from the crowd,” to feel unique in how they experience the app.

Indeed, most *WhatsApp* users tend to carefully select the status (and profile picture) that other users will see whenever they exchange phone numbers. As evidence of the importance of the status, we just need to recall what happened last 24 February 2017 when, coinciding with *WhatsApp* 8th anniversary, its creators launched a new version of its “status.” In this version, and rather than allowing users to include a short text next to their profile photo, users could share a 24-hour status in a similar way to that of Snapchat, as shown in Figure 1:

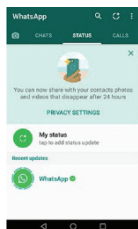


Figure 1. 24-hour *WhatsApp* status

Users' massively negative response, however, forced *WhatsApp* to restore the past statuses just one month afterwards (24 March 2017), after the web was flooded with complaints and queries about how to get back to the textual status.<sup>1</sup> This demonstrates that, far from being a frivolous matter, most users dearly value the opportunity these statuses provide for them as a self-presentation strategy.

The aim of this chapter is twofold as it intends, first, to delve into the kind of self-presentation users provide for others in their *WhatsApp* profile statuses, and more specifically, whether Spanish<sup>2</sup> *WhatsApp* users tend to employ humour (and

1. [http://www.elconfidencial.com/tecnologia/2017-03-17/whatsapp-estados-texto-historias-snapchat\\_1350295/](http://www.elconfidencial.com/tecnologia/2017-03-17/whatsapp-estados-texto-historias-snapchat_1350295/)

2. The variety under analysis is peninsular Spanish, the one used by all the participants.

what kind of humour) as a self-presentation strategy on *WhatsApp*. Secondly, it aims to ascertain whether other social variables such as gender and/or age may play a role in the use of humour in *WhatsApp* statuses. This chapter also intends to contribute to the increasing interest in a multimodal approach to humour research (Norrick 2004; Tsakona 2009; Shifman 2014; Ballesteros Doncel 2016; Dynel 2016; Marone 2017; Yus 2017a, 2018; among others).

Taking the above into account, I intend to answer the following research questions:

- i. Do Spanish *WhatsApp* users employ humour as a self-presentation strategy in their *WhatsApp* statuses? If so, to what extent and in what frequency?
- ii. What are the strategies users resort to in order to 'create' humorous *WhatsApp* statuses?
- iii. Do the sociological variables of gender and age play a role in the use of humour as a type of self-presentation strategy?

The rest of the chapter is structured as follows; Section 2 below revisits the literature on the concepts of self-presentation and humour and their study in digital communication,<sup>3</sup> with a special interest in studies focusing on *WhatsApp* together with describing *WhatsApp* and its profile status tool. This is followed by section three, which describes the methodology, more specifically the criteria followed in the compilation of the corpus and its description. The fourth section presents findings and discusses results from a quantitative and qualitative approach. Finally, conclusions are offered in Section 5 together with some pointers to future research or research already in progress.

## 2. Literature review

Self-presentation (and identity construction) has long attracted scholarly attention, both in face-to-face and digital communication. Most research on the latter, however, has focused on social networking sites (especially *Facebook*), blogs, chatrooms, etc. (cf. Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin 2008; García-Gómez 2010; Papacharissi 2011; Bronstein 2012; van Dijck 2013); while less attention has been paid to other online means of communication such as *WhatsApp* (Calero-Vaquera and Vigara 2014; Sultan 2014; Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya 2015a, 2015b)

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3. Traditionally, the term computer-mediated communication (shortened as CMC) has been employed. However, this term no longer represents the kind of communication that may take place using other devices such as smartphones or tablets. For this reason, digital discourse and digital communication are increasingly being used.

despite its ever increasing popularity as a means of communication, with 1.5 billion worldwide users in July 2018.<sup>4</sup> This is possibly why *WhatsApp* is progressively calling for scholarly attention. The majority of studies up to now, however, have tended to adopt a sociological approach, mainly analysing the social effects of *WhatsApp* on its users (Church and de Oliveira 2013; Devi and Tevera 2014; O'Hara et al. 2014, *inter alia*), especially on younger users (Bere 2012; Ahad and Lim 2014; Bouhnik and Deshen 2014, Maniar and Modi 2014; Yeboah and Ewur 2014; Plana et al. 2015). The increasing interest in *WhatsApp* has also raised methodological concerns on data collection (e.g., Vela Delfa and Cantamutto 2016).

It is hence doubtless that *WhatsApp* offers undeniable conditions for linguistic research. As argued by Calero-Vaquera and Vigara (2014: 112), “*WhatsApp* interests us as linguists since it has become one more witness of human ability to adapt and colonize communicative competence in any channel” (my translation). This interest has more recently been also emphasized by Yus (2017a: 75), who states that “WA [...], immensely popular nowadays and exhibiting interesting interface evolutions for a pragmatic analysis” (my emphasis).

More recently, there have emerged some studies that adopt a linguistic perspective, either discursive or pragmatic (or a combination of both) with a special interest in the multimodal<sup>5</sup> nature of *WhatsApp* (cf. da Fonte and Caiado 2014) or its use of typographical variation like *textese* (cf. Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya 2015a). Calero-Vaquera and Vigara (2014) provide a seminal study on the discursive similarities and differences between *WhatsApp*, Messenger and SMS, highlighting their hybrid and multimodal nature, especially given by the use of emoticons. Their study offers an interesting set of discursive features, which are subdivided into extra-textual, intra-textual and para-textual characteristics. However, in contrast to the current study, the latter does not offer a corpus analysis of naturally produced data but it is more an overview of *WhatsApp* characteristics, useful as a departing point for more detailed research.

More recently, Yus' (2017a) study has focused on the *app* from a relevance-theoretic approach, emphasising the relevantly positive effects of its use to boost phatic talk. Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez (2018) also focus on the speech acts of requests in *WhatsApp* conversations among Mexican Spanish speakers. Their findings show that, in terms of politeness strategy selection, these users resort to conventionally indirect strategies and a great deal of syntactic modification.

4. According to the web <https://www.latamclick.com/estadisticas-de-las-redes-sociales-en-el-mundo-2018/> [accessed December 2018].

5. Multimodality is here understood as the combination of two or more modes (e.g., textual and visual) to communicate.

As can be observed, however, most of these studies have focused on *WhatsApp* either in general terms or on the “conversations” held by its users. Less attention has been paid to how users choose to present themselves to others in the classic profile status (although see Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya 2015a).

## 2.1 Humour

The study of humour as a multi-dimensional phenomenon has led to well-established theoretical frameworks of humour, such as the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) (Raskin 1985) or the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (Attardo and Raskin 1991; Attardo 2001). Indeed, as Palmer (2003) posits in his seminal work, humour should be taken seriously and it is a phenomenon clearly worthy of academic research. Furthermore, its role in self-presentation (and hence identity formation and impression) is essential:

Humor is a fundamental ingredient of social communication. It is a rare conversation in which at least one participant does not try to elicit laughter at some point or does not respond with amusement to something another has said or done. Jokes, witticisms, and other humorous verbal and nonverbal behaviors are commonplace in social interaction situations and can have a major impact on the quality of the interactions. For example, one’s interpretation of a stranger’s remarks as humorous can influence the impression one forms of that person.

(Wyer and Collins 1992: 663)

There is a wide array of research on different types of humour. From a more psychological approach, for example, scholars from Freud (1991 [1905]) onwards have considered at least two major types of humour in what could be considered a continuum with two extremes: aggressive humour, where malicious humour (also termed as “memetic” by Freud) is targeted at diminishing others (e.g., cultural stereotypes in tendentious jokes) and innocent humour (or non-tendentious jokes), which do not involve hostility (e.g., droll humour). In a similar vein, Martin et al. (2003) speak about aggressive and affiliative humour, also considering related categories such as self-enhancing and self-deprecating humour.

Linguistic theories on humour have also demonstrated that humour follows certain patterns, being framed in such a way that it can be identified as humour by other interlocutors (cf. Norrick 1989, 1993; Attardo 2001). Some of these linguistic resources are puns, plays on words, repetitions (e.g., knock-knock jokes) or intertextuality, which “occurs any time one text suggests or requires reference to some other identifiable text or stretch of discourse, spoken or written” (Norrick 1989: 117). However, Palmer (2003) argues that the key element of a humour cue is the transgression of normalcy, either in content or linguistically, closely related to the incongruity-resolution pattern put forward by Suls (1972, 1977; see also

Dynel 2016 and Yus 2016, 2017b). This is illustrated by Example (1), where the incongruous verbal status is solved (and understood) only when we relate it to the profile image of the user, a photograph of himself when he was little:

- (1) [Male-20s] *Origen!*  
[Origin!]

## 2.2 Humour and digital communication

Curiously enough, however, digital communication (or computer-mediated communication in a more traditional sense) was initially regarded as a “medium inhospitable to humour” (Baym 1995: para. 1). In her pioneering study of humour online, however, Baym counter argues that digital communication can also be used for humour and that this humour is worth investigating:

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is often seen as a means of distributing information, of increasing organizational efficiency, of creating electronic democracy, or of challenging traditional hierarchies. It is rarely seen as a means of making people laugh. Yet CMC can be, and is, used as a forum for humorous performances [...] Analysis of humor is important because CMC research has been slow to address the formation of group identity and solidarity, though such phenomena occur in on-line groups and are negotiated, in part, through humor. (Baym 1995: 0)

Thus, focusing on the analysis of one of Usenet newsgroups on soap operas – what might now parallel forums, *Facebook* common interest groups or simultaneous TV-watching while *Twittering* – Baym’s (1995) study already demonstrated that humour is widely used online to create group solidarity, group identity and individual identity (cf. also Norrick 1993; Palmer 1994).

A few years later, Holcomb (1997) analysed the process of spontaneous joke making by students interacting in a synchronous classroom chat. Like Baym’s, his findings also pointed out to the essential say humour has in boosting group solidarity. Furthermore, Holcomb found out that humour might also give rise to asymmetric relationships by leaving out those who (i) did not get the joke, (ii) chose not to laugh and (iii) were laughed at rather than with (Holcomb 1997: 4).

Nowadays, it is undeniable that digital communication is pervasive with humour, which can adopt a myriad of forms (and genres) such as GIFs, memes, collages, remixes of videos, *YouTube* videos, humorous power points, etc. The appeal humour exerts on everyday users and scholars is reflected in the growing body of research devoted to digital humour and its different functions (cf. Kuipers 2002; Hübler and Bell 2003; Shifman 2007, 2014; Frank 2009; Maíz-Arévalo 2015; Wen et al. 2015; Dynel 2016; Marone 2017; Yus 2017b, 2018; among others).

Thus, humour has been shown to “pervade the rhetorical process of forming and maintaining online groups” (Hübler and Bell 2003: 278), hence boosting social identity and community bonding, the feeling of connectivity, of peer validation and acknowledgement (Norrick 1993; Yus 2018). Furthermore, humour also plays a crucial role in establishing personal identity and individualization, e.g., when “creating something beyond the norms imposed by the group” and showing “command of today’s discourses exchanged on the Net” or web-literacy (Yus 2018: 124–125).

However, and as already mentioned, the role of humour in *WhatsApp* statuses together with its subsequent effects in self-presentation and identity have been neglected so far. The following section focuses on the description of *WhatsApp* statuses and both its affordances and limitations with regards to self-presentation and humour.

### 2.3 *WhatsApp* and its statuses

Developed in 2009 by former Yahoo! employees Brian Acton and Jan Koum, *WhatsApp* is “a freeware and cross-platform instant messaging service for smartphones.”<sup>6</sup> Amongst its affordances, *WhatsApp* (so named by Koum to make it sound like “what’s up”) provides its users with the possibility to make voice and video calls, send text messages, images, GIFs, videos, documents, user location, audio files, phone contacts and voice notes. It also allows users to edit their own profile information by adding a photograph, and a textual (or multimodal) status through a 139-character blank where “*WhatsApp* users are prompted to write any message in order to complete their profile information” (Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya 2015b: 52) as illustrated by Figure 2:

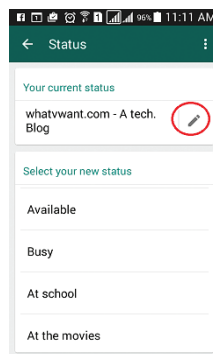
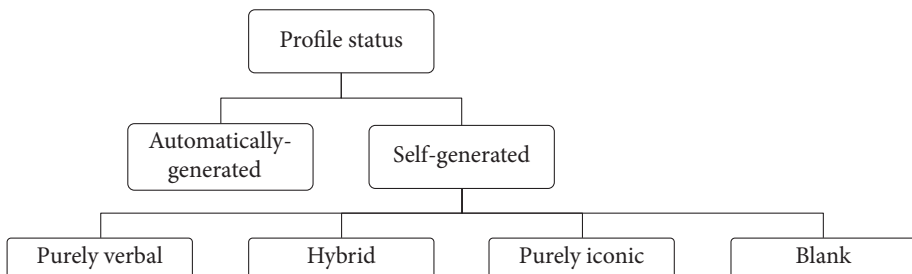


Figure 2. *WhatsApp* profile status information

6. As defined by Wikipedia, available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WhatsApp>.

In their study, Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya (2015b) focus on the discursive analysis of 420 profile statuses by Spanish users, paying special attention to the effect of age on profile editing. The authors provide a useful categorization based on the linguistic realization of the profiles, which they initially divide into automatically-generated statuses and self-generated ones, as illustrated by Figure 3:



**Figure 3.** Types of profile status in *WhatsApp* according to linguistic realization (adapted from Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya 2015)

Automatically-generated statuses are those where users simply choose one of the statuses provided by default. In the case of *WhatsApp*, the main default status is “Hey there! I’m using *WhatsApp*” but users may choose from the following range of 12 other default statuses. These default statuses can either show the user’s degree of availability<sup>7</sup> (Available; Busy; I can’t talk, only *WhatsApp*; Low bat; Only emergency calls; I’m sleeping) or places where they might be (At School; In the cinema; At work; At a meeting; In the gym) and which might also determine whether they are available to engage in chat or not.

Self-generated statuses are those where users manually type a status of their own choice in the 139-blank character gap provided by the *app* (see Figure 3). Within this macro-category, users have four options:



- (i) They may choose a purely verbal (or rather “textual”) status, as in Example (2):<sup>8</sup>
  - (2) [Male-40s] *Soy BIOlento*  
[I’m BIOlent]
- (ii) They may leave it blank, choosing not to write anything at all.
- (iii) They may choose a purely iconic status by employing just *emoji*, as in Example (3):

7. Translation of the Spanish original. There are users who directly choose to write in English.

8. All the examples come directly from the corpus. They are all preceded by the gender and age range of the participant in square brackets and followed by their translation into English when originally in Spanish.

(3) [Female-40s] 

(iv) Finally, users may choose to display a hybrid status where both *emoji* and text are employed, as shown by (4):

(4) [Male-40s] *Sin gafas...*   
 [Without glasses 

However useful the taxonomy offered, the authors do not delve into the content of such statuses or the pragmatic functions status profiling may perform. In the present study, I intend to partially fill this gap by focusing on a specific type of status and self-presentation: self-generated statuses where users display humour (or attempts at it) as a way to present themselves. In this respect, it is important to point out that the present analysis will not consider either blank statuses (for obvious reasons) or purely iconic statuses (whose interpretation is wide open and often ambiguous). For example, in the case of Example (2), the user might be displaying an emotion of happiness and joy, she might be describing a place where she is such as a concert or party, etc. or all of that simultaneously. Hence, I will exclusively focus on cases (1) and (4), purely verbal and hybrid statuses respectively.

With regard to the display of humour on *WhatsApp* statuses, there are two main aspects to take into account. First, and differently from other types of humour such as the conversational one, *WhatsApp* statuses can be argued to be much less of a “situated discursive practice” (Kotthoff 2006). Indeed, and as opposed to other types of humour like canned jokes, *WhatsApp* (like other digital communication) is mostly “disembodied” and users cannot see their interlocutors’ reactions or the effect their humour has triggered on others – i.e., whether they find the status funny or not at all, whether they indeed understand it as a joke or as an “obscure” comment, etc. In this respect, Kotthoff’s words on conversational humour do not fully apply to the specific genre of *WhatsApp* statuses:

Humorous activities are thoroughly dialogical and very context-sensitive. The relationship of those present, along with their disposition and moods, play an important role. When I tell someone a joke, I watch for signs of amusement. If the listener is willing to cooperate, s/he will let me finish, and will then smile, laugh, or respond in some way to the humorous potential. If the listener did otherwise, she would be defining my joke as a dud. It is this dialogicity, which inhibits timid persons, strangers, or people of lower status from joking in many contexts. They fear the embarrassment of not eliciting the appropriate reaction.

(Kotthoff 2006: 8)

Kotthoff’s words are extremely interesting since they help us understand the affordances and limitations users may encounter when employing humour in their *WhatsApp* statuses. Thus, and as already mentioned, there is a lack of contextual



cues as to how the other users are reacting to the “humorous potential.” However, what might initially be seen as a limitation may also appear as an affordance, especially for people who might refrain from using humour in their face-to-face encounters but for whom the *WhatsApp* status might prove an opportunity to (safely) display wittiness and humour without the embarrassment of an immediate reaction (cf. also McKenna and Bargh 2000; Papacharissi 2002; Bronstein 2014).

Secondly, it is to be acknowledged that the present study will not focus on the possible humorous effects these statuses might trigger on other *WhatsApp* users but on statuses where users have admitted they were trying to be fun and/or witty (and hence attempting to boost their own image as fun and witty, whether they succeeded or not). Future research, however, is intended to gauge these reactions via questionnaires (e.g., Martin et al. 2003) and interviews to find out and how humorous self-presentations are reacted to by other users. In other words, a self-presentation intended as humorous, original or witty may generate a wide array of effects, both propositional but also non-propositional, both positive but also negative (cf. also Yus 2018). As a preliminary result to this future study, let us consider the case of Example (5):

- (5) [Male-40s] *El veloz murciélago hindú*  
[The fast Hindu bat]

This user is resorting to the first part of pangram<sup>9</sup> the programme Windows used to employ in Spanish to display computer fonts, equivalent to the English “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.” Since the more recent versions of Windows no longer depict this pangram, younger *WhatsApp* users might fail to understand the wittiness and humour intended by this user (as he admitted himself). However, humour does not only depend on age spans. Thus, other users who belong to the same age group as this participant were questioned what they thought of this status and described it as “nerdy,” “preposterous” and even “conceited,” as the user was perceived to be showing off his knowledge. It might be argued here that those humorous statuses might have been perceived as giving rise to an asymmetric relationship with the participant, who was hence rejected (Holcomb 1997). Indeed, intertextual humour such as this is aggressive toward the audience because they are challenged to recognize the source text (Norrick 1989; Kotthoff 2007). In any case, all of the previous reactions show rather negative non-propositional effects far from intended by the user who posted that status in the first place.

9. A pangram (also known as holoalphabetic sentence) is a sentence using every letter of a given alphabet at least once.

### 3. Methodology

The data used in the present study were gathered during a month, with the aid of two other *WhatsApp* users.<sup>10</sup> Data were thus naturally produced, and collected randomly to avoid any bias. However, to ensure both the ethics and validity of the data, four main criteria were taken into consideration:

- i. Users below the age of 18 were excluded given their vulnerability as minors, focusing on five age spans: 20 years-old, 30 years-old, 40 years-old, 50 years-old and 60 years-old and +60.
- ii. All proper names and photographs that could identify the users in any sense were deleted to preserve their full privacy. All users were hence tagged according to their age (in their 20s, 30s, etc.) and gender,<sup>11</sup> which was provided by themselves or by the data-collectors.
- iii. To guarantee the validity of the gathered sample, the same amount of female and male users was gathered for each age group (see Table 1).
- iv. The amount of users per age group was determined by the ratio of Spanish users of *WhatsApp*; that is, following the results published by secondary sources such as the webpage Statista<sup>12</sup> and infogr.am.<sup>13</sup> According to Statista, the number of Spanish users of *WhatsApp* in 2018 was led by the age group of 46–65, with 51% of users, followed by the 31–45 age span (40%) and, finally, the 16–30 years-old (9%). Furthermore, the report by IAB Spain<sup>14</sup> on the use of social networking sites by Spanish users in June 2018 reflects that 89% of the Spanish population uses *WhatsApp*, with its users having already surpassed that of *Facebook*.

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10. The author would like to express her immense gratitude to her husband, Carlos Carvajal, and friend, Yelena Petrovic, for their inestimable help in collecting the data. Without them, this study would not have been possible. All errors, however, remain exclusively my own.

11. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss whether it would be more appropriate to use the term “sex” rather than “gender” given that its social components (e.g., the participants’ sexual orientation and identification with gender independently of the biological gender) have not been fully researched in this study.

12. <https://es.statista.com/estadisticas/576109/porcentaje-de-los-usuarios-de-whatsapp-en-espana-en-por-edad/> (accessed 12 December 2018).

13. [https://infogr.am/uso\\_de\\_whatsapp\\_por\\_edades\\_en\\_espana\\_en\\_los\\_ultimos\\_seis\\_meses](https://infogr.am/uso_de_whatsapp_por_edades_en_espana_en_los_ultimos_seis_meses) (accessed 12 December 2018).

14. Spanish Association of Advertising, Marketing and Digital Communication. Report available at [https://iabspain.es/wp-content/uploads/estudio-redes-sociales-2018\\_vreducida.pdf](https://iabspain.es/wp-content/uploads/estudio-redes-sociales-2018_vreducida.pdf) (accessed 12 December 2018).

Taking these secondary sources into consideration, the ratio of the present corpus was calculated per gender and age so as to ensure the calculated ratio represents that of the Spanish population using *WhatsApp* as closely as possible. The corpus thus gathered consists in 206 *WhatsApp* statuses produced by five age groups of both genders in a proportion replicating the ratio of use provided by secondary sources (i.e., Statista and infogr.am). As in the secondary sources, the age groups leading the number of *WhatsApp* users are 40s and 50s, followed by 30s and 20s, with the group of 60s and +60s occupying the lowest percentage, as illustrated by Table 1:

**Table 1.** Age and gender of the subjects

Age	Gender		Total (n=)	Ratio
	Female	Male		
20s	12	12	24	11.65%
30s	16	16	32	15.53%
40s	37	37	74	35.92%
50s	26	26	52	25.24%
60s (+60s)	12	12	24	11.65%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>100%</b>

The corpus ( $n = 206$ ) was then manually classified in an Excel file by taking into account the age range of the user, the gender, the type of status according to realization (see Section 4.1), the type of status according to content (see Section 4.2), and the profile picture accompanying the status. It is, however, beyond the scope of the present chapter to analyse in depth the relationship between the profile photograph and the status. In this case, only those pictures directly related to humorous statuses will be considered.

#### 4. Data analysis

This section presents the findings and their discussion, both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. For the sake of clarity, it has been divided into four sub-sections. Section 4.1 shows an overview of the results paying attention to the type of realization of the status according to Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya's (2015) classification (see Figure 3). Closely related, Section 4.2 focuses on the content of statuses and frequency of humorous statuses in contrast to others – e.g., by default statuses like “Hey there! I’m using *WhatsApp*.” Section 4.3 discusses humorous statuses in detail from a more qualitative perspective, trying to ascertain the

type of humour users are employing together with the main motivation(s) to do so in terms of self-presentation. Finally, Section 4.4 tackles the issue of age and gender in relation to humorous statuses.

#### 4.1 Types and frequency of *WhatsApp* statuses according to realization

As already mentioned, *WhatsApp* users have two main choices when it comes to editing their profile information and status: using a default or automatically-generated status or editing it themselves – i.e., self-generated status. Table 2 sums up these results in decreasing order of frequency:

**Table 2.** Types and frequency of *WhatsApp* statuses according to realization

Type of realization	N° of tokens ( $n = 206$ )	Ratio
<i>AUTOMATICALLY-GENERATED</i>	61	29.61%
<i>SELF-GENERATED</i>		
PURELY VERBAL	65	31.55%
PURELY ICONIC	36	17.48%
HYBRID	29	14.08%
BLANK	15	7.28%
<b><i>TOTAL</i></b>	<b>206</b>	<b>100%</b>

As can be observed, more than one third of the users (31.55%) opt for editing their status using purely verbal means – i.e., they choose to write their own text in the 139-character available blank, without resorting to emoji. In general terms, self-generated statuses prevail over automatically-generated ones, even if the latter show a surprisingly high ratio (29.61%), with users opting mostly for the “Hey there! I’m using *WhatsApp*” by default (with 33 tokens, 54% of the total). The rest of the automatically-generated status employ the “Available” option (20 tokens, 32.7%), with other minor occurrences such as “Busy” (3 tokens, 4.9%), and just one token for “I can’t talk, only *WhatsApp*,” “At work,” “At school,” “In the theatre” and “I’m sleeping.” In line with Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya’s (2015) results, most of these users are above the age range of 50 years old, maybe because they ignore how to edit the status or because they do not care about editing such information. Alternatively, younger users seem to prefer hybrid or purely iconic statuses. However, and as already pointed out, it is beyond the scope of the present chapter to correlate age and gender with the specific preferences of users in terms of status realization (cf. Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya 2015a), even if a general overview is useful to situate the two types of realization under analysis in this chapter. In the coming sections, therefore, I will be focusing on purely verbal and hybrid statuses where humour (or attempts at it) are dealt with in more detail.

## 4.2 Types and frequency of *WhatsApp* statuses according to content

Leaving aside both blank and purely iconic statuses, where users may be intending to convey many different types of meanings, this section focuses on the content of purely verbal and hybrid messages – i.e., what the users choose to write about. Although the chapter is aimed at the study of humorous statuses, it is important to consider these other categories as many users will use them in a mocking way. Thus, besides humorous statuses, it is possible to establish the following five major categories according to content:

- (i) By default statuses: are purely verbal and include those where, as already mentioned, users choose an automatically-generated status (see Sections 2.3 and 4.1). In terms of self-presentation, there might be different reasons why users choose to do so. They could ignore how to edit the profile information, they do not really care to present themselves by means of the profile status but prefer to do so by other means such as the profile photograph and so on.
- (ii) Emotional statuses: are those where users choose to display personal emotions (often in the form of an expressive or emotive speech act, see Maíz-Arévalo 2018), as in Examples (6) and (7), which illustrate purely verbal and hybrid statuses respectively:

(6) [Female-40s] Utterly in love<sup>15</sup>

(7) [Female-40s] *Te quiero amor* ❤️  
 You love love  
 [I love you, my love ❤️]

In the case of emotional statuses, however, it is possible to find also purely iconic cases, where users resort to emoji to express emotions like love, happiness and so on, as in (8) and (9) (see Dainas and Herring, this volume; Kavanagh, this volume):

(8) ❤️❤️❤️

(9) 😊

It can be argued that emotional statuses contribute to depict users as loving, happy people but also help other users retrieve additional information such as the fact, for example, that the user is part of a successful couple, hence helping to depict them as “socially desirable actors” (Maíz-Arévalo 2018). In fact, these emotional statuses are often accompanied by a picture of a “happy couple” (cf. also Gibbs et al. 2006; Bond 2009; Mesch and Beker 2010; Hum et al. 2011; Leary and Allen

15. Some examples appear directly in English in the original corpus.

2011). In the corpus at hand, 14.56% of the statuses belong to this category (see Maíz-Arévalo 2018, for more details).

(iii) Inspirational statuses: They can be defined as those where the user is trying to transmit a positive, motivational message hence presenting themselves as a positive, thoughtful and optimistic person generous enough to share this viewpoint with others. In the corpus at hand, this category accounts for 10.68% of the tokens. Previous research has revealed that adopting micro-celebrity tactics like sharing quotes is a common way of online self-presentation (Manago et al. 2008; Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin 2008). As happens with all kinds of self-presentation, these inspirational messages can also lead to negative reactions on other users, who might find the message too “cheesy” (see Maíz-Arévalo, forthcoming). This kind of status can often be linguistically realized in the form of directive acts targeted at an imaginary second person (the addressee), as illustrated by Examples (10) and (11):

(10) [Female-40s] Make of everyday a good day 🌈🐻

(11) [Female-50s] *Sonríele a la vida y disfruta cada instante :-D*  
[Smile at life and enjoy every moment :-D]

Another common sub-category of inspirational statuses is quotes, where users resort to well-known famous quotations or song lyrics to motivate themselves and others:

(12) [Female-50s] I believe I can fly

(13) [Female-60s] *Hoy puede ser un gran día*<sup>16</sup>  
[Today can be a great day]

(14) [Male-50s] *Lo esencial es invisible a los ojos*  
[The essential is invisible to the eyes]

A sub-group within this category involves quotes or expressions of political concern or critique, hence contributing to self-present the user as a committed citizen, as in (15–17):

(15) [Male-60s] *Los políticos de hoy son deshecho de tintera*  
The politicians of today are leftovers of mettle  
[Today’s politicians are the leftovers of the mettle]

(16) [Male-50s] “And the power they took from the people will return to the people.”

16. This line is the title of a song by the well-known Spanish song-writer Joan Manuel Serrat.

- (17) [Female-50s] *Todo poder cae a impulsos del mal que ha hecho*  
 All power falls to the push of the evil it has made  
 [All power falls pushed by the evil it made]

In the case of (15), the user is employing a bull-fighting expression that means “faulty” and “far from up to standard” to criticize current politicians. The knowledge of the jargon seems to help identify him as a lover of bull-fighting, completing his self-presentation. His utterance also illustrates the fact that implications may or not be supported by the user choosing this status. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind the notion of strong and weak implicatures and the fact that implicatures are very often extracted by the hearer’s exclusive responsibility (Sperber and Wilson 1995; Moeschler 2012).

In Example (16), the user is employing a quote from Chaplin’s final speech in his film *The Great Dictator*. The user in (17) is also resorting to a quote by a feminist Spanish politician, Concepción Arenas. These users are highly politicized individuals who actively take part in the local political panorama, hence their need to reflect this aspect of themselves in their *WhatsApp* status in order “to take a stance.” These critiques might, however, be risky and too compromising, which might explain why they are far from frequent. In fact, only five tokens (out of 22) can be found in the corpus (less than 3% of the total percentage). Future research is intended to find out whether the variables of gender and age play a role in this category. Preliminary analyses have shown that there seems to be a correlation between inspirational statuses and female users and political critiques and male users but a deeper analysis is needed.

(iv) Implicit statuses: can be defined as those where users choose to display a status that seems obscure and incomprehensible to those who are not in their inner circle and with whom they share this information. In (18), the user simply states:

- (18) [Female-30s] *Objetivo!*  
 [Target!]

Those in her inner circle know, however, that she is on a medical diet and her doctor gives her weight targets to reach every week. Her closer friends know, therefore, that she is expressing her delight at having reached this week’s objective whilst other users are left in the dark. This kind of mutuality fosters feelings of connection and group membership, therefore also leading to relevant non-propositional effects. Something similar seems to happen in Examples (19) and (20):

- (19) [Male-40s] *¡Sí!*  
 [yes!]

(20) [Male-30s] Yo  
[me]

By using implicature, these users seem to be choosing to boost their affinity and rapport with a particular group but not with everybody. In fact, this choice may be manifold. It offers users the safety of not disclosing too much personal information about the user although it can also contribute to other users' negative reaction, who might fail to understand what the message is about. Users may also choose to be more implicit to draw other users' attention – i.e., hence getting liked – by appealing to human beings' natural 'epistemic' curiosity (cf. Berlyne 1954 for a seminal study on human curiosity and Maíz-Arévalo 2017). However, the implicit risk in choosing this kind of self-presentation may account for its low frequency in the corpus at hand (4.86%).

(v) Miscellanea: this category includes minor frequency statuses such as propagandistic statuses (1.45%) like advertising the user's webpage (often employed when the user has a business) or the Twitter account to gain more followers (as in Example 21); statuses expressing the place where the user is or their availability (as in Examples (22–23), in a similar fashion to automatically-generated statuses) amount to 1.95%, together with other statuses that seem to overlap with implicit statuses, since their propositional meaning cannot be wholly inferred without the necessary context (as in the case of 24), personality traits (also 1.45%) like (25) and the use of other languages rather than English or Spanish (e.g., Catalanian), with only one token in the corpus under scrutiny (0.48%), namely Example (26):

(21) [Male-60s] @jardiaz1

(22) [Male-40s] *En Bruselas*  
[In Brussels]

(23) [Male-40s] *Telegram en mòvil, Whatsapp solo con wifi*  
[Telegram in my mobile phone, *WhatsApp* only with wi-fi]

(24) [Male-20s] Nice of you to drop in!

(25) [Female-40s] Eternally curious 

(26) [Female-40s] *Jo mai mai*<sup>17</sup>

17. It is the title of a Catalanian love song by Joan Dausà. It makes reference to the game where players have to say something they have never done (*Jo mai mai*) and the other plays have to drink a shot if they have.



In summary, Table 3 represents the frequency of *WhatsApp* statuses according to their content. Shadowed boxes (blank and iconic) include those statuses which have not been considered in the analysis for the reasons already explained:

**Table 3.** Type of status according to content

Type of status	N° of tokens ( $n = 206$ )	Ratio
<i>BY DEFAULT (AUTOMATICALLY-GENERATED)</i>	61	29.61%
<i>SELF-GENERATED</i>		
EMOTIONAL	30	14.56%
HUMOROUS	25	12.62%
INSPIRATIONAL	22	10.68%
IMPLICIT	9	4.86%
MISCELLANEOUS	14	6.8%
BLANK	15	7.28%
ICONIC <sup>18</sup>	28	13.59%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 4.3 Humorous statuses

As can be observed, humorous statuses account for 25 tokens in the corpus (12.62%), being the third more common type of self-generated statuses after emotional and purely iconic ones. This section will focus on the analysis of these 25 tokens, by paying attention to the resources employed by users to trigger humour (either successfully or not) and the relations (if any) between humour and the variables of age and gender.

Analysis of the results reveals that users resort to two macro-strategies to trigger humour: intertextuality and incongruity. However, rather than a dyadic opposition, these two macro-strategies often overlap and users may employ both simultaneously, as illustrated by Figure 4. For the sake of methodological clarity, however, I will focus on each of them individually, illustrating the different cases with examples from the corpus under scrutiny.

<sup>18</sup> Emotional statuses expressed by purely iconic means have been included in the “EMOTIONAL” category. This percentage accounts for the rest of iconic statuses where the meaning conveyed is manifold (see Example (3)).

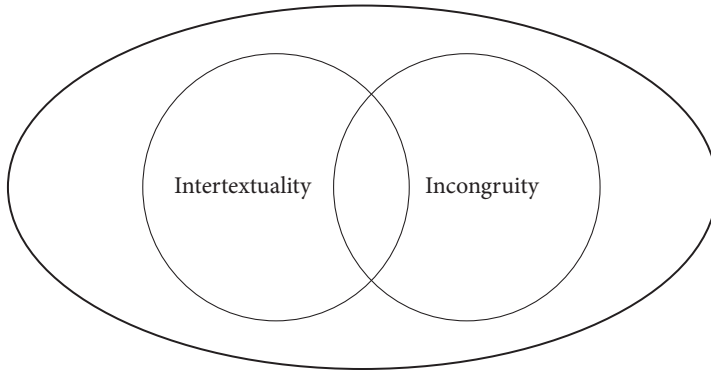


Figure 4. Macro-strategies to trigger humour

#### 4.3.1 *Intertextuality*

According to Norrick (1989: 117), intertextuality “occurs any time one text suggests or requires reference to some other identifiable text or stretch of discourse, spoken or written.” The analysis shows that it is the strategy most frequently employed by these *WhatsApp* users (68% of the cases). Within this group, the most frequent kind of intertextuality consists of those statuses whose users re-enact source texts belonging to (pop) culture (40% of the cases). These texts may belong to everyday computer jargon or mobile phones, like (27) or (28); popular songs (29); or catchy sentences used in well-known TV shows (30):

- (27) [Male-30s]      *Reiniciando* 😊  
                               [Resetting] 😊
- (28) [Male-60s]      *Cargando baterías*  
                               [Charging batteries]
- (29) [Male-30s]      *Sorpresas te da la vida...*<sup>19</sup> 😊  
                               Surprises you gives life [Life surprises you...] 😊
- (30) [Female-60s]    :-D *Creí que se me rompió el peroné, pero no!* :-D  
                               :-D I thought my fibula had broken, but not! :-D  
                               [:-D I thought that I had broken my fibula, but I hadn't :-D]

As can be seen, most of these cases are framed by emoji (or classic emoticons as in Example (30)) indicating the humorous intention of the user (see Dainas and Herring, this volume; Kavanagh, this volume). Intertextuality may also be argued to generate feelings of mutuality (see above) and hence of connectivity, adding an

19. This is part of the chorus of the popular salsa song by Rubén Blades: “La vida te da sorpresas” (Life surprises you).

emotion-laden emphasis on the extent of friendships. For example, in the case of (29), the user resorts to a famous Salsa song, which might link him to those friends of his with whom he shares nights out dancing to this kind of music.

In the case of (30), the joke also relies on the similar sound of both words of the pun, where “*peroné*” (fibula) sounds like the adversative conjunction “*pero no*.” This is a sentence often used by Arturo Valls, popular TV presenter of the Spanish daily quiz show “*Ahora caigo*,” whose audience mainly consists of retired people. Given the age of the user, it might explain why she is choosing this as her *WhatsApp* status, not only because she finds it funny but also because she likes the show. This might connect her to other followers of the programme and of the presenter himself, who has a big fan base among elderly ladies.

In this group, there are also a couple of cases where users base their status on the pangram Windows used to employ in Spanish to display computer fonts, equivalent to the English “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog” as in the already quoted Example (4), repeated here for the sake of clarity as (31) and in (32):

(31) [Male-40s]      *El veloz murciélago hindú*  
The fast bat Hindu  
[The fast Hindu bat]

(32) [Male-40s]      *El murciélago veloz*  
The bat fast  
[The fast bat]

As already argued, this intertextuality might be harder to recognize by younger users (since the more recent versions of Windows no longer employ this pangram) and hence become more aggressive since they feel they are failing the challenge to recognize the source text. In the case of (32), however, the user might be said to be playing on safer ground since his profile picture depicts a photograph of Batman, which might lead other users (especially younger users) to identify the status with the super hero rather than with Windows.

Also within pop culture, but forming a group of their own, are those users whose status mocks inspirational ones (see Section 4.2), as in Examples (33) and (34):

(33) [Male-40s]      *Sonríe... eso mata al enemigo* 😊  
[Smile... that kills the enemy] 😊

(34) [Female-50s]      Life is a question of mind over matter. If you don't mind it  
doesn't matter.

Clearly, users are mocking quotes and inspirational sentences, adding a humorous touch either framed by the emoji (33) or by the pun (34). The script initially

activated, in the first part of the message as it were, is later on confronted by its humorous, unexpected second part, almost in a punch-like version. Because inspirational statuses and quotes have generally become a popular and frequent genre, it could be argued that this kind of intertextuality might be easily recognised by other users, losing part of its aggressiveness (Norrick 1989). However, aggressiveness still remains in the sense that these users might also be positioning against all those other users who actually favour inspirational statuses (see Section 4.2). Indeed, a cursory look at the web renders a myriad of mockery inspirational sentences, which often reproduce the colours and photographs of the actual inspirational quotes, as illustrated by the images below, and often accompanied by swear or taboo words, to contrast even more with the all-optimistic and happy language of actual inspirational sentences (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Examples of mocking inspirational quotes<sup>20</sup>

Finally, a very common case (with 28% of the occurrences) is creatively re-enacting the default statuses the app actually offers, as in (35) to (40):

- (35) [Male-20s] No estoy  
I am not  
[I'm absent]
- (36) [Male-40s] Hey there! I'm NOT using *WhatsApp*
- (37) [Male-40s] I'm not lazy! I'm just on my energy saving move 🤖

20. "If the WhatsApp shit can smile, you can smile too" (author's translation).

- (38) [Female-40s]    &Sin Estado&  
                              &Without Status&  
                              [&Without any status&]
- (39) [Male-40s]    *En una reunion con las plantas*  
                              In a meeting with the plants  
                              [At a meeting with my plants]
- (40) [Female-20s]    *Ocupada, estoy peinando a mi tortuga* 🐢  
                              Busy, am combing my tortoise 🐢  
                              [Busy, I'm combing my tortoise's hair 🐢]

In some cases, users combine this intertextuality with incongruity, as in the case of (40), for example, since it is logically impossible to comb a hairless tortoise. It can be argued that the “source text” of this creative intertextuality is easily recognized by most *WhatsApp* users (except for those who ignore how to edit their profile information). This might explain why it is the most frequent users resort to as it contributes to presenting themselves as witty, creative, but also as having the know-how to play with default statuses. In terms of aggressiveness, it might be said that this form of intertextuality is the least aggressive (see below) since it is easily recognized by the audience (Norrick 1989).

*Incongruity*. Etymologically derived from the Latin word “*incongruus*” (from in- ‘not’ + *congruus* ‘agreeing, suitable’),<sup>21</sup> being incongruous amounts to lack of harmony, conformity, consistency or propriety.<sup>22</sup> Incongruity has traditionally been considered a core aspect of humour, especially in the work of Suls (1972, 1977, 1983; see also Koestler 1964; Shultz 1972; Forabosco 1992; among many others).

It is important to remember, however, that incongruity on its own does not suffice to generate humour as resolution of incongruity also needs to take place. In fact, incongruity on its own may only lead to non-humorous puzzlement. This has often been referred to as the incongruity-resolution framework:

*Incongruity and* resolution is defined as cognitive mastery. Seen from this perspective, both the perception of the incongruity and its resolution are essential components for the humor process. (Forabosco 1992: 45)

As argued by Wyer and Collins (1992: 665), “the most common general conception of humor assumes that it is stimulated by the sudden awareness of an incongruity between two objects or events, or the concepts associated with them.” More recently, Dynel (2016) has argued that:

21. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/incongruous> (accessed 12 December 2018).

22. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, available at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/incongruous> (accessed 12 December 2018).

Incongruity is considered the sine qua non for the emergence of humor, and it is also used as the acid test for it. Most contemporary linguists and psychologists (e.g., Attardo, 1994; Dynel, 2011, 2012, 2013; Forabosco, 1992, 2008; Martin, 2007) agree that the workings of jokes (and verbal humor in general) conform to the incongruity-resolution framework in the version put forward by Suls (1972, 1983) and Shultz (1972, 1976). (Dynel 2016: 672)

Within incongruity, a classic case is that of puns, which the WhatsApp users of the corpus often employ in combination with other resources (as in Examples (30) and (34) above) or as the only trigger for humour, as illustrated by (41) and (42):

(41) [Male-40s] *Cómo me río de Janeiro*  
[How I laugh at Janeiro]

(42) [Male-40s] *Soy BIOlento*  
[I'm BIOlent]

In (41), the message is senseless, its humour lying in the pun between the name of the Brazilian city (Rio de Janeiro) and the Spanish verb “reír” (to laugh) when conjugated in the first person singular “río” (I laugh). In (42), the user is generating a more complex script since he is playing with the misspelling of “violent” as “biolent” whilst presenting himself as a committed citizen concerned about biologic, sustainable products. Whether their messages actually succeed in triggering humour in their audience is a different matter and will be dealt with in future research, as already pointed out.

Incongruous statuses may also play with paradox, where users divide their message into two parts whose meanings oppose, causing a certain surprise for readers but also “inviting reflection,”<sup>23</sup> as in the oxymoron present in Example (43), which also seems to play with the alliteration of the sound [s] and (44), where the emoji contradicts the verbal part of the message:

(43) [Male-30s] *Soy un tipo serio que sonrío bastante*  
Am a guy serious that smiles quite a lot  
[I'm a serious guy that smiles quite a lot]

(44) [Male-40s] *Sin gafas...* 😊  
[Without glasses] 😎

Finally, there are just a few examples (2 out of 25) where users creatively play with the multimodal relationship between the verbal profile status and the accompa-

23. <http://www.retorigas.com/2009/06/8-ejemplos-varios-de-paradoja.html> (accessed 27 August 2017)

nying profile picture, which serves in both cases to provide a resolution to the apparently incongruous textual message:

(45) [Male-20s]      *Origen!* 😊  
                           [*Origin!* 😊]

(46) [Male-20s]      *¡Preséntame a la diva que llevas dentro!*  
                           Introduce me to the diva that you carry inside!  
                           [Introduce me to the diva that you really are on the inside!]

Thus, in (45), the user's verbal status needs to be related to the profile photograph of himself as a small kid to resolve the incongruity. A similar case is that of (46), where the user is disguised as a drag queen; the "diva" inside him. This is a particularly interesting case, since it is the only case where any sexual allusions are made, sexual humour being risky in most cultures (see Ruch and Forabosco 1996). In this case, the user is a highly creative and original male in his 20s, who often goes purposely against normativity (especially regarding gender).

#### 4.4 Humorous statuses, gender and age

As the previous examples have shown, the majority of humorous statuses in the corpus belong to male users, who account for 80% of the cases as opposed to 20% by female users. Although oversimplistic generalisations regarding humour and gender should be avoided (Kotthoff 2006: 6), results may seem to point to a male-dominance in the case of *WhatsApp* statuses (at least in the corpus at hand), thus reinforcing the stereotype that "it [is] not regarded as well-behaved for women to play the clown and fool around" (Kotthoff 2006: 5). At a smaller scale, however, it is not possible to identify any preferred pattern for these female *WhatsApp* users "to do humour" since they resort both to intertextuality and incongruity. In fact, there are examples where the user seems to be using humour (or at least a witty remark) to reinforce traditional and normativity female roles such as that of the mother. This is the case of (47), where the user employs a pun to present herself as a "creative mother," the accompanying profile picture being of herself and her two kids:

(47) [Female-40s]      *Criando y creando*  
                           [Raising and creating]

Other female users, however, seem to use intertextuality to precisely break with such normativity. This is the case of Example (38), repeated here for the sake of clarity as (48), where the user, who is a divorced woman in her late 40s, seems to be rejecting the normativity of aligning to a civil status (e.g., married, single, etc.):

- (48) [Female-40s] &Sin Estado&  
&Without Status&  
[&With no status&]

With regard to age, it is first important to remember that the participants were divided into by five age groups in a proportion replicating the ratio of use provided by secondary sources (i.e., Statista and infogr.am), as was illustrated by Table 1, repeated here as Table 4 for the sake of clarity:

**Table 4.** Age and gender of the subjects

Age span	Gender		Total (n=)	Ratio
	Female	Male		
20s	12	12	24	11.65%
30s	16	16	32	15.53%
40s	37	37	74	35.92%
50s	26	26	52	25.24%
60s (+60s)	12	12	24	11.65%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>100%</b>

This ratio will be used, thus, to consider the influence of age in the use of humour in the corpus at hand, for example, for the group in their 40s ( $n = 74$ ) and so on. It is also important to bear in mind, however, that these results cannot be generalised to the Spanish population given the limited size of the sample but can indeed show interesting tendencies that might be reflecting more generalised behaviours, especially since very little research on age and humour has been carried out (cf. Ruch et al. 1990).

Taking these factors into account, results show that the group that uses humour more frequently as a self-presentation strategy are users in their 20s (20.83%), with a preference for the incongruity-resolution pattern in contrast to the other groups. This group is followed by users in their 40s; 17.56% of whom opt for humorous statuses as a self-presentation strategy and seem to prefer more aggressive humour based on intertextuality. In comparison, the other three groups show a lower percentage: 9.37% for those in their 30s, 8.33% for those in their 60s and the lowest of all, 5.76% for those in their 50s. As already pointed out, the scarcity of the sample might be biasing the results but also other aspects such as the lack of know-how in the case of the older groups, with results in line with Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya (2015a, 2015b), where older users tend to employ default statuses rather than edit it themselves. It is thus open to future research to zero in on this variable, which might also be due to other sociological factors such as employment, educational background, etc. Alternatively, retired participants who have the know-how



might be willing to give vent to humour besides showing their knack for using “new” media, which might explain the increase in the 60s group. Unfortunately, however, more data are indeed necessary to test this hypothesis, which opens avenues for future research.

## 5. Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to answer the following research questions, repeated here for the sake of clarity:

- i. Do Spanish *WhatsApp* users employ humour as a self-presentation strategy on their *WhatsApp* statuses? If so, to what extent and in what frequency?
- ii. What are the strategies users resort to in order to ‘create’ humorous *WhatsApp* statuses?
- iii. Do the sociological variables of gender and age play a role in the use of humour as a type of self-presentation strategy?

With regard to the first question, results show that humour is used on 25 out of 206 occasions, rendering a ratio of 12.62%, slightly lower than the most frequent self-generated status (i.e. emotional statuses), which accounts for 14.56% of the cases. Humour, therefore, cannot be argued to be oft-used as a self-presentation strategy, maybe given the potential risks it entails – i.e., being misunderstood, appearing to others as a nerdy character, etc. As revealed by results, most of the users under scrutiny still opt for automatically-generated statuses, which add up to almost one third of the total (29.61%). As for the strategies employed to display humour in their profile statuses, users mostly resort to two major strategies that can be subsumed under the macro strategy of bisociation. On the one hand, users often resort to intertextuality, using other texts and discourses to re-create a humorous playing, e.g., by mocking inspirational statuses or automatically-generated default statuses. On the other, they can also opt for incongruity (e.g., by means of puns). Quite often, these strategies are combined and closely interrelated. In terms of self-presentation, hence, these users claim to be interested in displaying a playful but also an original, creative image for themselves in others’ eyes. A different matter altogether being whether or not they actually succeeding in being perceived by others as such.

Finally, and in relation with the variables of gender and age in the use of humour, there seems to be a dominant trend for the male users to display more humour than their female counterparts. More obscure, however, is the case of age, since no conclusive results seem to have been achieved, most likely due to the limited sized of the dataset. Nonetheless, there seems to be a preference for the use

of humour amongst male users in their 20s and 40s. Further research is needed to ascertain whether age plays a role in the case of humorous displays. Together with this variable, other aspects worth investigating include the perception by others of humorous displays. In fact, as an ever-increasing means of communication, *WhatsApp* is liable to become a breeding ground for researchers in different but interconnected fields such as sociology, linguistics, psychology and so on.

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## Inviting a purchase

### A multimodal analysis of staged authenticity in WeChat social selling

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The present study investigates the pragmatic strategies and effects of self-presentation performance in a social selling context either by way of status updates or through group chat in WeChat, a popular social networking platform in China. Drawing on Goffman's (1959, 1974, 1981) outstanding research on self-presentation, frame, and footing, as well as Page's (2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2018) exploration in digital narrative, this chapter analyzes data collected from WeChat Moments and WeChat chat logs to uncover their staged authenticity and the relative social value that it entails. The results of our analysis of both screen data and user data show that the meticulously intertwined and multimodally presented communicative acts of social selling on this particular social platform are the outcome of frame-shifting and frame-overlapping strategies on the one hand and highly crafted staged authenticity on the other.

**Keywords:** frames, footing, self-presentation, WeChat, status update, group chat, social selling, influencer, multimodal analysis, staged authenticity, pragmatic strategy

#### 1. Introduction

In a world where people are managing their interpersonal relationships mainly through a chain of communicative acts that transcend our traditional understanding of language modality on various social networking sites (SNSs), the motivated approach to the online presentation of self, as well as various social and cognitive factors that influence it, have aroused great interest from such diverse disciplines as psychology, sociology, philosophy, and communication studies. While these disciplines would apply different terms in pursuing their own studies (e.g.,



self-presentation, self-idealization, self-disclosure, self-verification, self-praise, true self, etc.) in different registers ranging from emails (e.g., Georgakopoulou 1997), blogs (e.g., Toma, Hancock and Ellison 2008; Dayter 2014, 2016; Sievers et al. 2015; Toma and Carlson 2015), vlogs (e.g., Misoch 2015), to synchronous (e.g., Joinson 2001; Bargh, McKenna and Fitzsimons 2002; Tidwell and Walther 2002) as well as asynchronous chats (e.g., Ellison, Heino and Gibbs 2006; Schwämmlein and Wodzicki 2012; Maíz-Arévalo, this volume), these studies focus, explicitly or implicitly, on users' divergent and convergent online self-presentation and different efforts invested for the benefits of social connection and interpersonal bonding (cf. Sunakawa 2020; Xie, Tong and Yus 2020). In the literature, findings on hyperpersonal (e.g., Walther 1996, 2007; Toma and Carlson 2015) vs. authentic presentations (e.g., Bargh, McKenna and Fitzsimons 2002) are mixed. It appears, though, that 'unacquainted observants' (Sievers et al. 2015) orient more to the reading of authentic presentations. Nevertheless, it seems to be a consensus that, on SNSs, self-presentation practices, both strategically and reflexively displayed, are socially negotiated and semiotically constructed communicative acts. In this participatory culture of online environments where self-presentation is a central act, and in this sharing age when internet retailing is growing exponentially, the pragmatic aspects of self-presentation in profit-oriented communication, especially in China's booming practice of social selling,<sup>1</sup> are comparatively under-explored within the fields of pragmatics and discourse analysis. Social selling in this chapter refers in particular to the business model whereby individuals, self-employed or employed by a particular company, retail through individual-based social networking accounts, e.g., WeChat. They either represent their product brands, or find their own sources of goods supply, and capitalize on personal contacts on the social networking site to do business. They present, to some extent, features of *social media influencers* who can persuade others to act based on their recommendations and their straightforward relationship with target customers, generally gathered through e-word-of-mouth (Qualman 2013; Backaler 2018). In WeChat, where users can friend each other through various channels, ranging from close relations to remote connections (e.g., people nearby), the lines between the influencers' "friends" and "potential customers"<sup>2</sup> can be quite blurry, leading to more fine-tuned pragmatic work involving a combined manipulation of narrative and semiotic resources. Yet, unlike blog

1. In China, hundreds of thousands of consumers have launched their own sales businesses on networks such as Tmall, Taobao, and Pinduoduo, and the recent covid-19 pandemic has also forced more businesses to shift their resources to online selling. According to Stevens (2020), in February 2020 more than 5,000 real estates from 100 Chinese cities resorted to Taobao Live to advertise homes to buyers.

2. The two quoted terms "friends" and "potential customers" will be elaborated in Section 2.1.

shoppers who cultivate their product intimacy through their embodied image presentation, or a cultivation of “persona intimacy” (e.g., Abidin and Thompson 2012), influencers in this study mainly resort to multimodal narrative activities to encourage a purchase. Thus, the main concern of this chapter rests on outlining the pattern of communicative acts (van Leeuwen 2004) that WeChat social-selling influencers adopt in promoting their endorsed products. Mainly informed by studies on narrative and its application to digital communication (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008; Page 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2018) and Goffman’s outstanding research on self-presentation (Goffman 1959), frames (Goffman 1974), and footing (Goffman 1979, 1981), this study explores the interaction between the affordances, i.e., the forms of communication made possible by digital technologies, and the practices therein (i.e., the practices of social selling). We will show: (1) how WeChat social-selling influencers, when composing an advertised text and inviting people to purchase, engage in self-presentation in the Moments they post publicly; and (2) what pragmatic effects these selves, unintentionally projected or intentionally represented, achieve in terms of the follow-up deals for their endorsed products. Our conceptualization of the term ‘presentation’ reflects, from an etic perspective, Goffman’s (1959) observation that people’s performance can be “given,” or “given off.”

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces the research background covering the theoretical framework and key notions involved. Section 3 presents the trajectory of the research, including the data and methods adopted for its analysis. Section 4 addresses the research questions through multimodal analysis and case studies. Section 5 briefly summarizes the findings and reflects on the directions for future research in this field.

## 2. Research background

### 2.1 Social selling in WeChat

Social networking platforms are capable of fostering new social connections, enhancing human relationships that already exist in real life, as well as favoring expanded networks of weak and latent ties (boyd and Ellison 2007; van Dijck 2013; Xie and Yus 2017, 2018; Yus 2017). As networked connectedness plays an increasingly important role in the organization of everyday sociality, users’ online connections do not necessarily parallel their offline contacts. The WeChat app is a good example. One of its functions is called 朋友圈 *péngyǒuquān* (“Moments” in the English interface), which allows users to keep in touch with people on their contact list; this function theoretically limits the public space to an audience of “friends” who have been individually ratified by the account owner and are in

principle known to the owner. This non-anonymous setting, where relationships are anchored in a number of ways through institutions and mutual friends, seems to place more constraints on the freedom of self-presentation. Yet WeChat's in-built 'friends-finding' affordances, ranging from mobile contacts and code-scanning to 'friend radar' (quickly adding friends in the vicinity) and 'joining people nearby,' are technically expanding the scope of "friends" from the persons we know, to those "we may or should know" (van Dijck 2013: 202). As a result, one's social network often snowballs rapidly across different social communities (cf. Sandel et al. 2019). In terms of social selling, these weak ties are "potential customers" that could possibly transform online social value into real offline rewards. This shifting function in social media from sociality-centered connectivity to a connectivity focused on the exploitation of resources is "instrumental for (personal) storytelling and narrative self-presentation" (van Dijck 2013: 200). Since 2016, the WeChat app has introduced subtle tactics to personalize basic rules for the public visibility of users' Moments, which can be rather exclusive depending on the owners' preferences. Instead of allowing their own Moments to be visible along their timelines to all friends on the contact list, users can strategically categorize their friends by applying different group tags (another WeChat affordance), allowing part of their Moments to be visible to a certain selected group or just themselves. Yet, social selling is all about gaining a wider readership. The coupling of both business conducting and interpersonal relationship management raises privacy issues to the public at large. On the one hand, the social context is dynamic (Fetzer 2004, 2017). The determined yet overlapping nature of tag creation makes categorization a rather intricate business that cannot totally ensure a "pure" context which the account owners can possibly foresee. In this non-anonymous setting, the context may still collapse in the sense that each friend on the contact list is an embodiment of discrepant roles that entail, in Goffman's term, both frontstage performers and backstage team members within the complex social networks. On the other hand, WeChat users doing social selling have vested interest in both personal and professional branding which can often be realized through regular narrative updates in the Moments that they share. As indicated by previous literature and further demonstrated by this chapter, the traceability of their online social behaviors can to some extent enhance users' credibility, or authenticity as social-selling influencers, and maximize their connectivity. In China, issues concerning WeChat communication attract much academic attention related to advantages and disadvantages for both interpersonal relationship and impression management (e.g., Lü 2016). But this kind of research has mainly been done from a non-linguistic perspective. The aim of this study is to make a contextualized account of the relative value of self-presentation in the specificity of digital discourse (see Yus, this volume, on self-presentation through locative apps). This means that we are interested in the

mechanism and effects of the highly crafted self-presentation, or stage authenticity in the communicative acts of social selling.

## 2.2 Theoretical perspective

Goffman (1976: 84) points out that advertisers tend to draw upon ritualized social situations and to render the “glimpsed action readable” in such a way that they “conventionalize our conventions” and “stylize what is already a stylization.” The message behind his usually complex prose style is the presupposition of “ritual,” which is treated as the basic element in his observation of social structure that lends “solidity and order” to the fragility of our day-to-day lives (Manning 1992: 5). In Goffman (1959), the concept of ritual is linked to self-presentation, frame and footing. In his account of a dramaturgical theory on self-presentation, we find stimulating examples among a wide range of occupational roles taken distinctly out of different kinds of rituals; the concept of frame is made up of a bundle of symbolic meanings, social rituals and hierarchies of authority that orient participants’ behaviors; and footing, or the change of it, is always conducted in full-fledged ritual interchanges. As Goffman (1981: 153) puts it, “we quite routinely ritualize participation frameworks.” In the field of commerce, this ritualization is mainly manifested through attending to customers’ needs, offering services beyond their expectations and giving options. When the internet connection has become the backbone of our everyday life, the world of service encounters is changing, and so is the way in which product promotion is conducted in these encounters (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Fernández-Amaya and Hernández-López 2019). E-service encounters are customer-oriented (Meuter et al. 2000) and feature informed choice which, rather than interaction, is at the core of e-customers’ preference for online purchases (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2015). Thus, the data collected for the present study are mainly naturally-occurring digitized semiotic representations strategically composed by social selling influencers, and are approached through the lens of Goffman’s legacy, which has been fruitfully applied to research on, e.g., public relations and online social interaction (e.g., Johansson 2007; Manning 2008; Hogan 2010). By examining how the “informed choice” in the emergent register of social selling in WeChat Moments is represented, this study tries to contribute a contextualized interpretation of Goffman’s “subtle and extensive body of work” (Manning 2008: 679).

### 2.2.1 *Dramaturgical theory, frame and footing*

Goffman (1959) proposes that people may, more often than not, communicate strategically to create a desired impression of themselves. He conceptualizes identity as a continuous performance and analyzes people’s practices using a dramaturgical

metaphor, suggesting that, in any given situation, individuals are actors who navigate the frontstage, where they intentionally give others an impression of being competent and moral, and the backstage, where they are supposed to keep undesirable impressions to themselves.<sup>3</sup> When situated in computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC) studies, this demarcation between frontstage and backstage can be strategically blurred so that self-presentation is often a tailored performance to evoke different frames for social engagement (cf. Raffel 2013).

Goffman uses *frame* in an attempt to capture the phenomenon that is socially constructed, contextually bound, historically grounded on networks of meaning and shared references that help individuals determine a situation out of an ambiguous reality, and regulate how these individuals undertake the required normative action, regardless of their predisposition. One important aspect Goffman attempts to formalize about the concept of frame is its vulnerability, or its manipulability (Manning 1991). It can be transformed, or “keyed,” from one schema of interpretation to another and can be designed, or “fabricated” to mislead others. A classical illustration is the situation of children playing doctors in which their childish understanding of medicine is framed into a fully adult competence (Goffman 1974: 161). When situated in the context of CMC, and social selling in particular, frames are mostly concerned with intimacy evoked by personal relationships, as opposed to distancing evoked by product-oriented business relationships. Footing, as an analytic term, concerns the participants’ stance in the interaction. It can be divided into the three parts of animator, author and principal (Goffman 1981: 145). Animator is the person who speaks; author is the person who composes, and principal, the person who “has committed himself [*sic*] to what the words say” (Goffman 1981: 144), and this often means that “the individual speaks... in the name of ‘we,’ not ‘I’” (Goffman 1981: 145). People may change their footings when, for example, they shift from saying something about themselves to reporting what someone else has said. This change is another way of talking about a change in the frame for alignment of self and other (Tannen 2009).

This production format has been introduced into the analysis of digital discourse (cf. Dynel 2011) whereby the omnipresent animator may be flexibly combined with either one or both of the other two at different communication levels in the collapsed context (Marwick and boyd 2010). For the present study, we argue that in the communicative context of WeChat Moments, authenticity can be a staged performance in which the three dimensions can be strategically integrated and multimodally/visually represented within different moves of a narrative.

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3. It should be noted that the backstage is also where people can happily “be themselves” without the burden of having to stage an impression on others. Thanks go to Francisco Yus for this good point.

### 2.2.2 *Staged authenticity in digital narratives*

CMC discourse is usually visual and/or multimodal (van Leeuwen 2004; Forceville 2020). The non-verbal elements, including images, more often than not, contribute to meaning production and expression. The communicative acts of social selling are often a strategically mixed but coherent combination of photos, narrative and typography that may function as a “lubricant for connecting people and products” (van Dijck 2013: 206). In recent years, narrative research has paid more attention to the multiple, fragmentary and irreducible situated form of practice that functions in a wide range of social arenas (de Fina and Georgakopoulou 2008: 275), displaying an “interactionally collaborative achievement” involving all the participants (see Rühlemann and Gries 2015 for a review). This trend is an epistemological reflection of multimodality and collapsed context in its unfolding. While it has long been documented in literature that narrative language provides a process of “subjectification” (Schiffrin 1996: 169) for the presentation of both psychological and social-cultural selves, in the field of social selling what matters more seems to be the presentation of an ‘authentic’ self, albeit a staged one (MacCannell 1973), for the purpose of engaging potential customers and achieving potential benefit (Abidin and Thompson 2012).

In Goffman’s (1981) terms, the authentic speaker in everyday face-to-face interaction often functions seamlessly as the principal, author, and animator of their own talk. In internet-mediated social life, the image of an ‘authentic’ speaker can also have the attribute of reworking traditional symbolic resources in new ways, which may involve “overtly displaying their own inauthenticities, playfully and self-mockingly” (Coupland 2010: 428). And it is the recipients who determine, (re)build or believe in the authenticity of the speaker according to their pre-understanding and/or contextual inferences. This perspective coincides, to some extent, with that of van Leeuwen (2001), who believes that authenticity is not necessarily based on the spontaneity of talk, but may be closely related to the modality in social semiotics, “concerned more with the moral or artistic authority of the representation than with its truth or reality” (van Leeuwen 2001: 396). Pictorial and multimedia representations, a prevalent part of online discourse, are important in displaying authenticity, but as van Leeuwen (2001: 395) points out, “our judgment of the truth of a photographic image depends on the look of photographic images and on norms for interpreting.”

Thus, to understand the mediated authenticity of social media influencers in providing informed choice, we adopt an ethnographic perspective combining the audience uptake and the multilingual resources used (Androutsopoulos 2015a, 2015b). For the social selling under study, our observation of influencers’ practices at the targeted social networking site mainly focuses on the composition of multimodal narrative, and audience uptake is resourced through follow-up interviews.

The Goffman-inspired approach may offer an interpretation of social-selling practices through an examination of the interrelationship between the instrumental frames and footings, and staged authenticity in WeChat Moments.

### 3. Data and methods

Following a discourse-centered online ethnography (Androutsopoulos 2008), our research paradigm is qualitative in nature: the data collected include multimodal screen data and interview data elicited through direct contact with the influencers concerned. In terms of screen data, a process of step-by-step zoom-in is adopted for the identification of communicative acts, frames enacted and self-presentation cues. We first asked three friends of the second author to assist in collecting social-selling posts by way of screenshots from their own personal accounts, thus enlarging the variety of commodities under investigation. This week-long (15–21 October 2017) concentrated yet random collection (326 screenshots from 10 WeChat accounts)<sup>4</sup> already manifests certain patterns and allows us to paint a general picture of the way frames are enacted by the influencers when designing their social selling. These frames are evidenced by both photos in the Moments and the accompanied linguistic descriptions, which are able to provide cues of footings that show the “structural basis” (Goffman 1979: 26) for analysis. We also check for certain cues of self-presentation in terms of the explicit self-referent, on the basis of which we design our semi-structured interview questions.

We then zoomed in on some individual accounts for in-depth scrutiny to complement our reading of self-presentation where frames are also analyzed on an emergent basis. Since the likelihood of getting responses from every social-selling influencer in our study is very slim, and due to ethical concerns, we narrowed our choices down to two informants (J and B) because of their professional identity as social-selling influencers (B, whose typical way of doing business yields additional data of 91 messages having 9,558 words in total, pictures excluded) and of their willingness to cooperate (actually J is among the few individual account owners willing to spare more time for a follow-up interview). We are fully aware of the limitation involved in the small-scale data, which spans a period of 3 months (from July through September 2017). But as a qualitative study following an ethnographical approach, we do not have any intention to generalize our findings beyond the present work. We also believe that human beings are at once individuals and social beings (Kecskes 2019; cf. Scheff 2005) and that they can be our looking

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4. WeChat social-selling cases in our data are mainly represented by part-timers ( $n = 7$ ) who promote different types of commodities.

glasses into the social-cultural environment where they do things and present their selves. Social structures are coercive to the extent that we must operate “within their terms” (Davies and Harré 1990: 52) to be recognizable and acceptable. And this undoubtedly applies to the structure of a social-selling community.

Additional data have been collected mainly through phone interviews and chat logs with the two informants. The expected trajectory of our mixed-method research in addressing the interrelationship between communicative acts and staged authenticity is: (1) to identify, from the randomly collected screen data, the way frames are enacted in the context of social selling; (2) to identify, from the screen data, how our subjects manage staged authenticity in self-presentation within their communicative acts of encouraging a purchase through the change of footing; and (3) to evaluate the pragmatic effects of intentional and unintentional self-presentation in social selling through a detailed reading of interview and screen data. All the collected screenshots have been manually classified by the second author to ensure consistency, and checked by the first author for reliability. The findings of our analysis are presented in the next section.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 The narration in WeChat social selling

Commodities included in our data are mainly promoted through two different types of account owners based on their screen names – product ID ( $n = 3$ ) that explicitly manifest their business, like *Lè Huì Jiā Jū* (Lehui Household Products), and personal ID ( $n = 7$ ) represented by the owners’ nicknames, as can be seen in Figure 1.<sup>5</sup>

The products sold under these two types of accounts include household products such as beddings and pajamas ( $n = 44$ ), home-cooked food ( $n = 10$ ), local specialties ( $n = 56$ ), cosmetics ( $n = 55$ ), health products ( $n = 63$ ), and a variety of fashion items ( $n = 98$ ). Our preliminary reading reveals that narrative in the product ID is more consistent in pattern while narrative in the personal ID is more varied in style. Nevertheless, they both exhibit ritual(ized) practices, which are found, although in a less artful way, in traditional printed advertisements, i.e., product photos accompanied by short written descriptions. We have identified three communicative acts which consistently emerge in both product and personal accounts: informing, affiliating and appealing. These acts may not co-occur but may be sequenced differently, as the following two screenshots show:

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5. For ethical reasons, personal ID in the screenshot is anonymized.



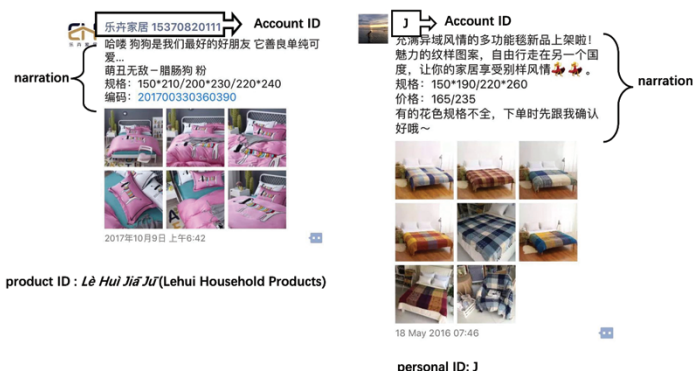


Figure 1. Screenshot of two types of registered accounts: Product ID vs. personal ID

everybody 来让我们一起欢唱: 我有一头小毛驴 我从来也不骑, 有一天我心血来潮骑着去赶集...Pt 带来儿时的回忆陪伴我们入眠! 小毛驴 粉 蓝  
 面料: 60S长绒棉 + 极致刺绣  
 规格: 200\*230/220\*240  
 编码: [201700340370](#)



Figure 2. Screenshot of an ad from a professional account<sup>6</sup>

6. The English version of the text goes like this: Everybody [*sic*] let's sing along: I have a little donkey but / I have never ever ridden it / One day seized by a whim / I rode it and went to the market... Pt[*sic*] brings back childhood memories and lulls us to sleep! Little Donkey in pink and blue

Fabric: 60S long stapled-cotton + delicate embroidery

Size: 200\*230 / 220\*240

Item code: 201700340370

还是每年都要卖的款  
 还是每年的那个样子  
 还是每年的那种不够卖的裤子  
 所以，我觉得没有什么好介绍的  
 冬天你需要，正好我这里有~



Figure 3. Screenshot of an ad from an individual account<sup>7</sup>

While product specifications and photos taken from various angles have the explicit function of providing information, they are implicitly appealing to prospective customers through the presentation of details and perspective changes. What these two social selling accounts have in common are their photos which are consciously designed by giving consideration to techniques that can better set off promoted products in an idealized way. Both presentations demonstrate a flexible zoom-in on the products from different angles, a technique that can generate a feeling of intimacy, as if the promoted products were brought closer to the eyes of viewers. Although the verbal promotions follow different styles, both involve a change of footing.

The description in Figure 2 can be divided into (1) parts of address; (2) lyrics of a popular Chinese song; (3) assertion; and (4) description. Here the very vocative ‘everybody’ in English as an open-up increases the affiliation by creating a sense of on-the-spot spontaneity that pretends to change this part of narrative

7. The English version of the text may go like this:

The same style sold every year  
 The same design shown every year  
 The same jeans sold out every year  
 So, there is not much I need to reintroduce  
 What you need in winter, I just have them all here.  
 (The last image shows the specifications of the size of the jeans and its front size)

into a face-to-face exchange. The lyrics shared would easily resonate across a wide range of viewers. As is noted in literature, lyrics are usually rich in “connotative language that inspires ‘mental pictures’” (Stern and Gallagher 1991: 87; see also Barnet 1979; Abrams 1988), where “novel juxtapositions encourage the reader to experience something familiar in a fresh way” (Stern and Gallagher 1991: 87). The lyrics enact an intimacy frame through the choice of a song familiar to many, if not all, Chinese people. Although the influencer is not the author of the lyrics, an integration of the animator and principal is effected following the choice and sharing of the lyrics. The ellipsis “...” in the post serves as a demarcation, following which the frame changes. The influencer is imposing through an assertion an idea less shared than the lyrics, whose message aiming at encouraging a purchase enacts a business frame. While 我们 *wǒmen* in the assertion “Pt带来儿时的陪伴让我们入眠!” (Pt brings us childhood memories and lulls us to sleep) indicates the aspect of the speaker as a principal, we can also sense a reintegration of “author” back into animator and principal in that the frame has been shifted from the intimacy created by the sing-along part to that of business. The invitation to purchase is built upon the shifting of the intimacy frame into a business frame.

The account owner of Figure 3 resorts to a different style of generating the intimacy frame. The first three parallels (i.e., “The same style sold every year; The same design shown every year; The same jeans sold out every year”) function as a direct answer to a possible inquiry “what’s on sale?” serving as a justification by the influencer for giving “not much I need to reintroduce” in line 4. These four lines as part of the social selling generate at least two implications. On the one hand, this conversational footing as a direct participant in a dialogue of essentially goal-oriented exchanges enacts personal framing; on the other hand, the repetition of 还是 *háishì* ‘the same’ and 每年 *měinián* ‘every year’ in the parallel lines suggests a continuity of the business which enacts product-oriented framing. The overlap of two frames manifests the account owner’s conscious effort in staging an authenticity: By keying the product-oriented business frame through the fabricated personal framing of dialogue, the account owner creatively establishes her credibility as a reliable and popular social-selling influencer. The last line in the narrative is a combination of informing, affiliating, and appealing: by informing her ample stock of products through affiliated second and first personal pronouns 你 *nǐ* ‘you’ and 我 *wǒ* ‘I’, the influencer is indirectly inviting a purchase.

Such strategic performance is quite prevalent among accounts of personal IDs: the collected data show that 4 out of 7 personal-ID influencers are rather committed to crafting staged spontaneous talks; and that their posts of product look like a box of chocolates to the extent that without the known identity as an social-selling influencer, it is hard to tell whether the narrative is advertising or simply sharing a personal thought, as the following screenshot seems to indicate:

人类总有一种难以言说的无奈，看似有许多关于人生的选项摆在面前，可最后能抓到的却只能有一个。如果我们未曾见过那么多选项，就不会如此贪心，时刻取舍，才能在割裂中成熟。  
☀️☀️ 早安!



Figure 4. Screenshot of an ad from an individual account<sup>8</sup>

The contributor of this screenshot explains that the influencer has been promoting this kind of health products on a regular basis to such an extent that any person on her friend lists can tell instinctively whether she is “doing business” or “doing being ordinary” (Sacks 1984; Fetzer and Weizman 2019; Xie and Tong 2019). From our point of view, the influencer is not simply letting the picture communicate. It is true that a picture may speak a thousand words (Walther, Slovacek and Tidwell 2001) and this carefully-taken photo of the product, 枸杞 *gōuqǐ* ‘wolfberry’, most often used to make drinks in China, is not an exception. In the photo, the focus is obviously on the effect brought about by its conventional use, i.e., soaking, by way of which the influencer tries to promote a more real than ideal image of the product (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). This presentation renders the apparent casual outlet of chicken-soup-for-the-soul a purposeful design for the implication of self-praising: “Products like this are abundant on the market, yet I provide the best choice.” Besides, people who like to publicize chicken-soup-for-the-soul generally give an impression of being caring, which is reinforced by the emoji of a smiley sun, energizing and promising. In this way, an intimacy frame is enacted in which the influencer assumes an integration of animator, author, and principal and the communicative acts of informing (through the photo), affiliating and appealing (through the narrative of the “chicken-soup-for-the-soul” and the effect of the photo) are effectively done through a combined reading of both the text and the image.

Apart from these analyzed cases, what we can conclude from a general reading of the collected screen data include: (1) The general communicative acts of informing, affiliating and appealing are often meticulously intertwined and multimodally presented to strengthen the intended message of inviting a purchase; (2) these communicative acts are conducted through the change of footing by keying the intimacy frame through the fabrication of personal interaction, into the

8. The English version of the text may go like this: We human beings inevitably experience a sense of unspeakable helplessness. It seems that life presents a lot of choices in front of us; yet we only end up with a single choice. If we haven’t been offered so many choices, we wouldn’t have been so greedy. Only when we get to know what to take and what to give, can we really grow up.

☀️☀️ Good morning!

product-oriented frames; or by overlapping the intimacy and business frames; (3) the frame shifting and frame overlapping seem to indicate the influencer's conscious effort in staging authenticity, which creates a *gestalt* of meaning that conveys values not simply in what is said, but also by how it is said.

These macro-findings are a reflection of the fragmentary nature of narratives shared in WeChat Moments. To complete the picture, we zoomed in on the two influencers to seek more cues on self-presentation and its desired effects in a more consecutive fashion.

#### 4.2 The influencers in WeChat social selling

As has been briefed in the previous section, two influencers accepted an in-depth follow-up interview. From their narration, we found a conscious effort that the influencers invest in frame shifting and frame overlapping for performing the communicative acts of social selling. We wonder to what extent this intentional effort would go, i.e., whether those means of self-presentations we identified from our etic perspective coincide with the account owners' original design or their emic perspective under the meta-frame of social selling. So, the current investigation involves: (1) identification of self-presentation through a combination of semiotic resources, including photos, profiles, alias, and all the digitized verbal models; (2) corroborating the unintentional self-presentation from intentional ones through interviews; and (3) obtaining a pragmatic account of the relative value of staged authenticity in the specific register of social selling on the basis of both emic and etic interpretations. Since the focus is on macro-level ideas rather than micro-level features, what we present here are summative reports instead of verbatim transcriptions of the interview. But actual quotes are provided where necessary.

##### 4.2.1 Case study 1: *The influencer in WeChat Moments*

Influencer J has been promoting household products (mainly beddings) on and off since 2015. Using her single personal ID in WeChat as a platform for product promotion, she keeps her given name as the alias and uses as her avatar, occasionally depending on her 心情 *xīnqíng* 'mood,'<sup>9</sup> photos of scenery or decorative objects taken by herself. In her WeChat profile, one can find her authentic indication of gender and region (a specific district in a specific city) and given that she does not activate such popular privacy settings as "viewable by friends for last 3 days,"<sup>10</sup> one can scroll

9. *Pinyin* in quotation marks accompanied by English translations are actual quotes from the interviewed subjects.

10. The other two privacy settings are "viewable by friends for the last month" and "viewable by friends for the last six months."

down her sharing in Moments to the earliest posts to view her multifaceted way of life. In terms of her private life, she is not a very active user (3 to 4 updates per month on average) and the themes of her posts range from personal stories to forwarded news. But when it comes to social selling, we can see a constellation of promotions within a day and daily updates consecutively for 3 to 4 days. From these occasional intensive social-selling updates, we try to verify her self-presentation (of which she may not be aware) and staged authenticity (of which she is aware). We established eight salient features after an exhaustive reading of the data,<sup>11</sup> which are summarized in Table 1. We then corroborated our analysis in a follow-up interview with J.

**Table 1.** Salient features in digitized narratives for social selling

Features	Illustrations
explicit self-reference in singular form + smiley emoji	1. 最近感觉我自己特别卡哇伊呢 😊. 这么可爱的图案, 忍不住发出来。 Recently I feel myself so kawaii 😊. What a cute design. Just cannot help but share it.
explicit self-reference in plural form	2. 好多亲问我, 是不是纯棉, 百分之百优质纯棉, 我们自己工厂生产, 加工, 没有任何中间费用, 几百元品质=商场上千品质, 因为我们是出厂价 Many <i>qīn</i> 's <sup>12</sup> have asked me whether it is made of pure cotton. A hundred percent pure cotton of high quality. Manufactured and processed by <u>our</u> own factory. No intermediate cost involved. The quality of our products sold at a few hundred <i>yuan</i> = the quality of products sold at a few thousand <i>yuan</i> in the store, for <u>we</u> offer the outlet price
change of footings through evaluation	3. 亲们要的可爱系列来了 <i>Qīn</i> 's, the lovely series you ordered are now available 4. 高支全棉贡缎面料, 这么可爱的小兔子, 睡觉都特别香甜吧 Of high-count all-cotton satin. <u>This adorable little bunny will bring you sweet dreams.</u>
frequent application of emojis that seldom repeat throughout + chicken-soup-for-the-soul narrative	5. 一天有三分之一的时间 📱 在床上, 请对自己好一点 🍷 选择优质的床品, 让自己“背/被”有依靠 ❤️、有喜欢的带图询价 One third of a day 📱 is spent in bed. Please be kind to yourself 🍷 Choose beddings of high quality to give yourself something to rely/lie on ❤️. Ask for the price with the picture of your favorite.

11. Given all her view photos are ritualized product-presentation as shown in Figure 1, we list the digitized verbal models here only.

12. The phrase 好多亲 *hǎoduō qīn*, is an other-reference brought forth by the electronically-enabled nationwide Taobao culture, in which 亲 *qīn*, literally meaning 'dear', is what online vendors use to address their potential customers. Nowadays, this form of address is widely used among peer colleagues beyond the field of commerce.

## photo of chat log 6. Figure 5

好货大家都懂哈，关键是真心便宜呀，只要💰150/170，商场售价1000+，有个花型已售完，还剩图七六个花型，自用，送人，亲朋好友有需要的，都来吧，过了这村就没这店啦😁😁😁😁

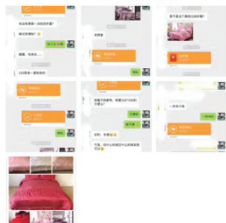


Figure 5. Screenshot of a multimodal social selling in Moments<sup>13</sup>

Even from an emic perspective, it is still tricky to distinguish what is “given” from what is “given-off” (Goffman 1959). In this study, we correlate it with Goffman’s three dimensions of production format. What examples 2, 3, and 6 have in common, as J herself acknowledged, is that they represent her direct responses, dialogically framed through the address terms, to her long-term customers’ inquiry, thus being both animator and author of the text. By resorting to these dialogic narratives in both linguistic forms and photos, she was following suit, being more 接地气 *jiēdìqì* ‘down to earth.’ This practice has been ritualized among social-selling influencers and would give other potential customers a sense of popularity and reliability. In this intentional practice she acted as an author and an animation of a principal other. The plural form 我们 *wǒmen* ‘we’ used for both self-reference and other-reference is, as J herself claimed, an unconscious choice without giving it too much thought because it is how social-selling influencers talk. In examples 1, 4, and 5 we can sense a style of intertextuality whereby J imitates what other social-selling influencers do for the 业内气息 *yè nèi qì xī* ‘jargon style,’ especially with the chicken-soup-for-the-soul narrative in example 5. J admitted that except for the smileys in the posts, which she consciously chose for the purpose of building an image of being easy-going and out-going, all the non-smiley emojis picked up and embedded like punctuations in the narrative, as shown in example 5, were the work of other advanced influencers. This direct reference to the connoisseur was her effort to ‘look the part.’ What is most interesting in this follow-up interview

13. The English version of the text may go like this:

Anyone can tell what good quality products look like. The point is, it is rather cheap, 💰 150/170, but the price can go to 1000+ at stores. One of the patterns is sold out. Only six patterns in Picture 7 are in stock. Keep it for yourself or give it as a gift, to your friends or your relatives. Order now. Once a deal is gone, it is gone for good. 😁😁😁😁

Note: The first 6 photos in Figure 5 are the screenshots of her chat logs with other customers on a closed deal.

is the first illustration on self-reference 最近我感觉自己特别卡哇伊呢 (*zuìjìn wǒ gǎnjué zìjǐ tèbié kǎwāyī ne*, ‘Recently I feel myself lovely’). When reading it out of context, J denied her authorship. The recovery of the accompanied photos reminded her, to our amusement, that she did animate these words, which she self-evaluated as “太不像我了” (*tài bú xiàng wǒ le*, ‘sounds so not like me’). When asked about the feedback from the friends on her contact lists for her intensive social-selling practice on certain days, J shared frankly that she had categorized her contact lists into friends and customers. While the customers can view *all* her updates, her friends would not receive her selling updates notifications because she did not want to disturb them. In case her friends intended to make a purchase, “他们会直接跟我联系” (*tāmen huì zhíjiē gēn wǒ liánxi* ‘they would contact me directly’), she explained. It seems that against the common sense of vulnerable interpersonal relationships, even the social influencers themselves know the disturbing nature of such social selling practice. Yet, given the existence of the social norm of such practice, they would carefully calibrate the communicative context and work on an idiosyncratic staging of their own authenticity. On the other hand, she does not mind letting her customers have a panorama view of her personal life, saying that “大家都这样, 没什么忌讳的” (*dàjiā dōu zhèyàng, méishénme jìhuì de* ‘Everybody<sup>14</sup> is doing it, so there is nothing to avoid as taboo’). What we can get from this single case in terms of staged authenticity and its effect on social selling may be that: (1) the dimension of author presents a conscious effort to strike a balance between a staged authenticity and an easily recognized principal of social selling; (2) authenticity work goes beyond the profiles and multimodal narratives. Both vertical viewability, or status updates along the timeline in one’s own Moments account, and the sharing of horizontal chat logs, or chats at a particular time with other customers, contribute to the influencer’s authentic credibility; and (3) pragmatically speaking, the influencer’s invested efforts in making digitized verbal models is targeted at enacting a staged authenticity that works at two levels: evoking the conventional social-selling business frame and following the convention of foot shifting to impose an intimate frame.

#### 4.2.2 Case study 2: The influencer in WeChat group chat

What sets influencer B apart from other social-selling influencers and arouses our interest is how he employs WeChat to promote his endorsed products. His promotion is conducted completely through his group chat (370 members by October 2017) where B himself is the only person that can talk and share within that group chat, while his updates in his own WeChat Moments are exclusively about his daily

14. Here “everybody” refers in particular to other social selling influencers.



activities with his family in America.<sup>15</sup> This exotic experience adds an authentic edge to his identity as 海外代购(*hǎiwài dàigòu* ‘overseas purchasing agent’), purchasing for customers in mainland China<sup>16</sup> various overseas commodities, from luxury goods to groceries. B uses his English name as his alias and his personal photo taken in the US as his profile picture. His profile also shows authentic indication of gender and region. To get to know B’s business, one has to be invited by one of the group members to join his group chat, a privileged membership status at that. The ID of the group chat is a combination of his two children’s English names plus the Chinese characters “妈妈美品汇” (*māmā měipǐnhuì* ‘Mama’s Beauty Products’), a strong hint of his target customers. Once invited in, one can receive from time to time B’s advertisements on a variety of overseas products that enjoy certain brand recognition in China. The social sellings in the group chat include semiotic descriptions and product photos taken either by B himself or from other digital advertisements. They are sent separately like messages, but the semiotic description is rather informatively designed as the following example shows:

🇺🇸 感恩节lancome 兰蔻特价再来 🍷🍷 粉色盖子的是多效修护营养日霜，含spf 30防晒，金色盖子的是多效修护营养晚霜，都是50ml 🍷🍷 这款霜我也用，里面有很多营养成分，非常保湿而且把皮肤也会慢慢养细养白，早晚霜各一瓶今天只要 799.99RMB 🇺🇸 包税直邮 🍷🍷 单独早霜或晚霜 429.99RMB 🇺🇸 包税直邮，建议日霜晚霜都买 🍷🍷

Figure 6. Screenshot of a social selling discourse from the *hǎiwài dàigòu* group chat<sup>17</sup>

15. To have a family in America is still something many Chinese envy and aspire to.

16. Part of the reason for the popularity of this shopping model is due to the fact that the prices for luxury goods can be 30 to 40 percent higher in China than abroad.

17. The English version of the text may go like this: 🇺🇸 Thanksgiving Day. Lancôme special offer is here once more 🍷🍷 The one with the pink cover is the Bienfait multi-vital sunscreen cream with broad spectrum SPF 30. The one with the golden cover is the Bienfait multi-vital night cream. Both come in 50ml 🍷🍷 I use this cream, too. It contains multiple nutrients. Super moisturizing. It can gradually refine and brighten your skin. One day-care plus one night-care costs only RMB 799.99. 🇺🇸 Tax included. Direct mail 🍷🍷 If bought separately, each costs RMB 429.99 🇺🇸 Tax included. Direct mail. A combined purchase is recommended 🍷🍷

Similar to the promotions in other influencers' Moments updates, this message also entails the communicative acts of informing (e.g., product description), affiliating (e.g., "I use this cream, too") and appealing (e.g., "A combined purchase is recommended"). The listing of the examples is for the sake of convenience instead of indicating a clear separation, for explicit personal evaluations like "It can gradually refine and brighten your skin" implicitly appeal for a purchase. What's most interesting in this message is the self-reference in "I use this cream, too," which would be more appropriate if said by a female (B is a male). This direct self-reference in making an evaluation on products that are exclusively female-designed can be found elsewhere in the data, making us wonder whether authenticity is a concern when promoting the products in the group chat.

While observing B's data, we also noticed that the most salient feature of B's messages is the abundant use of emojis (see Dainas & Herring, this volume). Literature shows that while they may be deemed inappropriate in professional contexts, emojis have been found to be capable of disambiguating the communicative intention behind messages (Kaye, Wall and Malone 2016; Kaye, Malone and Wall 2017), whether they are face ones or non-face ones (Riordan 2017), and of providing insight into the users' personality with a reasonable level of accuracy (Wall, Kaye and Malone 2016; Marengo, Giannotta and Settanni 2017). Combined with text messages, the application of emojis can increase information richness leading to playfulness that facilitates social connectedness and identity expressiveness (Hsieh and Tseng 2017; see also Danesi 2017; Evans 2017; Seargeant 2019; Giannoulis and Wilde 2020). B's influencing practices apparently bear this out. A thick reading of the data collected from this channel reveals that apart from the national flag emojis like 🇺🇸 and 🇨🇦, which are the signature start-offs of nearly all the messages indicating the manufacturers of to-be-promoted products, the other most commonly used emoji is 😂, which is semiotically more intensive than 😍 indicating "I love you" or "I love this."<sup>18</sup> Previous research (e.g., Wolf 2000) indicates that females use emojis more for humorous effect, while males often use them to tease and/or ridicule. In this context, it obviously performs the humorous function. We therefore made a thorough reading of the collected data and found that it occurs repeatedly and consistently in the following digitized communicative contexts.

Both contextualized reading and B's description reveal that the funny look of this drooling emoji somehow strengthens the force of appealing for a purchase in a less imposing way, regardless of its context. On the other hand, among B's regular updates in his Moments (more than ten updates per month during this study), this emoji occurs exclusively in the context of evaluation of food and cuisine, as Figure 7 shows:

18. Illustrations are available at <https://emojipedia.org/people/> (accessed 21 November 2017).

**Table 2.** The context in which the emoji 🍷 is used

Context descriptions	Illustrations
on sale	1. 限时折扣 🍷 Flash-sale 🍷
service	2. 包税直邮 🍷 Tax included. Direct mail. 🍷
feature	3. 可拆卸 🍷 Removable 🍷
promotion	4. 明星唯一选择 🍷 Public celebrities' exclusive choice 🍷
specification	5. 限量版钻石盒 🍷 Limited-edition packed in diamond-shaped box 🍷
evaluation	6. 做出来的菜非常鲜美 🍷 Make your dishes super delicious 🍷
recommendation	7. 建议日霜晚霜都买 🍷 A combined purchase is recommended 🍷

包子太好吃，再来口小酒，美的不要了 🍷  
螃蟹？！那是醉的，特级大师功夫，好吃的  
的你想不到 🍷 🍷 🍷

**Figure 7.** Screenshot of a routine update in B's WeChat Moments<sup>19</sup>

19. The English version of the text may go like this: The steamed stuffed buns are so yummy, and to go with a sip of wine, I'm in heaven 🍷 The crabs? They are liquor preserved. Only a super master chef can make this. Yummy beyond your imagination 🍷

As Table 2 demonstrates, in social selling, this drooling emoji is frequently used in such different contexts that it seems to have assumed a more general function of highlighting and have less to do with personal evaluations. In contrast, in the influencer's Moments stories, this emoji occurs only in food sharing, demonstrating a personal touch in making evaluations. Such differences make us wonder to what extent an authentic self would be present in the group chats of social selling. Given the time lag and B's reluctance to reveal too many details, all we can get is that those promotions shared in the group chat are actually authored by someone else so that the same promotion can spread in different groups. In other words, information of social selling sent in the group chat is but a "cut-and-paste" writing that is authored collectively. Such a chat mode of influencing is comparatively more imposing than promotion updates in Moments in the sense that receivers are relatively easily disturbed by the promotion that might otherwise get drowned by the information overload that characterizes WeChat Moments updates. This way of doing business makes authenticity less significant in comparison with the general jargon style shared among the Moments influencers, who would stick to the talking "within their terms" (Davies and Harré 1990: 52). However, B claimed his trust is earned through an authentic self-display in his Moments stories, whereby he tries to publicize the image of a loving father and a caring husband through an elaborated anecdotal record of his personal life. And the customers, as B briefly notes, would get to know his reliability and authenticity through both the brand products he promotes, which are made abroad, and the private contact with him. We feel that this consistent picture of a "uniform public self" (van Dijck 2013: 211) in B's Moments is a strategic self-presentation, although the three dimensions of product format coincide, and is still staged, which would get verified through the increasing number of group members and his regular promotion of overseas brand products.

## 5. Conclusion

Self-presentation is more than a simple representation of authentic self. It has been found that in blogshop selling (e.g., Abidin and Thompson 2012), the shop owners' fame and success rest on commercial intimacy cultivated by models' highly crafted embodied self-presentation to involvement and interaction with their audience of readers-cum-consumers for a co-creation of business values. The data collected for this study present a slightly different picture. The social selling influencers in WeChat, one of the most popular social networking sites in mainland China, trade largely on product-oriented multimodal narrative and their personal connections as the overarching strategy for the promotion of their endorsed products. The

narrative in the digital context, either in the form of updates on a regular basis, or through messages sent to a group chat, shows the influencers' strategic maneuver of the semiotic resources for the effect of staged authenticity. Our research questions about the interrelationship between self-presentation and communicative acts of social selling are twofold. The analysis of 326 screenshots from 10 account owners reveals that in composing a promotion of text and image combo, and encouraging a purchase, these WeChat social-selling influencers would strategically key the intimacy frame, enacted by personal and conversational footing, into the frame of business transaction, enacted by a product-oriented invitation to purchase.

These strategies reflect to some extent how they assign parts of themselves in following more or less "ready-made" communicative acts that mirror the "terms" in the community of social selling (the answer to research question 1). Goffman's lamination of speaker roles allows us to distinguish the change of footing in the three dimensions of animator, author, and principal, and the effects such changes can bring out: the intentionality is manifested at the level of author for the purpose of easily recognized principal for product promotion, while the enactment of conversational footings is targeted at enacting an intimate frame in the social-selling narrative; authenticity is a staged performance that may transcend the simple integration of the three dimensions of speaker roles within a single piece of multimodal narrative. Assisted by the WeChat affordance, images deployed in Moments narrative are a juxtaposition of pictures carefully and faithfully taken from different perspectives, which can generate a sense of authenticity; on the other hand, an unfiltered viewability of the influencer's updates and the purposeful sharing of chat logs with other customers contribute to the engaging of regular customers and sustainable business development (the answer to research question 2). Our collected data also reveal that group chat as an independent selling channel sanctions a so-called 'bald on record' way of product promotion, which marginalizes the necessity of authentic self-presentation. The rich application of emojis somehow reduces the imposing force thereof. Authenticity in this case also includes the unfiltered viewability of the account owner's WeChat Moments, but is established by the brands of the products promoted. The possible side effects of information overload may make customers more ready to be persuaded by the straightforward yet engaging appeals as the narrative of social selling in this group chat indicates.

Yet, in order to combine our frame approach with in-depth qualitative analysis, we have focused on the narrative in social selling without considering the interaction between the influencers and their customers, a field that might yield some fruitful findings in the Goffmanian approach. Also, we have narrowed our frame categorization to a dichotomy of intimacy and personal on the one hand and distance and business on the other, out of the presumption that the "friends" on social selling influencers' WeChat friend lists are either friends or potential customers.

If further stratified, we would reach a different frame analysis that might offer a kaleidoscopic picture of the way people do self-(re)presentation.

Our small-sized data show that in WeChat professional accounts, the pattern of doing promotion is consistently similar. If expanded, it might show the emergence of new varied patterns, given the coercive power of social structures and the urge of operating within their terms.

In conclusion, our study is an attempt to provide an assessment of the relational value of staged authenticity in social selling. Careful analysis in this regard is necessary to increase our understanding of what self-presentation does, how it is done, and how it is to be evaluated.

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# Online nicks, impoliteness, and Jewish identity in Israeli Russian conflict discourse

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This paper examines how online interlocutors manipulate the nickname or nick, an important form of self-presentation and identity construction online (Bechar-Israëli 1995; Aarsand 2008; Yus 2011: 43–44). Most studies of nicks focused on their taxonomy, but paid little attention to interaction. Nicks can be targeted in conflict discourse. Studying an online community of ex-Soviet migrants to Israel, I show how interlocutors discuss, modify, substitute, combine with insults, and/or translate an opponent’s nick. Such *nick manipulations* during conflict fall under the impoliteness strategy of using inappropriate identity markers (IIM; Culpeper 1996). By considering how nicknames are manipulated in a community with a complicated cultural history of naming, my argument reexamines how the IIM strategy relates to nick choice, nick manipulation, and identity.

**Keywords:** conflict discourse, impoliteness, facework, inappropriate identity markers, migration, Jewish, Israeli, Russian, identity, nicknames, online discourse

## 1. Introduction

Recently, scholars have been drawing attention to the intersection of (im)politeness – and more generally, facework – and identity work. The relationship between facework and identity work can be hard to tease apart (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich and Sifianou 2017); but one place where impoliteness and identity intersect directly and clearly is the use of inappropriate identity markers (IIM), one of the positive impoliteness strategies included in Culpeper’s influential article “Towards an Anatomy of Impoliteness” (Culpeper 1996, updated in 2005 and modified in Dobs and Blitvich 2013). Culpeper describes the IIM strategy as “Use inappropriate identity markers – for example, use title and surname when a close relationship pertains, or a nickname when a distant relationship pertains”

(Culpeper 1996: 357). Culpeper's article expands on Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory by drawing attention to face-attacking phenomena. His framework for the study of impoliteness describes specific strategies that can be used to attack an interlocutor's positive and negative face wants, like IIM.

The IIM strategy can encompass a wide range of phenomena, from a sergeant major using 'my friend' to refer to a recruit when the relationship is neither proximate nor friendly (Bousfield 2008); the use of 'corruptors' to refer to citizens involved in demonstrations (El Samie 2016); the choice of an overly proximate personal pronoun when a more formal pronominal reference would be appropriate (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013; Perelmutter 2013) and more.

In this paper, I explore how online interlocutors manipulate a quintessential online phenomenon – the nickname or nick, an important form of self-presentation and identity construction (Bechar-Israeli 1995; Aarsand 2008; Yus 2011: 43–44). I show how, in a course of conflict, the interlocutors may discuss, modify spelling, mock, substitute or combine with insults, and/or translate an opponent's nick as a face-threatening act. Such *nick manipulations* during conflict fall under the umbrella of the impoliteness strategy of IIM. IIM is often encountered alongside other impoliteness strategies, such as Call the Other Names; Condescend, Scorn, Ridicule; Use Taboo Language; and more.

Online nicknames or nicks, like personal names, are intimately tied to identity (Bechar-Israeli 1995; Stommel 2007; Aarsand 2008; Jones and Hafner 2012; Barton and Lee 2013; Ecker 2013). Unlike personal names, which are given by parents and rarely changed except in situations of a major identity shift such as migration or trauma (Tummala-Narra 2016), online nicknames are actively selected by participants to represent them, and can be more easily changed (Bechar-Israeli 1995). Moreover, nicknames are often used within the context of a single online community; the same person may use a different nickname in a different online community.

Though online nicknames have been connected to identity construction (Stommel 2007; Aarsand 2008; Yus 2011) and the intersection of nicks and face-work was briefly discussed by Krefß (2014), the usage of nicknames in the linguistic processes of both facework and identity work merits further consideration. This article discusses how nicknames can be manipulated and altered in conflict discourse involving impoliteness and jocular mockery. I will show how, in a multilingual migrant online community, *nick manipulation* can index other identity components, such as language selection, Soviet Jewish history and migration, perceived attitudes towards both anti-Semitism and assimilationist processes in Russia and Israel, and more. I show that impoliteness and jocular mockery involving nicknames are important parts of conflict discourse in which identity components are discursively negotiated.

For Russian-speaking Israeli migrants, identity may be already embedded in nick selection. Migrants make multiple choices, including a choice of language or code (Russian, Hebrew, English, and more), a choice of alphabet (Cyrillic, English, Hebrew), a choice of spelling style for Russian (standard or counter-cultural), a choice of stance (serious or jocular), a choice of meaning, and more. Participants' choice of nick may reflect attitudes towards Jewishness, political stances, and other identity-salient aspects. When interlocutors manipulate the nick during conflict, they express their attitudes not only towards the person involved, but also towards the identity expressed in the nick.

By considering how nicknames are manipulated in a specific community, my wider argument reexamines the Inappropriate Identity Markers strategy. I claim that what is "appropriate" and what is "inappropriate" in IIM must be considered carefully when the identity markers used are online nicknames or nicks, which are selected and used by participants in a context of a specific online community. When participants in an online community use or refuse to use, alter and manipulate each other's nicknames in order to attack or support each other, considerations of appropriateness or inappropriateness are not clear-cut. In a migrant community, identity markers can index multiple levels of affiliation and belonging. Invoking and altering specific nicks is not simply "appropriate" or "inappropriate" – it reveals the tensions between individual identities, group norms and expectations within a particular online community, and even beyond – tensions pertaining to communal identities that extend beyond the scope of online communities (such as ethnic and religious affiliations, gender, nationality, immigrant status, and more). I argue that the use of nicks is one of the key aspects of identity construction, and nick manipulation is crucial component to how individual or group identities are supported or attacked in online discourse.

## 2. Theorizing nicks, identity, and personal names in a migrant community

Online nicknames are identity performances (Aarsand 2008) which can express identity-salient information such as gender, mood, political attitudes, playfulness, and more (Bechar-Israeli 1995; Stommel 2007; Ecker 2013). Nicknames create a first impression (Johnová 2004) communicate to others "who [the participants] are, and [act] as invitation to others to talk to them" (Crystal 2001: 166). Nicknames may be changed temporarily as a part of play (Bechar-Israeli 1995) or more rarely, permanently (cf. Aarsand 2008); nicks, like personal names, accrue social histories.

The choice of nick itself can be related to identity. Bechar-Israeli's (1995) pioneering study presents a taxonomy of nicks selected by participants in an IRC

chatroom, with the most frequent category being “self-related names” (45%), followed by nicks related to technology (16.9%), names of flora, fauna, or objects (15.6%), plays on words and sounds (11.3%), people using their real names (7.8%), names related to famous figures and people (6.1%) and more. Stommel’s (2007) detailed study of nicknames shows how identity performance correlates with nick choice in a German-language forum for eating disorders – almost half of the nicknames analyzed were common first names; many nicks indexed aspects of gender, body image, mood (such as depression), or personal qualities (such as strength).

Comparing Bechar-Israeli (1995), Ecker (2013), Aarsand (2008), and Johnová’s (2004) analyses of nick choice in specific contexts reveals two important aspects of nick selection: first, there are common strategies in nick selection (first names, flora and fauna, wordplay and wit, specific identity features); second, the specific cultural context and practice of each community studied affects the participants’ nick selection. Thus, technology-related nicks were statistically prominent in Bechar-Israeli’s (1995) IRC data, but did not seem central in Stommel’s (2007) forum focusing on eating disorders; instead, body image and gender were at the forefront. Nick selection reflects the personal identity of the participants, but it has collective implications as well – nick selection may signal a bid for belonging in the group, and/or reference identity features salient to a specific community of practice.

In bilingual and multilingual environments, nicknames can be bilingual or biscriptal, and/or can be adapted by participants themselves to align with their local and/or global identities. Lee and Barton (2011, 2012) note that when Chinese-speaking and Spanish-speaking participants on Flickr choose a language for their screen names, profiles, and writing, they “presuppose and index particular kinds of audience through their multilingual writing as well as their metalinguistic representation of their language choice [...]. To some users, a local language often helps display their local identities, thus allowing them to claim insider knowledge of that language and the culture associated with it” (Lee and Barton 2012: 142). However, this research explores the participants’ personal choices, rather than the ways that nicknames can be used and manipulated by the interlocutors as a part of facework.

In a community of multilingual Jewish and Jewish-adjacent Russian-speaking migrants, nick selection often references aspects of migrant identity. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Jewish ex-Soviets (often accompanied by non-Jewish relatives) settled in the US, Canada, Germany, Israel, and other countries. Israel alone received over a million ex-Soviet migrants between 1989–2000 as a part of the so-called Great Wave, the largest migration in Israel’s history (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2007). In Israel, Russian-speaking ex-Soviets learned Hebrew, while striving to preserve Russian as not only an everyday language, but as a language of culture, education, and prestige (Trier 1996; Ben-Rafael, Olshtain and Geijst 1997; Kheimets and Epstein 2001; Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2007). Many of

the migrants, however, incorporated Hebrew elements into their speech, creating a new, local Israeli Russian variant (Remennick 2003; Naiditch 2004, 2008; Perelmutter 2018a). They also mostly retained their Russian-style names (Gitelman 2016: 14–15). A detailed statistical study by Lawson and Glushkovskaya, carried out in the early years of the Great Wave migration and published in 1994, shows that only 11% of the men and 3% of the women changed (Hebraized) their names upon arrival in Israel.

At *souz.co.il*, nicks often take the shape of personal names with Russian, Hebrew, English (and more rarely, Yiddish) origin, and Russian and Hebrew words are popular choices. As far as spelling is concerned, nicks of Russian, Hebrew, English, or Yiddish origin can be spelled in the Cyrillic, Latin, and Hebrew alphabets. The tension between the three available scripts (Cyrillic, Latin, and Hebrew) and their use by participants is an example of translanguaging, a cover term that includes a range of multilingual phenomena “from code-switching and mixing to translation and transliteration” (Androutsopoulos 2015: 186). Spilioti (2019) uses translanguaging as a lens for the study of digital writing by multilingual participants, and argues that trans-scripting, or respelling of certain words in local alphabets (in Spilioti’s research, English words in Greek alphabet) is a key for understanding these performances as creative practices (Spilioti 2019: 1). The creative use of such respellings demonstrates what Androutsopoulos notes is the blurring of “dichotomies between written and spoken language” (Androutsopoulos 2015: 187), a distinctive feature of networked multilingualism. The transscripting choices available in multilingual CMC writing are not necessarily available in either oral discourse or standard written codes (Androutsopoulos 2015: 187).

Since personal names are a popular choice of nickname in general (Stommel 2007) and at *souz.co.il* in particular, a discussion of Jewish-Soviet naming practices is relevant.

Much like online nicknames, personal names are closely tied to identity; names are “identity stereotypes” (Dinur, Beit-Hallahmi and Hofman 1996). In Watzlawik et al.’s (2016) study of Korean, German, and Brazilian naming practices, connections between identity and personal names seem culturally dependent, yet displayed important commonalities. The authors reported that about 1/5 of study participants from these three cultures thought of changing their first names, but only a minority ended up doing so.

In contrast, name changes are often central to the lives and identities of migrants and refugees. Tummala-Narra’s (2016) insightful study of migrants’ naming practices shows the fluidity of names and naming practices in the lives of immigrants and refugees; “names and name changes can reorganize cultural experience and identity” (Tummala-Narra 2016: 160). Changing one’s name after arrival in a new country can be advantageous, helping migrants find employment



and education opportunities, and ease discrimination and stigmatization. On the other hand, loss of one's birth name for migrants may represent a disconnect from family, language, and culture, and the silencing of important life experiences. Shifting away from one's migrant birth name might mean developing "split-off aspects of the self and split-off identifications with cultural aspects of identity" (Tummala-Narra 2016: 159–60). Name-change might also entail loss of solidarity and an uncertain group membership: rejection of [ethnic] names might be perceived as rejection of community (Cortés-Conde and Boxer 2002: 142–3). For migrants, names and name changes carry complexity and ambiguity related to both personal and communal identity, history, and culture.

For Jewish ex-Soviet migrants to Israel and elsewhere, name changes are not a new phenomenon. Under the Soviet regime, Jewish people faced discrimination on multiple levels. The practice of religion in general was forbidden by the Soviets; Jewish religious practices and education were suppressed. Eastern European Ashkenazi Jews, who were predominantly speakers of Yiddish at the end of the 19th century (Estraiikh 2008), underwent language shift: by the last Soviet census, 90% of self-identified Jewish respondents marked Russian as their native language (Remennick 2003).

Jewish personal names were also targeted under the Soviet regime. The majority of Jews were pressured to Russify their Yiddish and Hebrew names after the Russian Revolution of 1917, though little scholarly research exists on this topic (Verschik 2003). Lawson and Glushkovskaya (1994) discuss that Soviet Jews maintained their traditional naming patterns (naming a child after a deceased relative), even though most European (Ashkenazi) Jews surveyed by the authors were largely not religious and did not observe most, or any, traditions. Lawson and Glushkovskaya use informant interviews to suggest some patterns of name changes from Yiddish and Hebrew to Russian. Verschik also discusses the rules as to what Russian name replaced what Yiddish or Hebrew name after the Revolution: "for example Boris replaces Ber, Berl, Borekh; Michail replaces Moshe, Mendl, Motl, Meir; Ekaterina replaces Rineh. Mark can replace Mordkhe and acquire a Jewish sound. Haye – Zoya, Hayim – Vitaliy" (Verschik 2003: 147). Verschik argues that when Jews started using non-Jewish names, they exerted influence on Russian; some Russian names became associated with specific Jewish names, and with Jews. Similarly, Lawson and Glushkovskaya (1994) note that Russians tended to avoid certain names because of their association with Jews (e.g., Roza, Solomon, David). While scholarly research on Jewish-Russian name switches is scarce, additional information can be gleaned from post-Soviet genealogical websites where Jewish ex-Soviets discuss their ancestry and ask for help back-translating their Russian-

coded names into Yiddish or Hebrew as a part of post-Soviet Jewish revival.<sup>1</sup> In the Ashkenazi Jewish tradition, first names are given to honor a deceased ancestor such a grandparent or a great-grandparent, and Russian-coded names of Russian Jews today often reflect naming and name-change trends of the first Soviet generation. Because of this generational continuity, the early Soviet practice of name switching continues to be relevant. By asking ‘what is my/my child’s Hebrew and/or Yiddish name?’ the genealogically inclined Russian Jews are inquiring about the names of their great-grandparents.<sup>2</sup>

Most Soviet Ashkenazi Jews had Russian/Russified names, but these names often encoded additional information: some “sounded Jewish,” others did not. Thus, Boris and Roza, both Russian names, sound Jewish; Ivan and Klavdiya do not. The patronymic Borisovich/Borisovna sounds Jewish; the patronymic Ivanovich/Ivanovna does not. Russian Jews used this knowledge to glean patterns of assimilation and intermarriage, recognize each other as Jewish or not, express solidarity or disaffiliation. As we can see, first names carry a complex web of meanings for Russian Jews: a history of assimilation, anti-Semitism, linguistic and cultural shift

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1. For example, a thread entitled ‘The names of Russian Jews, their origin and Russification’ at a Jewish Russian-language genealogical forum (<http://forum.j-roots.info/viewtopic.php?f=98&t=145>) contains 1744 posts of forum members sharing family first names, the history of Jewish-Russian name changes in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and exchange advice about the naming of children.

2. I gleaned additional information on Jewish-Russian name substitutions from informant interviews, jokes and anecdotes, literary works, and more. My own family history supplies rich data on name substitutions: after the revolution, Rakhil’ was replaced with Roza, Borekh with Boris (Borya), Hannah with Anna, Motl with Mark and Max; Haya-Surah became Sofiya. Jewish-Russian name substitutions were a topic of the following Jewish Russian anecdote:

- (i) как доказать, что имя Боря это то же самое, что имя Степа: Боря – это Брухес, Брухес это кадухес, кадухес это тухес, тухес – это жопа, а жопа – это Стёпа!  
 ‘How to prove that the name Borya (diminutive of Boris) is the same as Styopa (diminutive of Stepan)? Simple: Borya is Brukhes, Brukhes is kadukhes (Yiddish ‘illness’), kadukhes is tukhes (Yiddish ‘ass, bottom, behind’), tukhes is zhopa (Russ colloquial ‘ass’) and zhopa is Styopa!’

This anecdote lampoons Jewish-Russian name substitutions, suggesting a chain of such substitutions in which Jewish words and names are replaced with each other and with Russian ones until one Russian name is shown to be equal to another. The anecdote points out a well-established parallel between the Russian name Boris (Borya) and its Jewish counterpart Borekh, Brukhes (Ashkenazi Hebrew ‘blessed one,’ ‘blessings’) (on the importance of bilingual humor for documenting and legitimizing Jewish speech under the Soviet regime, see Perelmutter 2018b).

after the Russian Revolution; the emergence of Soviet Jewish culture with its detailed codes and messages in names; and migration-related naming shifts.

In Israel, personal names of ex-Soviet Jews, and the long, complicated histories of Jewish name-changes in migrant families play a crucial role. The members of the Great Wave faced stigmatization because of their unique cultural history. Because of the long-standing Soviet policies of suppression, most of the migrants arriving between 1989 and 2000 were native speakers of Russian, with almost no knowledge of Hebrew, and a limited knowledge of Jewish religious practices, holidays, and laws. Zionism was negatively regarded by the Soviet regime; in Israel, ex-Soviet migrants were stigmatized as un-Zionist. Since the majority of Russian-speaking Jews had Russified (Russian) first names, the immigrants' names were often a target of stigmatization, an immediate proof that ex-Soviet Jews were insufficiently Jewish. All Russian names sounded equally alien and often insufficiently Jewish to Hebrew-speaking ears; migrants were pressured to Hebraize their first names, though most chose not to do so (Lawson and Glushkovskaya 1994; Gitelman 2016).

However, most migrants did not want to Hebraize their names: the names were Russified, but nevertheless considered Jewish within the Russian-Jewish community – because of the naming practices of naming a child after a deceased relative, these Russified names carried connections to Yiddish and Hebrew names that preceded them.

As the discussion above shows, name-changing practices among Russian Jews are a common cultural and multi-generational phenomenon. Online communication has a fluid, flexible, and vernacular nature. In this context, name-changes – both nick selection and nick manipulation – are easier to access and carry no legal repercussions (unlike an official name-change). Online, nick changes are signaled easier than in face-to-face contexts – through a simple update in a user's profile or through a reference to an interlocutor. Nick changes and nick manipulations allow multilingual migrants to express and to play with identity aspects, contributing to “creative and playful uses of linguistic resources, which ... are reflexively mobilised in discourses of cultural diversity or hybridity” (Androutsopoulos 2015: 187).

Migrants also engage in impoliteness, which involves the perceived Russian-ness and Israeli-ness of nicks. Facework involving these aspects of nicknaming – and naming – relates directly to identity. The issue of “appropriateness” and “inappropriateness” of identity markers is complicated by the complexities and tensions involved in Soviet Jewish history which includes a history of personal name changes. Impoliteness using IIM involves not just individuals: it indexes a complex and long communal history.

### 3. Methodology

This study examines nick manipulation in multiparticipant conflict discourse at souz.co.il, a resource and forum portal for Israeli ex-Soviets. Souz.co.il is a digital diaspora, a place where migrants congregate to discuss issues of migration, identity, belonging, and daily life, as well as other topics of interest. The majority of participants are Russian speakers who migrated to Israel with the Great Wave of 1989–2000; some live in Israel, others migrated from Israel to other countries (US, Canada) or returned from Israel to Russia, Ukraine, or a different country of the former Soviet Union. A minority of participants have never lived in Israel, but feel some connection – positive or negative – to the country.

Discourse at the forum often revolves around topics pertaining to migration, politics, life in Israel, Judaism, Russian-Jewish identity, and more. The board is in continuous existence since 2002, and all posts are publicly accessible, and do not fall under Human Subjects according to the IRB oversight at the University of Kansas. Members are not obligated to disclose demographic information in user profiles, though they may discuss personal details pertaining to immigration, age, profession, and more. Publicly displayed information includes a nick, a pictorial avatar (under the nick), location, date of registration, and the number of total posts to date; this information is displayed to the left of each post.

Online discourse at souz.co.il is the focus of my larger-scale research, and I am familiar with the board's norms and cultures.

I selected threads for analysis according to the following purposive criteria:

- (1) Threads with over 100 comments – such threads present plentiful material for analysis, and the multiplicity of posts attests to the thread's relevance to forum members (both threads I selected unfold over 200+ posts).
- (2) An identity-salient topic
- (3) Conflict is clearly present
- (4) Thread participants have nicks in different languages (Hebrew, Russian, English).
- (5) Threads posted in different years and involving different people, to diversify the data.

In this article, the conversation under discussion is a 622-comment thread about the discrimination of Russian-speaking Jews in Israel, and the Jewish status of Israelis of a different ethnic origin – posted in 2008.

I have supplied translations of all examples, making them as literal as possible, and faithful to the original.

There is a *ty/vy* difference in Russian between *ty* 'you.2SG' reference and *vy* 'you.2PL' reference; *vy.2PL* 'you' is usually polite towards an adult distal interlocutor,

while a switch to *ty*.2SG addressing an adult distal interlocutor, especially in the context of conflict, often signals a face attack. I marked these in the translation to help contextualize polite and impolite uses of pronominal references in the examples – for more discussion on *ty/vy* references in Russian conflict discourse, see my earlier article on Russian-language flamewars (Perelmutter 2013).

I have additionally marked, translated, and explained all Hebrew elements within the matrix of Russian to the best of my ability; I have native or near-native proficiency in Standard Russian, Hebrew, and the Israeli Russian vernacular. The remaining mistakes are mine alone.

## 4. Data and analysis

### 4.1 Thread: Zeev

A multi-participant conflict containing 622 messages develops in response to an inflammatory posting made by user Zeev2008. The title of posting, *Эта ... страна ИЗРАИЛЬ* ‘This ... country ISRAEL’ represents an effort of moderation: the original title, *Эта фашистская страна ИЗРАИЛЬ* ‘This fascist country ISRAEL’, can be seen in the first quoted response to the original thread. The word ‘fascist’ in the title has been erased by moderators, but it also appears in the post itself, where it is not erased. The beginning of the post reads:

- (1) *Здравствуйте. А эта страна и есть фашистская. обманом заманившая полтора миллиона человек и сделавшая из них полурабов.*  
 ‘Greetings. This country truly is fascist, having lured by deception 1.5 million people (= *the poster means the ex-Soviet Jewish migration to Israel – RP*) and made them into half-slaves.’

In this inflammatory post, Zeev2008 self-identifies as a returnee, or a person who immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union, lived there for an extended period of time (18 years) and moved back to Russia. In an emotionally charged and conflictual post, Zeev2008 identifies the reasons for his return: what he perceives as discrimination against Ashkenazi Jews, and Russian Jews in particular, in favor of Jews who immigrated to Israel from Arabic countries, as well as Arabs, whom Zeev2008 views negatively.

As the flamewar develops, most users oppose and ridicule Zeev2008’s stance. Zeev2008’s choice of nickname plays an important role in the developing conflict. The nick is targeted by Zeev2008’s interlocutors – Inappropriate Identity Markers (IIM) are one of the impoliteness strategies used in the flamewar. This impoliteness strategy is closely tied to issues of Jewish diasporic identity.

The poster's nickname, Zeev2008, consists of two components: Zeev – a Hebrew male name which translates as 'wolf'; and 2008, the year of registration and posting. Nicknames in this community vary, and they reflect the participants' linguistic heteroglossia and multiglossia, which may involve knowledge of Russian, English, Hebrew, and more. The choice of code is significant: in this community, the choice of a Hebrew-language nickname is marked. Hebrew nicknames seem to be especially frequently subjected to linguistic play. Moreover, usernames can be spelled in Cyrillic, Latin, or (rarely) the Hebrew alphabet. In this sequence, usernames are spelled in either Cyrillic or Latin. Zeev2008 spells his Hebrew-based username in Cyrillic, indexing a hybrid Russian-Hebrew identity.

In the course of the conflict, Zeev2008 emphasizes his knowledge of Hebrew by peppering his inflammatory postings with words of Hebrew origin such as *yerida* 'descent; immigration from Israel,' *kviutnik* 'a person who obtained tenure/job security' (Israeli Russian word combining two elements, Hebrew *kviut* 'job security' and the Russian suffix *-nik*, 'a person doing something'). Such usage of Hebrew elements adopted to Russian matrix is characteristic of the immigrant Israeli Russian vernacular (Perelmutter 2018a).

The amount of Hebrew words increases as Zeev2008 emphasizes his Jewish religious identity in response to the harsh criticism of other forum members; for example, he tells his opponents that he manages to be a good Jew in Moscow, because:

- (2) *Каждый день молюсь в синагоге на шахарис. Одеваю тфилин, соблюдаю шабат и кашрут.*  
 'Every day [I] pray shakharis ('morning prayer' – Ashkenazi Hebrew). [I] put on tfilin 'phylacteries,' observe shabat 'shabbat' and kashrut 'Jewish dietary laws.'

Zeev2008's use of Hebrew is an identity feature: he demonstrates his Hebrew knowledge and asserts his Jewishness while, at the same time, leveling harsh and emotionally charged criticism at Israel and the Israeli-based forum members – the majority of the forum members at *souz.co.il* – whom he disparages with words such as *vatiuk* 'old timer (negative)' and *kviutnik* 'a person who obtained tenure/job security' – for Zeev2008, these are negative features representing complacency in the face of oppression.

Zeev2008's posts are met with resistance; impoliteness strategies abound, and some users utilize the nickname to employ the IIM impoliteness strategy. They do this in two different ways:

- (1) translating the nickname into Russian *волк* 'wolf'.
- (2) Russian versus Hebrew names: Zeev's Hebrew name is substituted for a Russian given name.

Each of these overarching strategies in turn facilitates the use of additional impoliteness strategies.

#### 4.2 Translating the Hebrew nick into Russian

As Zeev2008 ramps up his usage of Hebrew elements, his Israel-based opponents employ Standard Russian with no Hebrew elements. This is an othering strategy, designed to exclude an undesirable outsider. Here, othering directed not at a generic, imagined outsider as in the Kopytowska, Grabowski and Woźniak's (2017) study of othering in the context of the refugee crisis in Poland, or the othering representations in Szilágyi's (2017) study of British and Hungarian far-right attitudes towards China. Here, instead, a person who is participating in the discourse is being othered and excluded by other participants as a part of conflict discourse.

While Zeev's opponents demonstrate their knowledge of Hebrew (further in the thread, by linking and discussing Hebrew-language articles) and communicate in the Israeli Russian vernacular among themselves, they deny Zeev2008 association by refusing to share this linguistic commonality with him (Perelmutter 2018a). Translating the Hebrew part of the nickname, Zeev, into *волк* 'wolf' is a part of their refusal to accept him as an insider who is ratified to criticize the state of Israel.

Vsegda (one of the main opponents of Zeev in the thread), introduces the translation:

(3) *Зеев 2008*

*Вести с Вами полемику, всё равно, что кормить волка. Простите за каламбур по-поводу слова Волк (Зеев)*

'Zeev 2008

To argue with you.2PL is as good as feeding a wolf. Forgive.2PL me for the pun related to the word Wolf (Zeev)'

Vsegda translates the nickname and compares Zeev2008 to a wolf, invoking a famous Russian proverb about the futility of feeding a wolf ('no matter how much you feed a wolf, he keeps looking at a forest' – you cannot tame a wolf, and you cannot gain the support of a bad person no matter how much you give them). Comparing Zeev2008 to a wolf is a negative impoliteness strategy Explicitly Associate the Other with a Negative Aspect (Culpeper 1996); translating the nickname is IIM. However, while an inappropriate identity marker is used for the nickname, Vsegda employs the polite and appropriate 2PL personal pronoun.

In contrast, user Ursego employs the IIM impoliteness strategy twice: once when he calls Zeev2008 'Wolf,' and again when he uses the 2SG pronominal reference *ты*, which is impolite to use with an adult peer who is a stranger:

- (4) *Ну ты даёшь, Волк... Не нравится, уехал – не ты первый не ты последний. Но чем тебе так насолил Израиль, что пишешь такие фразеологические обороты?*

‘Wow, Wolf, you.2sg are overdoing it. You don’t like it, you left – you are not the first or the last. But what did Israel do to you that you are using such phraseological turns?’

Vsegda uses *волк* ‘wolf’ once again, when he admonishes the forum members not to argue with Zeev2008 anymore:

- (5) *Один волк воет, а все собаки в деревне лают. Расслабьтесь, есть много других тем. Предлагаю не реагировать более на вой из-за буэра.*  
 ‘A single wolf wails, and all the dogs in the village bark [in response]. Relax.PL, there are many other threads here. I suggest that [you] not react anymore to wailing from abroad.’

Here, user Vsegda translates the nickname again, and uses the translation ‘wolf’ to other and outgroup Zeev2008 via a metaphor: Zeev2008 is the lone wolf, the outsider and returnee; he is contrasted with the in-group of posters in the community that react negatively to the aggressive outsider (the village dogs). The phrasing *из-за буэра* ‘from abroad’ suggests the opposition of Israel (‘self’) and abroad (‘other’). While multiple other posters are located outside of Israel (US, Canada), they are in-grouped and Zeev2008 is outgrouped as a wailing voice from abroad because he is using harsh, emotional and racially laden arguments against the state of Israel.

### 4.3 Russian versus Hebrew names

In the exchange below, two forum members (KlaraPetrovna and vsegda) express negativity towards Zeev2008’s main message that Israel is a fascist country because it discriminates against Ashkenazi and particularly Russian Jews by privileging Jews from Arab-speaking countries. Zeev2008 and vsegda both use the IIM strategy as directed at nicknames in order to attack other users: Zeev2008 alters KlaraPetrovna’s name in order to question and attack her Jewishness and call for her deportation from Israel; and vsegda uses the name Vladimir as a substitute for Zeev, evoking a longstanding but underresearched (cf. Verschik 2003) tradition of swapping Jewish names of Hebrew origin with Russian names under the Soviet regime.

Zeev2008’s use of the IIM strategy directed at user KlaraPetrovna comes in response to her posting the following:



(6) *KlaraPetrovna*

*разрешены вот такие высказывания??? антисемитские, унижающие. вы что тут вообще обсуждаете, вместо того, чтобы удалить эту вонь? 'Are such expressions allowed [here]??? antisemitic, humiliating [expressions].*  
 what are you discussing here at all, instead of deleting this stench?

KlaraPetrovna addresses the forum members and offers them to stop discussing Zeev2008's inflammatory postings and instead, simply have them deleted. In this, KlaraPetrovna's statement is similar to vseгда's suggestion that forum members ignore Zeev2008 rather than debate with him. Both KlaraPetrovna and vseгда use Explicitly Associate the Other with Negative Aspect impoliteness strategy when they describe Zeev2008's words with two similarly sounding words *вонь* 'stench' (KlaraPetrovna) and *вой* 'wailing' (vseгда).

Zeev's comment addresses both posters with insults. He quotes vseгда's comment about a wailing wolf (discussed in previous section) and addresses him with the following:

(7) *Вам ни кто не говорил, что вы идиот?*  
 'Did nobody tell you that you are an idiot?'

In the same comment, Zeev2008 then continues to reiterate his racialized stance against Israel:

(8) *Почему Израиль фашистский? Он Фашистский по отношению к своему народу. Еврейское государствою. Я с детства мечтал в него приехать, я, прошедший все тяготы антисемитизма.*

*Гойской рожке Клавдии Пятровне этого не понять. Таких гоев надо вон из Израиля. Из них и еврею то не уютно как то вынуждены покидать еврейсеое государство так называемое. Я приехал в Израиль о котором мечтал и ПОЛНЫЙ ОБЛОМ. Выяснилось. что сюда берут евреев по 3 колону, арабские иудеи – тоже евреи. У них с нами нет ничего общего и не будет!!!*

'Why is Israel fascist? It is Fascist towards its own people. Jewish state. From childhood I dreamt to come there – I, who survived all the burdens of antisemitism.

The goyish ugly face KlavdiyaPyatrovna cannot understand this. Such goys should be deported from Israel. Because of them, even a Jew is uncomfortable, they are forced to leave the so-called Jewish state. I arrived to Israel, about which I have been dreaming, and a COMPLETE FIASCO. It turned out that they take people who have a Jewish great-grandparent, and Arabic people of Jewish faith – also Jews. We don't have anything in common with them and will never have!'

To attack his interlocutor KlaraPetrovna, Zeev2008 invokes an especially painful aspect of the Great Wave Jewish Russian immigration to Israel: debates around Jewishness, which have legal implications in Israel. Under the Israeli Law of Return, people are allowed to migrate to Israel if they are Jewish according to religious law. To be recognized as such, Soviet Jews had to demonstrate that they had a Jewish mother, or a Jewish maternal grandmother. Those able to demonstrate matrilineal Jewish descent could have “Jewish” listed in their *teudat zeut* Hebrew ‘ID card.’ Family members of persons acknowledged as Jewish by the state of Israel were also eligible for immigration under the Law of Return, but they would have a listing of *lo rashum* Hebrew ‘unspecified’ or Russian (or another ethnicity) in their *teudat zeut*, which might impact their ability to legally marry and access Jewish burial under the law, since there is no separation of church and state in Israel (more on this in Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2007; Gitelman 2016).

However, under the Soviet regime, people of mixed heritage could choose either mother’s or father’s ethnicity as their official ethnicity. Children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers were often registered Jewish, had Jewish last names, and experienced anti-Semitism. In Israel, these migrants (who were considered Jewish in the Soviet Union) would be marked as “unspecified.” The juxtaposition of being Jewish in the former Soviet Union and being non-Jewish in Israel caused identity crisis, anger, and friction for many members of the Great Wave.

The external stigmatization of all Great Wave immigrants as ‘insufficiently Jewish’ or even ‘non-Jewish’ led to and/or reinforced intracommunal tensions and peer scrutiny among ex-Soviet Jews. Many of the migrants were stigmatized as insufficiently Jewish regardless of their legal status (Ben-Rafael, Olshtain and Geijst 1997; Leshem and Lissak 1999; Olshtain and Kotik 2000).

This is the background Zeev2008 evokes when he employs the IIM strategy to change KlaraPetrovna’s nickname to KlavdiyaPyatrovna. Both the name and the patronymic are altered. The name Klara is considered Jewish (Klara appears to be a substitution for Hebrew/Yiddish name Haya). Klavdiya is a Russian name which is very rarely found amongst Russian Jews. Moreover, Klavdiya as a name has a rural, old-fashioned feel. By calling her Klavdiya, Zeev2008 claims that KlaraPetrovna is not Jewish.

The rural Russian/non-Jewish connotation is reinforced by the respelling of Petrovna as Pyatrovna – the change of *e* to *ya* suggests non-standard, dialectal phonology rather than the standard pronunciation of the patronymic. Thus, an Israeli poster who protests antisemitism is presented by Zeev2008 as non-Jewish, a parochial Russian person, and called a *goy* ‘non-Jewish person (a word with negative connotations).’ Moreover, Zeev2008 makes legal claims based on his IIM attack: according to him, KlaraPetrovna should be deported from Israel; he claims people like her should never have been accepted under the Law of Return.

User vseгда responds to Zeev2008 with a long comment in which he uses same strategy of IIM to substitute the Hebrew name Zeev, with a Russian name Vladimir presented in two diminutive forms (Volodya, Vova). In the lengthy middle portion of the comment, excluded due to length limitations, vseгда addresses Zeev2008 to strongly argue that Jews from different countries and continents are all Jews and should not be disparaged. Vseгда suggests that Zeev2008's troubles with employment in Israel, which Zeev2008 attributes to discrimination, were due to his lack of Hebrew skills:

(9) *Ой, Зеев, Зеев.*

*Не хотел Вам отвечать, но придётся.*

...

*А теперь, представьте себя на хорошем рабочем месте. Появляется свободная вакансия. Кому вы предложите её?*

*Мише из Биробиджана или Моше из Эфиопии? А? Подумали? Весь мир устроен одинаково. Каждый помогает более близкому. Если только речь не идёт овысококвалифицированных специалистах.*

*Здесьработает другой механизм. Я знаю фирму, которая держит у себя профессора-химика не владеющего ивритом, только потому, что ни один ивритоговорящий*

*Моше не имеет тех знаний. А Вы Володя, простите, Зеев не из профессоров будете?*

*Не делайте из себя идиота, Вова.*

*Да и из нас тоже ...*

*'Oy, Zeev Zeev.*

[I] did not want to respond to you.2PL, but [I] will have to.

(...)

And now, imagine that you are employed at a great job. There is a vacancy. Whom would you offer it? To Misha from Birobidjan or to Moshe from Ethiopia? Have you thought about it?

The whole world is built in the same way. Each [person] helps the closest [to them]. If we are not talking about highly qualified specialists. In that case, the mechanics are different. I know a firm which employs a chemistry professor who does not speak Hebrew, but only because not a single Hebrew-speaking Moshe has this knowledge. And you, Volodya, excuse me, Zeev, are not a professor by any chance?

Don't make a fool out of yourself, Vova.

And not out of us, either...'

Vseгда uses proper names twice in this segment: once, to contrast an imaginary Misha from Birobidjan (the capital of the Soviet Jewish Autonomous Region) with an equally imaginary Moshe from Ethiopia; and then, to juxtapose the name

Zeev with the Russian name Vladimir, which here appears in its two diminutive forms: Volodya, which is a regular diminutive form of Vladimir which could be used between adult friends; and Vova, a diminutive form of Vladimir more often in use with children. Both constitute the IIM impoliteness strategy: diminutive forms of first names are not appropriate with strangers of equal status with whom one is in conflict. Diminutives in this situation are used to belittle and to emphasize a power disparity – implying that Zeev2008 does not behave in a reasonable, adult manner.

In addition to the diminutive forms, the translation of Zeev as a form of Vladimir, just like the juxtaposition of Misha and Moshe, alludes to a long-standing Soviet tradition of substituting Jewish names of Yiddish and Hebrew origin with Russian-sounding names.

In the comment under discussion, user vseгда draws two parallels between Hebrew names and Russified Jewish names: Mikhail (Misha) and Moshe. Mikhail is a Biblical name of Hebrew origin, but for Soviet Russian Jews, this name was a substitution for a much more widespread and much more Jewish-coded name, Moyshe/Moshe (Verschik 2003, quoted above). In Russia, the name Mikhail is popular among ethnic Russians, and is associated with the national mascot, the bear (*medved'*) – both bears and Mikhails can be referenced by the diminutive mishka/Mishka. In contrast, Moyshe, Moysa (variants of Moshe) is a name given exclusively to Jews, and a name that is often used to denote Jewish persons in anti-Semitic contexts. A Jewish-Russian Misha has likely had an ancestor Moshe who Russified his name to Mikhail. By drawing a comparison between Misha from Russia and Moshe from Ethiopia, vseгда makes a point that people tend to first help those who are most like them demographically; but both Misha and Moshe share a name and are not that different: both are Jews (in the same post, vseгда admonishes Zeev2008 that as a religious person he should know that the Torah teaches Jews to love all Jews regardless of origin). When vseгда uses the IIM impoliteness strategy to call Zeev2008 Volodya and then Vova, he implies that Zeev2008's birth name, like that of other Russian Jews, was probably a Russified name. Zeev is likely to have adopted 'Zeev' as his Hebrew name after the Soviet regime – either in Israel or upon his return to Moscow. Vseгда's usage of IIM here might imply that Russian Jews, stripped of their religion, language, and even traditional names under the Soviet regime, are not 'purer' Jews than other Jews.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

Online nicks are personally selected by participants, and often provide an immediate insight into identity. The impoliteness strategy of IIM (Inappropriate

Identity Markers) is involved in nick manipulation as a part of face attacks. IIM is often combined with other impoliteness strategies: thus, referring to Zeev as Volk ‘wolf’ involves not just IIM, but Explicitly Associate the Other with a Negative Aspect impoliteness strategy. When Zeev2008 alters KlaraPetrovna’s nick to imply that she is not Jewish (IIM), he is also using the strategy Call the Other Names (Culpeper 1996): she becomes not just KlavdiyaPyatrovna, but “goyish ugly face Klavdiya Pyatrovna.”

It is important to note that IIM connected to nick manipulation in the data is both identity-related and does not occur on its own; rather, nicks (usually, nicks that are or resemble personal names) are subjected to criticism and manipulation as a part of identity work when combined with provocative or problematic identity-salient positions in discourse. It is these positions which are the subject of resistance from forum members. In the case of Zeev, forumites object to his anti-Israel stance and his exclusionary views towards non-Russian Jews.

Choice of nicks is related to identity positions. Zeev’s Hebrew nickname signals his knowledge of Hebrew (which he also demonstrates repeatedly via code-switching), religiosity, and Jewish identity – he claims to be a ‘real Jew.’ Other forum members disrupt his identity positions by translating the nick, engaging in further impoliteness around the concept of ‘wolf’ (‘wolves who wail from abroad’), and substitute his Hebrew name Zeev with its Russian Jewish equivalent Vladimir. Zeev’s narrative places him as a person born in the Soviet Union; it is highly unlikely that his birth name was Zeev. We might never know whether Zeev’s birth name is indeed Vladimir, but it is not unlikely given the history of Soviet Jewish name changes. By making the substitution, forum members remind Zeev of his cultural history in all its complexity – a history of assimilation which is at odds with Zeev’s narrative of the ‘real Jews’ of Moscow. Because this complex identity position is combined with a provocative political stance unsupported by most other forum members, Zeev2008’s nick is subjected to manipulation based on its Hebrew coding.

Just as Hebrew in Zeev2008 is targeted by forum members, Zeev2008 attacks a Russian nick of another participant, KlaraPetrovna, altering it to remove any Jewish connotations and emphasize the non-Jewish Russian connections. He then uses the nick manipulation as a basis for legalistic claims that people like KlaraPetrovna should be subjected to deportation for not being sufficiently Jewish.

Both nick manipulations (Zeev > Volk, KlaraPetrovna > KlavdiyaPyatrovna) correspond to the Inappropriate Identity Markers impoliteness strategy. Both index complex aspects of Jewish Russian identity and the history of ex-Soviet Immigrants in Israel. These debates, these impoliteness moves, can only make sense in a community which is deeply invested in Jewish, Israeli, migrant, and Soviet identities. Thus, these “inappropriate” identity markers still index important

aspects of identity – and especially communal identity and history. These identity markers are undesirable, or inappropriate, on an individual level – they are impolite and engender resistance. However, on the communal level, linguistic play involving nick manipulation reinforces the sense of communal uniqueness and cohesion – the members of the community are insiders who are able to generate these impoliteness strategies and understand the complex meanings they index.

The discussion of nick manipulation and (im)politeness online raises many additional questions. In the online environment, text-based identity markers like nicks are crucial to both facework and identity work. Most studies of online nicks focused on their taxonomy (proper names, flora and fauna, etc.), but paid little attention to how these nicks are used by interlocutors in interaction. Moreover, the connection between nick choice, nick manipulation, personal identity, and issues of group cohesion, group norms, and belonging should be investigated across multiple communities of practice. In a Russian-language faith-based community which I am investigating for a different project, moderators question the participants' choice of nick and even encourage users to change nicks if they perceive these nicks to be in conflict with the community's values. Studying such interactions would help further clarify the connection between nicks, identity, facework, and community. For migrant online communities specifically, empirical studies could investigate nicknaming practices as they relate to the tensions of language choice, code-switching, and other aspects of identity work.

Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness strategies remain a useful tool for empirical study of impoliteness in interaction. This study has shown how a single impoliteness strategy of Inappropriate Identity Markers can be used in diverse ways to signal identity and express both negative and positive attitudes towards an interlocutor online. I argued that the meaning of "inappropriate" in the IIM strategy needs to be refined: what is inappropriate between individuals can at the same time play an important role in group cohesion and identity work. The intersection of identity markers (nicks, pronouns, and more), facework, and identity work online merits further investigation.

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PART III

## **Pragmatics of internet-mediated texts**



# Candidates' use of Twitter during the 2016 Austrian presidential campaign

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This paper explores the Twitter use by the candidates of the 2016 Austrian presidential campaign which lasted for almost one year and required three ballots in sequence. The data corpus consists of all Twitter messages the candidates posted during the campaign. Drawing on theoretical considerations regarding politicians' and political parties' use of internet communication technologies (esp. the innovation vs. the normalization hypotheses), the paper explores the content level, the use of rhetorical actions, and selected aspects of the interpersonal level of the data. Results show that the candidates' communication strategies cannot fully be explained by either of the two hypotheses and hence that none of them can predict electoral success in this specific political campaign. It is concluded that the two proposed hypotheses concerning the use of internet communication technologies in the field of politics are too broad and that they have to be modified to account for contextual aspects of specific political communication situations.

**Keywords:** political discourse analysis, social media discourse, Twitter discourse, social media communication strategies, political campaign communication strategies, innovation hypothesis, normalization hypothesis, Austrian presidential election campaign 2016

## 1. Introduction

In Western democracies, politicians and political parties have used the Internet for communicating with the general public since the 1990ies (Larsson 2013; Gruber 2018). During this time, political scientists have developed two hypotheses concerning the impact of Internet communication technologies (ICTs) on political communication and on the relations between politicians and citizens: The *innovation hypothesis* assumes that ICTs will help establishing a qualitatively new communication culture between politicians and citizens, facilitating more direct

contact, enabling politicians and citizens to discuss political issues directly (without involving classical mediators and gatekeepers like journalists) and establishing direct, balanced personal relationships between politicians and the general public on an equal footing. The rise of social media since the beginning of the 2000s has fuelled these expectations as these platforms enable all users to create and disseminate self-created content easily.

The *normalization hypothesis*, on the other hand, expects that politicians and political parties will extend and adapt their traditional communication practices to the affordances of new ICTs and that no qualitatively new communicative practices or patterns of politician-citizen communication will emerge. On the contrary, the hypothesis expects that the traditional audience design of political communication (politicians/parties as information providers, citizens as passive recipients) will be further stabilized through ICTs (Schweitzer 2008; Larsson 2013). Through these traditional communicative practices, parties and politicians establish a distanced, “paternalistic” relationship towards their audience.

Methodologically, these earlier studies often applied content analytic techniques on different levels of sophistication (cf. Section 3). More recently, automated sentiment analysis of social media posts has been used to identify correlations between Sentiment in politicians’ tweets in large data sets and public opinions and election outcomes (see e.g., Yaqub et al. 2017). As this study is based on a rather limited set of data and combines quantitative and qualitative analysis, the former approach is followed. Nonetheless, it will be attempted to relate the results of this study to the outcome of the 2016 presidential election.

This chapter investigates if and which of the above hypotheses can account for the Austrian presidential candidates’ communicative practices on Twitter during the 2016 election campaign. The 2016 Austrian presidential election, lasting for almost one year for reasons which cannot be discussed in detail here (for a short overview see Section 4), provided a unique opportunity for analysing the use of a social media platform by candidates for one of the very few political offices in Austria which is elected by direct popular vote.<sup>1</sup> The candidates’ communication practices and strategies will be analysed (a) on the content level, (b) with regard to their rhetorical activities, and (c) on the interpersonal plane of communication.

In the remainder of this chapter, firstly a short overview on previous studies of politicians’ use of social media is presented (Section 2). Possible operationalisations of the two communication hypotheses and the methodological approach of the current study is outlined in Section 3. In Section 4, the data and a short

1. In most Austrian elections, citizens vote for party lists and not for individual candidates, exceptions are mayoral elections in some bigger Austrian cities and the election of the president of the Republic.

overview about the 2016 Austrian presidential campaign are provided. Section 5 presents quantitative and qualitative results of the investigation of the candidates' Twitter posts. In Section 6, these results are discussed in relation to the research question and with respect to the candidates' electoral success.

## 2. The use of ICTs in political communication

So far, ICT use in politician-citizen communication has been investigated mainly by communication scholars and political scientists and only recently by linguists. These studies focus mainly on the use of three different forms of electronic communication: politicians' websites, Facebook pages, and their activities on Twitter (for an overview see Gruber 2018). They are often based on large data sets and social network analyses (e.g., Ausserhofer and Maireder 2013; Bruns and Highfield 2013) or they apply broad content-oriented coding schemes (for an overview see Jungherr 2014). Graham et al.'s (2013) study of politicians' Twitter use during the 2010 UK general elections represents one of the few instances in which political scientists scrutinize not only content aspects but also the communicative function of tweets. Zappavigna's (2011) study applies Systemic-Functional Linguistics and Appraisal Theory for analysing a big corpus of Twitter posts of i.a. political communication, but focuses on citizens communicating *about* political topics.

Whereas politicians as a group (or political parties as organisations) seem to be rather reluctant users of new ICTs (see Jackson and Lilleker 2009; Larsson 2013; Koc-Michalska et al. 2016), single individual politicians do in fact use social media quite heavily. In his comprehensive overview on the use of Twitter in political communication, Jungherr (2014) found that politicians use Twitter for communicative activities related to their "public persona" but not to their private life, i.e., they spread information on political (campaign) activities, policy statements, or they provide links to their website where they comment on articles published in traditional media. However, they do not often interact with other users (and if so, politicians interact with fellow politicians or journalists). All in all, the studies reviewed by Jungherr seem to support the normalization hypothesis. Hermans and Vergeer's (2013) and Vergeer, Hermans and Sams's (2013) investigation of Twitter use by Dutch politicians during the 2009 EU elections, however, shows at least a tendency towards a new style of personal campaigning among a fraction of Dutch politicians. And Larsson and Ihlen's (2015) study of Norwegian politicians' use of @-messages showed unexpected high rates of interactions between Norwegian party leaders and citizens. Since Donald Trump's advent at the political stage of the US (and even more so since the beginning of his presidency), Trump's use of Twitter has instigated an entire wave of investigations of his use of this media

platform by scholars from very different backgrounds (from data scientists to rhetoric scholars) which cannot be reviewed here in detail (for a very recent collection of papers under a rhetorical perspective see Lockhart (2019); for a critical discourse analysis of the right-wing populist elements expressed in Trump's tweets see Kreis (2017); Hoffmann (2018) investigates negative evaluations in Donald Trump's and Hilary Clinton's tweets during the presidential campaign applying an Appraisal Theory framework; Ott (2017) takes Trump's verbal (mis)demeanor as a case in point for his severe criticism of Twitter as a communication medium). The results of this "Trumpology," however, clearly show that his (quasi-) impulsive use of Twitter and the "ordinary" language and populist rhetoric he applies does not only sharply contrast with the political style of other US politicians but even more so with Austrian politicians' use of this platform. As a recent study has shown, especially the Austrian presidential candidates avoided rather than attempted to present themselves as "ordinary people" on Twitter (Gruber 2019). Based on the previous research, two broad research questions were formulated:

Research question 1: Which communication strategies of Austrian presidential candidates on Twitter can be identified?

Research question 2: Are these strategies more in line with the innovation or the normalization hypotheses?

### 3. Methodological approach

For an investigation of the above research questions, a linguistically meaningful operationalization of the two broad hypotheses was necessary. In her study of party websites, Schweitzer (2008) presents six empirical indicators for distinguishing them: (1) amount of information provided; (2) number of interactional features; (3) number of sophisticated website features (e.g., multimedia and service options); (4) amount of self-referential campaign coverage; (5) degree of personalization; and (6) number of negative campaigning elements. The first three indicators cover structural features, the last three deal with content aspects of websites. According to Schweitzer, a high count on the first three dimensions (accompanied by a low count on the last three) indicates that a website conforms to the innovation hypothesis whereas a reverse frequency pattern is an indication for the normalization hypothesis. Schweitzer's own results, however, show that websites may display structural features of the innovation hypothesis while their content aspects support the normalization hypothesis.

In a linguistic study of Twitter communication, the above indicators have to be adapted to the affordances of the platform as well as to a linguistic pragmatic

perspective towards communication.<sup>2</sup> The amount of information provided by the candidates is measured by computing the average number of tweets per candidate, day, and ballot. The counting of sophisticated features is not relevant in the context of this study as Twitter is a rather “lean” communicative form allowing (at the time of data collection) only 140-character messages<sup>3</sup> and including pictures or short videos. The rest of the above indicators (and some more linguistically relevant features) will be covered by adopting a pragmatic genre-oriented analysis which allows to reconstruct the communicative goal(s) genre users pursue as well as their self-presentation strategies.

In the context of social media, genres are conceptualized as context-sensitive social practices. Genres realize social goals by communicating specific topics in various rhetorical modes and applying different semiotic modes of production (cf. Gruber 2018). As socio-pragmatic “tools,” genres establish a social relationship between user(s) and audience(s) and thus indicate i.a. how genre users present themselves in front of their audience. These self-presentation practices allow to reconstruct how genre users imagine relevant characteristics of their audience. A genre approach to analyzing the data therefore suits best for investigating the research questions of this study.

Message production- and audience roles which have been conceptualized for modeling face-to-face communication (Goffman 1959) have to be adapted for the specific communication situation in new and social media (Dynel 2014a, 2014b; Draucker and Collister 2015). As social media communication is characterized by a “context collapse,” i.e., a single user’s audience may be composed of members from rather different (social, geographical, etc.) groups (Vitak 2012), it has been proposed to conceptualize this (potentially) inhomogeneous group of people as a “third party” (Dynel 2014a, 2014b) of whom message producers in SNS are aware although they do not necessarily know who they are. This characteristic of social media’s communication situation does not only have implications for its theoretical conceptualization but also for methodological considerations and analytic procedures (see below).

For the quantitative analysis, a coding scheme comprising categories for the following, genre-related, dimensions of tweets was developed:

2. For a detailed discussion of Twitter as a microblogging platform under a linguistic perspective, see Zappavigna (2017).
3. Although the actual maximum Twitter message length is presently set at 280 characters, the data of the present study were collected at a time (i.e., prior to 8 November 2017) when tweet length was limited to 140 characters.



- Content aspects
- Rhetorical activities
- Interpersonal aspects

23 *content categories* cover the topical variety of the candidates' tweets. In a first step, content categories applied in previous investigations of election campaigns in Australia, in several European countries, and in North America were compiled (cf. Jungherr 2014) and a start list was created. New categories were added when necessary during the coding process. The categories cover three broad dimensions of political and one dimension of non-political communication. The three political dimensions are "statements and descriptions" (comprising 8 sub-categories) through which politicians transmit information on their campaign in a rather monological way. The second dimension covers "appeals and instructions" (4 sub-categories) through which followers and supporters are called to perform certain actions (either online or offline). The third dimension of political communication (9 sub-categories) comprises "interactive moves" through which a candidate interacts with others (supporters, journalists, other politicians including opponents, etc.). The dimension of non-political content types covers all topics which are not related to the election campaign or politics in general, i.e., mainly tweets in which information concerning aspects of a candidate's private life is given.

*Rhetorical activities* specify the discursive action(s) a tweet realizes. As Twitter messages were limited to a length of 140 characters at the time of investigation, complex illocutionary structures (and hence multi-stage genres) were not expected. The analysis showed, however, that despite their brevity many tweets combine more than one content and rhetorical activity category which results in relatively complex content and rhetorical structures. Content categories and rhetorical mode categories are not independent of each other, especially the three dimensions of political communication topics are systematically related to certain rhetorical activities (see Section 5).

*Interpersonal aspects* of the tweets are covered by three sets of categories, "interpersonal elements," "forms of self-reference," and "visual impression management."<sup>4</sup> The coded interpersonal elements include linguistic, typographic, and visual features through which the author of a tweet positions themselves towards their "imagined audience" (Marwick and boyd 2011) or the content of their tweet. This category comprises greetings or direct addressing of users and stance expressions towards the posted content (emoticons, emojis, typographic elements; on emoticons, see Kavanagh, this volume; on emojis, see Danesi 2017; Dainas and

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4. Visual aspects of the tweets cannot be scrutinized systematically in this paper. This is the focus of Gruber (2019).

Herring, this volume). Forms of self-reference (full name, family name, first name, team name or 1st person sg. pronoun) indicate how a candidate (or his campaign team) indexically positions him/herself towards their audience, i.e., which kind of relationship they intend to establish towards them. Whereas the use of full name, family name, or team name indexes a formal distance and a three-party relationship between audience (addressees and third party), politician (protagonist and principal of a message), and the campaign team (author, animator and broadcaster; cf. Draucker and Collister 2015), the use of first name and especially the use of the 1st person sg. pronoun indexes a horizontal personal relationship between politician and audience (cf. Riboni 2015).

Analysing content, rhetorical modes and interpersonal aspects of each tweet in the corpus allows identifying genres and genre variants realized in the tweets. The socio-pragmatic genre conception applied in this study provides the opportunity to relate the results of the linguistic pragmatic analysis of the data to the wider socio-political context of the election campaign.

In the quantitative analysis, high frequencies of certain categories on each of the three dimensions (and low frequencies in others) indicate a candidate's communication strategy (or strategies). Systematic combinations of categories across dimensions allow identifying the genres which were used during the campaign. In a second step, individual communication strategies and genres can be attributed to one of the two general communication hypotheses discussed in Section 2. The analysis of the corpus was conducted at the quantitative and the qualitative level. In the qualitative analysis, selected, pragmatically relevant, aspects of the tweets were scrutinized (see Section 5).

A text-centred analytic approach was chosen for the following reasons: (1) As discussed above, most previous research on politicians' Twitter use was conducted in the fields of communication studies and/or political science.<sup>5</sup> These studies applied only quantitative, content-analytic methods. In order to relate the present study to previous research, an (at least partly) quantitative approach was necessary. (2) The above discussed context collapse as a central situational characteristic of social media communication suggests *two possible analytic foci* for a linguistic-pragmatic analysis: The *first one* puts the text of the postings in its centre as they are the primarily available data and the starting point of all ensuing comments and recontextualizations by the audience. If we conceptualize pragmatics as a functional view towards all aspects of language use (Verschueren 1999), the analysis of textual features and their functional interpretation (which accounts for the specifics of the situation in which they are used) yields inventories of meaning potentials

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5. And the studies of Donald Trump's Twitter use are simply not relevant for the current investigation.

of a text in a concrete communication situation. As analysts, we can of course not decide which of these potential interpretations is actually chosen by which sections (or members) of the audience. But we can arrive at a theoretically grounded analysis of participants' starting points for their uptake (Sbisà 2009) of an utterance.

Investigating participants' differing uptakes and recontextualizations of a specific utterance would constitute the *second possible focus* of analysis. Such an analysis scrutinizes the chain of actual interpretations of an utterance during an interaction but it can only yield meaningful results when it is based on the previous analysis of its pragmatically relevant characteristics. The present study concentrates on the first focus (i.e., a textual analysis). It is therefore deficient in the sense that it does not investigate how the scrutinized tweets' meaning potentials are taken up by the third party. An analysis of this second aspect would go far beyond the scope of the present chapter. The results presented here thus may lay the foundation for a follow-up study which could focus on this second aspect.

#### 4. The 2016 Austrian presidential campaign: Details and data

Austrian federal presidents are elected by popular vote every six years in a run-off voting procedure. Each Austrian older than 35 years may run for presidency, provided they hand in 6,000 affidavits of support before a given deadline (37 days before the ballot). In order to collect the required number of affidavits, prospective candidates start their campaigns within due time before this deadline.

In the 2016 presidency election, 6 candidates competed in the first ballot:

- Irmgard Griss (independent candidate; campaign start: 18 December 2015),
- Norbert Hofer (FPÖ<sup>6</sup> candidate; campaign start: 27 January 2016),
- Rudolf Hundstorfer (SPÖ<sup>7</sup> candidate; campaign start: 15 January 2016),
- Andreas Khol (ÖVP<sup>8</sup> candidate; campaign start: 10 January 2016),
- Richard Lugner (independent candidate; campaign start: 10 February 2016),
- Alexander van der Bellen (independent candidate, supported by the Green party; campaign start: 8 January 2016).

The overview shows that three party candidates (Hofer, Hundstorfer, Khol), one formally independent candidate who was supported by a party (van der Bellen) and two independent candidates (Griss, Lugner) ran for presidency. Griss, a retired

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6. FPÖ: Austrian Freedom Party, right wing populist.

7. SPÖ: Social Democratic Party.

8. ÖVP: Austrian People's Party, Christian conservative.

judge at the Supreme Court, became popular as the head of a public commission investigating the biggest Austrian bank scandal of the 2nd republic in which several politicians and parties were involved. Hofer was third president of the first chamber of the Austrian parliament at the time of the campaign.<sup>9</sup> Hundstorfer had held several high political offices and was minister for social affairs until the campaign start. Khol also had held various high political offices during his career, at the time of the presidential campaign he was head of the ÖVP's association of pensioners. Lugner is a well-known businessman and a notorious member of the Austrian high society who had run for presidency already in 1998. Van der Bellen, a former university professor of economics, had been a MP for the Green party since the early 1990ies and later on head of this party. All six candidates had Twitter accounts from which all tweets they posted since their individual campaign starts were collected through weekly searches with the NodeXL Excel template combined with manual downloads from the candidates' Twitter homepages. Initiative as well as responsive tweets and retweets were included in the dataset as the candidates' interaction with others was one of the aspects under scrutiny. Multiple instances of the same tweet, however, were not included. ÖVP candidate Khol – although he had an official Twitter account – did not post any tweet and independent candidate Lugner posted only a few tweets before the deadline for affidavits. Therefore, his tweets will not be part of the analyses in Section 5.

The actual authors (in Goffman's sense) of the tweets posted at the official accounts were not identifiable in all cases. From Griss's, Hundstorfer's, and van der Bellen's accounts, official campaign teams tweeted which was communicated at their campaign starts. Hofer's tweets were posted in rather irregular intervals during the campaign (cf. Section 5.1), and it was never disclosed whether (1) he tweeted in person, or (2) if his account was serviced by a team, or (3) if these two variants alternated.<sup>10</sup> Despite these different author roles, only the account holders' names will be mentioned as "author" in the following presentation and discussion of results.

From the four candidates (Griss, Hofer, Hundstorfer, van der Bellen) who posted tweets until the first ballot on 24 April, Hofer (35.1%) and van der Bellen (21.3%) received the highest share of votes and competed in a second ballot on 22 May. In this second ballot, van der Bellen reached a narrow majority of 50.35% of votes. Because of formal irregularities during the counting of postal votes the FPÖ party lawyer had documented, the FPÖ appealed against the result of this

9. In contrast to his competitor Hundstorfer (and against usual practice in Austria), Hofer did not step down from his office before the campaign started.

10. A communication lapse occurring on his Facebook page after the election suggests that this third alternative is correct, for details of this incident see Gruber (2019).

ballot at the Austrian supreme court. Granting this appeal, the Supreme Court revoked the result of the second ballot on 1 July. The third ballot, originally scheduled for the beginning of October, was postponed to December, 15 due to organizational difficulties. In this third ballot, van der Bellen reached a clear majority of 53.8% of votes.

## 5. Results

The presentation of results follows Schweitzer's indicators for the distinction between the two hypotheses underlying the present investigation (see Section 2). First the amount of information the candidates provided on Twitter during the campaign is analysed, then their use of the platform's interactive affordances is discussed. Following this, the campaign tweets' content and rhetorical features are scrutinized. The section ends with an analysis of the tweets' interpersonal features.

### a. Candidates' frequency of use of the Twitter platform

The *amount of information* (operationalized as average number of tweets sent per day) differs highly between candidates and ballots. Table 1 provides an overview of the tweeting activities of all candidates during the entire election campaign.

**Table 1.** Twitter activities of candidates during the 2016 Austrian presidential election campaign

	Individual campaign start – 24 April (1st ballot)	25 April – 22 May (2nd ballot)	1 July – 15 December (3rd ballot)	Total
Griss	708			708
Hofer	69	12	294	375
Hundstorfer	379			379
Khol	0			0
Lugner	19			19
van der Bellen	278	187	247	712
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.453</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>2.193</b>

During the first ballot, Griss (5.5) and Hundstorfer (3.8) posted most tweets per day, closely followed by van der Bellen (2.6), whereas Hofer sent only 0.8 tweets on average. Thus, Griss's, Hundstorfer's and (to a lesser degree) van der Bellen's information providing activities seem to support the innovation hypothesis. During the second ballot, the average number of van der Bellen's tweets increased

to 6.7 whereas Hofer's tweeting rate dropped to 0.4. Thus again, van der Bellen's information circulation strategy conformed to the innovation hypothesis whereas Hofer's did not. During the third ballot, however, both candidates' tweeting rates were rather low (Hofer 1.75 and van der Bellen 1.47 tweets per day). The interpretation of these low rates has to take into account the extremely long duration of the third ballot (168 days) as well as the fact that two months of this period (July, August) are traditionally used for summer vacations in Austria. Thus, it can be assumed that both candidates would not post too many tweets during this time.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the results show (1) that the average rate of tweets per day does not only differ between candidates but also between ballots. Thus, no one of the two candidates who completed all three ballots showed a consistent pattern of information density over the entire campaign time. (2) Results suggest that election success does not seem to be related to the amount of information supplied by candidates on Twitter as those candidates who had the highest tweeting rates in the first ballot (Griss, Hundstorfer) were not the most successful ones.

#### b. Use of interactive features

The overview on the candidates' use of interactive affordances of Twitter during the first ballot shows that (except of Griss and Hofer) the candidates did neither interact frequently with their audience nor with each other (cf. Table 2).

**Table 2.** Candidates' use of interactive features during the first ballot

	Griss		Hundstorfer		Hofer		van der Bellen		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
interaction with opponents	9	1.05	4	0.82	0	0.00	0	0.00	13	0.71
interaction with journalists	4	0.47	6	1.23	3	3.16	9	2.53	22	1.20
interaction with supporters	29	3.37	9	1.84	3	3.16	10	2.81	51	2.77
responses to questions and statements	95	11.05	31	6.34	17	17.89	25	7.02	168	9.14

Table 2 further shows that if candidates interacted with their audience at all, their interactive moves were mainly second-position (reactive) actions (cf. last row of Table 2). Even Hofer (who used relatively most interactive moves) responded to questions and statements of his followers only in about 18% of his tweets. Griss responded to previous postings in about 11% of her tweets, all other candidates

11. If July and August are not considered in the computation of the average tweeting rates, Hofer tweeted 2.7 and van der Bellen 2.3 tweets per day. For Hofer, this indicates a clear increase, for van der Bellen, a return to his tweeting rate from the 1st ballot.

responded to tweets of other users in less than 10% of their Twitter messages. The realizations of the other interactive categories of all candidates is neglectable.

During the second and third ballot, both Hofer and van der Bellen's ratio of interactive tweets was below 10% of the overall amount of their tweets. Nonetheless, Hofer posted more interactive tweets (between 3.7 and about 6%) than van der Bellen.

### c. Content and rhetorical aspects

Table 3 provides an overview of the most frequent content categories (printed bold) realized in the candidates' tweets between their individual campaign starts and the end of the first ballot. Because of space limitations only those categories are included which together cover about 60% of each candidate's postings' content.

**Table 3.** 1st ballot, most frequent content categories/candidate

	Griss		Hundstorfer		Hofer		van der Bellen		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
information on campaign activities and events	91	<b>10.58</b>	85	<b>17.38</b>	4	4.21	90	<b>25.28</b>	273	14.85
information on media events	93	<b>10.81</b>	67	<b>13.70</b>	5	5.26	67	<b>18.82</b>	232	12.62
statement of political conviction	150	<b>17.44</b>	80	<b>16.36</b>	2	2.11	15	4.21	247	13.44
link to external information	69	8.02	61	12.47	14	<b>14.74</b>	40	<b>11.24</b>	203	11.04
comment on current event	29	3.37	8	1.64	10	<b>10.53</b>	6	1.69	53	2.88
quote	158	<b>18.37</b>	57	<b>11.66</b>	3	3.16	16	4.49	234	12.73
endorsing candidate	22	2.56	27	5.52	2	2.11	30	<b>8.43</b>	81	4.41
posting of non-political content	19	2.21	27	5.52	19	<b>20.00</b>	7	1.97	75	4.08

Table 3 shows that regarding the content level all five candidates followed individual communication strategies. Griss' frequency pattern peaks at the two categories "statements of political conviction" (17.4%) and "quote" (18.37%). That is to say, she frequently posted slogans concerning various domains of Austrian politics which were realized as self-quotes posted during media events as Example (1) shows.

- (1) *Griss über Ö Flüchtlingspolitik: „Als BP hätte ich Plan eingefordert. Nichts ist aber geschehen. Da sind extreme Versäumnisse passiert“* (13 March)  
 Griss on A[ustrian; HG] refugee policy: "As FP [Federal President; HG], I would have demanded a plan. But nothing happened. Extreme omissions occurred." (13 March)

The above tweet is part of a series of 12 tweets posted during an interview with Griss in a news program on Austrian TV station “Puls 4.” All of them share the same formal pattern: they begin with an elliptical reporting clause presenting the candidate’s name in thematic position and the general topic of the entire tweet in a circumstantial element in the Rheme.<sup>12</sup> The following quote consists of few very short clauses presenting Griss’s position towards this topic (Austrian refugee policy in Example 1): an introductory (hypothetical) demand is followed by two short descriptive clauses evaluating the factual situation negatively. Taken together, the series of tweets presents the candidates’ political positions on various issues in a nutshell. Griss’s use of this format for broadcasting her political view is not surprising as she was the only candidate without a previous political career and hence had not publicly positioned herself towards many political issues so far.

Hundstorfer’s tweets mainly realize four content categories and inform about campaign activities or media events he participated in (about 30% of his tweets). He also provides links to external information (i.e., media websites, facebook pages etc.) and frequently posts statements of political conviction in the form of self-quotes. This last result is slightly surprising as he was a rather well-known social-democratic politician who had been minister for social affairs for several years before his candidacy, hence his political position towards almost all issues of Austrian politics were already known to the general public.

Hofer also posts links to external information rather frequently and often comments on current events. But the two most frequent content categories in his tweets are responses to other users’ questions or statements (17.9%) and the posting of non-political content (20%). In these postings, he shares pictures with his followers which are totally unrelated to the presidential campaign as Example (2) shows:

In (2), he retweets a picture from an internet site ([www.oldpicsarchive.com](http://www.oldpicsarchive.com)) without any further comment. This practice indexes him as an “ordinary user” who shares content he likes with his followers (cf. John 2013; Gruber 2019). Hofer’s content frequency pattern during the first ballot shows that he uses the platform in a rather unique way (displaying some communication features the innovation hypothesis predicts). This should not change during the whole election campaign.

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12. “Theme” and “Rheme” are analytic categories for exploring a message’s information structure dynamics and its fitting into its co-text and context (Thompson 1996). Although they are often associated with Systemic Functional Grammar, they originate from the Prague School of Structuralism (Halliday 1994). An analysis of the thematization of an utterance allows to reconstruct an utterance producer’s awareness of the communicative needs of their audience (i.e., their audience orientation) and thus yields pragmatically relevant results.



(2)



Van der Bellen's frequency distribution shows a clear focus on two content categories: providing information on his campaign (25.28%) and on his media activities (18.82%). Example (3) provides a typical instance:

- (3) *Noch kurzes Interview vor dem Sammeln der Unterstützungserklärungen um 11 Uhr vor dem Innsbrucker Rathaus* (23 February)  
 Short interview before starting to collect affidavits at 11.00 in front of the  
 Innsbruck city hall (23 February)

The elliptical clause addresses the candidate's current activity in thematic position and provides the exact time and location where supporters could provide their affidavits shortly after the broadcast of the tweet (10:34) in the Rheme. The text is accompanied by four photos showing (1) the candidate being interviewed by a journalist, (2) the logo of the local TV station "Tirol TV," (3) the Innsbruck city hall, and (4) the dark and rather blurred interior of a TV studio. The elliptical clause and the way the four pictures are shot and assembled provide an improvised and hasty impression indexing the candidate (and his social media team) as very busy. Although the text is static and descriptive (which is reinforced by the missing verb), the exact information about time and place for the collection of affidavits shows that it is also intended as an invitation for prospective supporters to provide their affidavits at the indicated time and place.

Tweets of both categories (information on campaign activities and on media events) are often complemented by links to external information. The focus on a limited set of content categories is a characteristic of van der Bellen's campaign

style (which is mainly compatible with the normalization hypothesis) and did not change during the entire campaign.

For reasons of space, an in-depth analysis of the rhetorical modes realized in the candidates' tweets cannot be given here, only the most frequent combinations of content-categories with rhetorical modes per candidate will be discussed in the following. These results support the tendencies which emerged through the qualitative analysis of the examples so far.

Griss often combines descriptions with information on media events (75) or campaign activities (56). Statements of political conviction (her most frequent content category) are mainly combined with three rhetorical activities: demands (40, cf. Example (1)), claims (37), and descriptions (29). The rather high amount of demands and claims when informing her audience about her political convictions positions her as an active and self-confident politician who has clear positions towards political issues. Hundstorfer shows a similar pattern of combining content and rhetorical categories. Information on his campaign (52) and media activities (50) are frequently presented as descriptions whereas his political convictions are often realized as plans (8) or claims (22). As mentioned above, this is surprising insofar as his political positions were known in advance and it is not clear why they are presented so often during the campaign. In Hofer's tweets, no clear pattern of combination is visible. The only noticeable frequency peak occurs with postings of non-political content which are frequently realized as (retweeted) descriptions (cf. Example (2)). In van der Bellen's tweets, information on his campaign (36) or media activities (38) are most often realized in descriptive mode (cf. Example (3)) followed by descriptions of links to external information (19) and descriptions of prominent persons who publicly endorse him (17).

The 2nd ballot saw a marked difference in the frequency of Twitter use by the two remaining candidates Hofer and van der Bellen. Whereas Hofer posted only 12 Tweets during the 27 days of the campaign, van der Bellen posted 187. A comparison between the candidates' Twitter activities during this period is thus difficult. Again, only the most frequent content categories are represented and discussed here (cf. Table 4). The analysis shows marked differences between the two communication campaign styles. In Hofer's tweets, information on media events (15.63%) and comments on his opponent or his activities (12.5%) are the most frequent content categories. Most of these tweets contain links to external information.

As during the first ballot, van der Bellen's tweets display a rather clear communication strategy in terms of content. About one third of his tweets contain information about his campaign activities and about 17% inform about his media activities. Many of his tweets contain links to external information (about 18%). An interesting difference to Hofer's frequency pattern concerns the "comments on opponent/ opponent's activities" category. Whereas this category was the second

Table 4. 2nd ballot, content categories/candidate

	Hofer		van der Bellen		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
information on campaign activities and events	2	6.25	96	33.57	98	30.82
information on media events	5	15.63	48	16.78	53	16.67
link to external information	9	28.13	52	18.18	61	19.18
comment on opponent and/or opponent's activities	4	12.50	0	0.00	4	1.26
<b>total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>100.00</b>

frequent content category (12%) in Hofer's (few) tweets, it is not realized at all by van der Bellen. Van der Bellen thus refrained from commenting on his competitor whereas Hofer did not.

The analysis of the rhetorical modes realized in the two candidates' tweets during the second ballot complements the results of the content category analysis (cf. Table 5). One third of Hofer's tweets evaluates media events or his opponents' activities and slightly more than one fifth (22%) contains only one or more hashtags. Descriptions and claims (16.6% each) represent more or less the rest of his few tweets.

Table 5. 2nd ballot, rhetorical modes/candidates

	Hofer		van der Bellen		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
description	3	16.67	102	51.00	105	48.17
claim	3	16.67	7	3.50	10	4.59
evaluation	6	33.33	39	19.50	45	20.64
<b>total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Example (4) shows one of Hofer's tweets evaluating van der Bellen:

- (4) *Van der Bellen heute in der ZIB: TTIP Verhandlungen jetzt stoppen und in ein oder zwei Jahren sehen wir weiter.... Einfach unglaublich!* (2 May)  
 Van der Bellen in today's ZIB [daily evening television news show; HG]:  
 stop TTIP negotiations now and in one or two years we'll see ... Simply unbelievable! (2 May)

In Example (4), an elliptical reporting clause presenting Hofer's opponent in the thematic position and time and occasion of his statement in a circumstantial element in the Rheme is followed by a short paraphrase of van der Bellen's alleged

statement, and further followed by Hofer's negative evaluation of this statement. The overall thematic structure of this tweet results in a sandwich-structure positioning Hofer's opponent van der Bellen's name in the macro-Theme position and the (negative) evaluation in the macro-Rheme (Martin 1992) of the entire tweet.

Van der Bellen's rhetorical communication strategy is very clear. More than half of his tweets (51%) are realized in descriptive mode and almost one fifth (19.5%) are evaluations. This means that only two rhetorical activities account for almost three quarters of his tweets. The rather high number of evaluative tweets results from van der Bellen's retweeting activities during a specific campaign event on 16 May (i.e., one week before the ballot). This event ("Stimmen für van der Bellen/voices<sup>13</sup> for van der Bellen") took place in one of Vienna's most prominent concert halls (the "Konzerthaus") and presented many of van der Bellen's supporters from the fields of culture, politics, and academia. During and after the event, van der Bellen retweeted many tweets from third persons who had tweeted positive evaluations of single speakers/performers during the event. As during the first ballot, descriptions are often combined with information on van der Bellen's campaign activities or media events.

During the third ballot, Hofer posted more tweets (294) than van der Bellen (247). A superficial glance at the frequency patterns of the candidates' tweets during the extremely long lasting third ballot (168 days) (misleadingly) seems to imply rather focused communication strategies on both candidates' sides (cf. Table 6).

**Table 6.** 3rd ballot, content categories/candidate

	Hofer		van der Bellen		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
information on campaign activities and events	6	1.39	88	24.44	94	11.88
information on media events	42	9.74	55	15.28	97	12.26
link to external information	166	38.52	73	20.28	239	30.21
comment on current event	64	14.85	28	7.78	92	11.63
posting of non-political content	24	5.57	14	3.89	38	4.80
<b>total</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>791</b>	<b>100.00</b>

38.5% of Hofer's tweets contain links to external information. The high frequency of this category, however, does not imply a focused communication strategy but

13. In German, this title conveys a double meaning: *Stimme* means both "voice" and "vote." Thus a *Stimme* for van der Bellen may come from somebody who publicly speaks out for him or from someone who votes for him. Additionally, "Stimmen für van der Bellen" can also be read as a colloquial imperative ("Vote for van der Bellen").

rather shows that in more than one third of Hofer's tweets, links are used to provide the audience with additional information on a tweet's content. Furthermore, in many of his tweets, the text serves as a teaser referring readers to Hofer's Facebook account (cf. Example 5).

- (5) *Liebe Freunde! Das Zukunftsmodell meines Mitbewerbers sind die „Vereinigten Staaten von Europa“; hier sitzt er ... fb.me/5kUgrWQgA* (13 November)  
 Dear friends! My competitor's future model is the "United States of Europe", here he falls for ... fb.me/5kUgrWQgA (13 November)

In this tweet, after addressing his followers as "dear friends" one complete descriptive clause ("My competitor's future model is the 'United States of Europe'") presenting his opponent's alleged political position is followed by an incomplete one ("here he falls for<sup>14</sup>...") and a link to Hofer's Facebook page. The incomplete clause is obviously intended as a teaser to receive more information at the Facebook page.

Analysing the remaining content categories in Hofer's tweets reveals no clear frequency pattern. Only comments on current events are realized in more than 10% of his tweets. In these tweets, Hofer comments on events of a very diverse significance ranging from international terrorist attacks to specific decisions of the Austrian government.

Hofer's tweets communicating "non-political content" also change compared to the first ballot. Whereas the tweets during the first ballot indexed him as an "ordinary" Twitter user performing "ordinary" Twitter practices, during the third ballot, he mainly extends good wishes on state or religious holidays etc. towards his followers (cf. Example 6).

- (6) *Liebe Kinder! Heute ist Weltspartag. Die Idee dazu wurde bereits im Jahr 1924 beim ersten internationalen... <https://t.co/Cp4ZlHQq2t> (link to article of "Handelsblatt online")* (31 November)  
 Dear children! Today is world savings day. Already in 1924 at the first international .... this idea was .... <https://t.co/Cp4ZlHQq2t> (link to article of "Handelsblatt online") (31 November)

Structurally, this tweet resembles the one discussed above (Example 5). Hofer firstly addresses the "dear children" among his followers (or probably rather their parents) and then presents a short, incomplete clause and a link to an article in an online economics journal in which the history of world savings day is presented. This way of presenting non-political content indicates a change in

14. The English translation "to fall for" is far less ambiguous than the German verb used in the tweet. *Sitzt* (lit.: "sits") does not have a clearly recognizable meaning here. The translation "to fall for" (*aufsitzen*) is the only one which makes sense in this context, given the two candidates' vastly different views towards the EU.

his communication strategy insofar as he changes from “doing as if being ordinary” (Gruber 2019) to applying a content strategy through which he manifests his mindfulness for his followers.

Van der Bellen's tweets focus on two content categories, they inform his audience about campaign activities (24.4%) and media events (15.3%). Many of these tweets contain links to external information (20.3%). In contrast to Hofer, van der Bellen never uses tweets as teasers for longer texts posted on his Facebook page. All his tweets present self-contained messages, their links lead to additional information.

The distribution of rhetorical activities realized in both candidates' tweets is similar during the third ballot. Both clearly focus on descriptions and display a minor frequency peak on evaluations (Table 7).

**Table 7.** 3rd ballot, rhetorical modes/candidate

	Hofer		van der Bellen		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
description	103	35.52	141	53.61	244	44.12
appeal	13	4.48	32	12.17	45	8.14
evaluation	51	17.59	38	14.45	89	16.09
<b>total</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>553</b>	<b>100.00</b>

In van der Bellen's tweets, this tendency is, however, more pronounced. More than half of his tweets (53.6%) are descriptive whereas Hofer tweets show only 35.5% descriptions. Both candidates use descriptive tweets when they inform about their campaign or media activities. Hofer posts more evaluations (17.6%) than van der Bellen (14.5%). In many of his evaluative tweets, Hofer retweets previous postings of users in which he was denigrated, insulted or threatened<sup>15</sup> and towards which he expresses negative judgement attitudes (Martin and White 2007). Another reason for the relative high number of evaluative tweets is the expression of positive affect attitudes (Martin and White 2007) towards his followers in his non-political tweets.

Van der Bellen's evaluative tweets quite often mention his campaign activities and express a positive judgement attitude. Both candidates thus combine evaluations with frequently occurring content categories. In more than 10% of van der Bellen's tweets, appeals are realized (12.2%). In these appeals, followers are either

15. These hostile tweets, however, were originally posted during or even before the first ballot. Hofer retweeted them after media reports on death threats against his competitor van der Bellen and subsequent police investigations during September 2016. So, his intention of publicly showing that he was also a victim of malicious tweets became quite obvious.

asked for donations (the extremely long campaign had caused financial shortage in van der Bellen's campaign funds as he was no official party candidate) or they were invited to join campaign activities (e.g., hiking tours during late summer and early autumn).

(d) Interpersonal aspects: self-references

The analysis of interpersonal aspects of the tweets shows that different forms of self-reference (Table 8) occur in 13–42% of the candidates' tweets during the first ballot.

**Table 8.** 1st ballot, forms of self-reference/candidate

	Griss		Hundstorfer		Lugner		Hofer		van der Bellen		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
full name	96	58.54	37	74.00	1	14.29	9	64.29	41	34.75	184	52.12
family name	24	14.63	5	10.00	2	28.57	2	14.29	76	64.41	109	30.88
1st person sg. pronoun	43	26.22	3	6.00	4	57.14	3	21.43	1	0.85	54	15.30
first name	0	0.00	5	10.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	5	1.42
team name	1	0.61	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.28
	164	100.00	50	100.00	7	100.00	14	100.00	118	100.00	353	100.00
% of candi- date's tweets		23.16		13.19		36.84		20.29		42.45		

In Hundstorfer's tweets, fewest (13.19%) and in van der Bellen's most self-references (42.45%) occur. Griss and Hofer use self-references in about 20–23% of their tweets. Self-references, however, can index very different forms of relationships with an audience depending on the grammatical forms used. The frequency pattern shows that in all candidate's tweets full name and family name account for most self-references. This establishes a rather distanced relationship between a candidate and their audience and clearly indicates that a team is servicing the account in order to inform a candidate's audience about their activities. This pattern is especially clear with van der Bellen in whose tweets almost exclusively full name and family name is used. In contrast, 26% of Griss's tweets contain first person singular self-references. This rather high ratio, however, does not indicate that she (or her team) built a more direct or personal relationship with her audience but rather results from the high number of self-quotes communicating her political convictions (see above, Example 1). Only Hofer, who used first person singular pronouns in 21% of his tweets, sometimes seems to have intended establishing a

personal relationship on an equal footing with his audience. This is in line with the rather high number of tweets (20%) communicating non-political content.

Hofer's self-presentation is also peculiar in a different respect. In his evaluative tweets (30.4% of all his tweets), a specific split of his public political role manifests even if no self-references occur. In one fraction of tweets he clearly writes in his role as a presidential candidate, whereas in a second group of tweets, he adopts his role as third president of the Austrian national council and evaluates actions and decisions of the government or events occurring during parliamentary debates as the two following Examples (7) and (8) show:

- (7) *@\*martinthuer\* Vielen Dank, es war ein hartes Interview – aber auch fair. Und nach der Wahl spielen wir noch eine Runde Plants vs Zombies* (21 March)  
*@\*marthinthuer\* Many thanks, it was a tough interview – but fair also. And after the election we play a round of Plants vs Zombies* (21 March)
- (8) *In der heutigen Sitzung des Nationalrates manifestiert sich die tiefe Kluft zwischen den Koalitionspartien. Das kann nicht gut gehen.* (16 March)  
 In today's session of the national assembly the deep divide between the two coalition parties manifests. This cannot go well. (16 March)

In Example (7), Hofer addresses journalist Martin Thuer (then talk show host of the private Austrian TV station ATV) and thanks him for a “tough but fair” interview. The second clause shows Hofer attempting to establish personal relations towards the journalist by referring to plans for playing a round of an online game after the election. By evaluating the “interview” and addressing the time “after the election,” he clearly adopts the role of a presidential candidate.

Example (8), in contrast, was posted during a session of the Austrian national assembly whose third president Hofer was then. In the first clause, he refers to the alleged political divide between the then coalition parties SPÖ and ÖVP which is negatively evaluated in the second clause. This tweet is obviously authored by the third president of the national assembly who comments on the performance of the government rather than by the presidential candidate Hofer. Hofer's self-presentation during the first ballot thus oscillates between establishing symmetric personal and distanced hierarchical relationships towards his audience and between presenting himself as a presidential candidate or as third president of the national assembly.

During the second ballot, Hofer's tweets did not contain any self-references, whereas almost 52% of van der Bellen's tweets did (cf. Table 9). As in the first ballot, more than 90% of these tweets use either full name or family name to refer to the candidate. Thus, the rather distancing self-reference strategy from the first



ballot is continued. In only about 8% of the self-referencing tweets, van der Bellen uses the 1st person singular pronoun and hence indexes a rather personal symmetric relationship towards his audience.

**Table 9.** 2nd ballot, forms of self-reference/candidate

Self-reference	van der Bellen	
	n	%
full name	23	23.71
family name	66	68.04
1st person sg. pronoun	8	8.25
first name	0	0.00
team name	0	0.00
<b>total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100.00</b>
% of candidate's tweets		51.87

During the third ballot, about 40% of both candidates' tweets contain self-references (Table 10). But as in the two previous ballots, the realization patterns differ.

**Table 10.** 3rd ballot, forms of self-reference/candidate

Self-reference	Hofer		van der Bellen		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
full name	1	0.84	34	32.69	35	15.70
family name	1	0.84	62	59.62	63	28.25
1st person sg. pronoun	117	98.32	8	7.69	125	56.05
first name	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
team name	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
<b>total</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>100.00</b>
% of candidate's tweets		40.48		42.11		

The use of the 1st person singular pronoun accounts for almost all self-references in Hofer's tweets, whereas in more than 90% of van der Bellen's tweets, either full name or family name are used. Van der Bellen's results parallel the frequency patterns during the first and second ballot, whereas Hofer self-reference strategy changed during the three ballots: during the first ballot, full name or family name self-references prevail, during the second ballot no self-references occur at all, and during the third ballot almost all self-references are realized as first-person singular pronouns.

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

In closing, I will discuss if and how the presented results answer the research questions formulated in Section 2 and also provide an overarching discussion of the results. The generalizability of the results, however, is limited by the corpus under investigation: this study can only reveal candidates' communication strategies on Twitter but no reliable generalizations on their communication strategies on other social media platforms nor about their overall campaign communication strategies are possible.

Research question 1 asks if communication strategies can be identified. This question could be answered positively for all candidates and all three ballots. Note, however, that Hofer's applied a different communication strategy during each ballot whereas van der Bellen's strategy remained more or less consistent during all three ballots.

Research question 2 asks whether the data would support the normalization or the innovation hypothesis. The results presented above provide a mixed answer if Schweitzer's (2008) criteria are applied. The *amount of information* differs highly between candidates and ballots. During the first ballot, Griss's, Hundstorfer's and (to a lesser degree) van der Bellen's information providing activities seem to support the innovation hypothesis. During the second ballot, van der Bellen increased his tweeting rate whereas Hofer's tweeting rate remains low. During the third ballot, however, van der Bellen's tweeting rate returns to the level of the first ballot whereas Hofer's tweeting rate increases. These results show that no candidate who completed all three ballots shows an entirely consistent pattern of information density during the whole campaign and that van der Bellen's tweeting density conformed more to the innovation hypothesis than Hofer's. Results also suggest that election success does not seem to be directly related to the amount of information supplied by candidates as the two candidates with the highest tweeting rates during the first ballot (Griss, Hundstorfer) were not the most successful ones.

The number of *interactive tweets* varies between candidates and ballots. During the first ballot, Hofer and Griss interacted most often with other users (followers, journalist, and competitors). These two candidates' tweeting activities thus seem to support the innovation hypothesis at least moderately. The other two candidates' rates of interactive tweets (Hundstorfer, van der Bellen) support the normalization hypothesis insofar as their tweets realize mainly "monological" genres. During the second and third ballot, both remaining candidates' interactive tweet frequency dropped below a rate which allows a quantitative interpretation. These results show that candidates used the interactional affordances of Twitter at best moderately, only Hofer interacted with several groups of the audience and thus his activities conformed to the innovation to some extent during the first ballot.

The rate of *self-referential campaign coverage* is high in all candidates' tweets and during all three ballots. All candidates realized descriptive genres most often: they describe campaign related activities and media events or their political standpoints. Even if the description of a political standpoint is realized as a demand or a claim, a closer analysis reveals systematic deviations in the realization of these genres which turns them into descriptions: "demands" are typically realized in hypothetical mode ("as a president I would demand...") and "claims" are realized as projections in reported clauses ("candidate X says ..."). Realized this way, even demands and claims become descriptions. The second frequently used genre are evaluations. Evaluations can either refer to the candidate as author/principle or to another person or event. Self-evaluating tweets were mainly posted by van der Bellen whereas Hofer typically evaluated other persons and events. All these results support the normalization hypothesis. Only Hofer's sharing activities during the first ballot index him as an "ordinary user" and thus conform to the innovation hypothesis during this first period of the election campaign. Through his sharing activities, however, he did not present himself as a politician who would establish a relationship towards his audience on an equal footing but rather as an ordinary (non-politician) user like his audience.

At the interpersonal level (used for operationalizing the *degree of personalization*), differences in genre realization could be found. During the first ballot, the candidates' tweets contain a rather varying number of self-references. It is, however, relevant to look at *how* this personalization is realized. In the majority of the tweets containing self-references, candidates are referred to by their full names or family names. These tweets in fact support the normalization hypothesis insofar as they index a rather distanced relation between candidate (the person who is protagonist and principle of the tweet's text), a social media team (who is the author) and the audience. During the first ballot, Hofer's results differ from the others as he indicates (via 1st person sg. pronoun use) in about one fifth of his tweets containing self-references that he is the author of the tweet. During the second and third ballot, van der Bellen's tweets continue to contain self-references realized almost exclusively as full name or family name whereas Hofer's tweets do not contain any self-references. During the third ballot, however, almost half of his tweets contain self-references realized as 1st person sg. pronoun. Most candidates' tweets thus support the normalization hypothesis with regard to personalization, only Hofer does not follow a clear pattern across all three ballots, he oscillated between relating more personally (and symmetrically) towards his audience and distancing from his audience. These results indicate that Austrian presidential candidates position themselves quite differently (and much more distanced) towards their audience as the US politicians whose blogs Riboni (2015) investigated during the 2008 US presidential election campaign.

Schweitzer's last indicator (*negative campaign elements*) was not realized in the candidates' tweets at all. This does, however, not mean that no negative campaigning occurred but rather that negative campaigning elements were posted by users who could not clearly be associated with one of the candidates' teams.

This short summing up of the results shows that most candidates' communication strategies clearly tend towards the normalization hypothesis. Only Hofer's tweets oscillate between the two hypotheses without a clear tendency towards one of them. These results, however, could also indicate that the two hypotheses might simply be too general to account for complex political communication practices. Rather than attempting to explain all political communication practices in the Internet, the hypotheses should account for pragmatic and contextual features like campaign vs. non-campaign communication activities (cf. Larsson and Kalsnes 2014), communicative affordances of the respective communication platform, and qualitative differences in the realization of certain indicators which may result in very different communicative effects.

The discussion of the results further suggests that neither of the two hypotheses seems to be suitable for explaining the election success (or failure) of the candidates. During the first ballot, Hofer's communication activities conform most of all candidates to the innovation hypotheses and he received the relative majority of votes. This implies that following this hypothesis (and relating to his audience on a more equal footing than the other candidates) may lead to electoral success.

A look at the entire campaign, however, shows that this is only partly true. Van der Bellen, whose communication practices on Twitter conformed to the normalization hypothesis in most respects, shows a coherent communication strategy during all three ballots by focusing on a very limited number of genres and contents which index a rather distanced relation to his audience. Hofer, on the other hand, changed his communication strategy during each ballot. This result suggests that a coherent, focused campaign communication strategy on a social media platform leads to success rather than following one of the two communication hypotheses. But these results may also indicate that Austrian politicians prefer to establish a rather distanced ("paternalistic") relationship towards their audience as this might meet the expectations of the general public (this interpretation is also corroborated by the results reported in Gruber (2019) which show that the presidential candidates presented themselves not very frequently as "ordinary people" in their campaign communication on Twitter).

As mentioned in Section 3, the results of this study provide only insights into the investigated tweets context-dependent (and context-shaping) meaning potentials. No conclusions about the actual uptake of these tweets by the audience can be drawn. Investigating all aspects of these uptakes (kinds of comments, number and kinds of retweets, etc.) could be the next step of analysis and has to be based on the results presented in the current investigation.

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# A study on how cultural and gender parameters affect emoticon distribution, usage and frequency in American and Japanese online discourse

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This study attempts to understand how cultural and gender parameters affect emoticon distribution, usage and frequency in American and Japanese online discourse. From a corpus of American and Japanese personal blog comments of over 45,000 sentences and data from interviews with bloggers, emoticon function, usage and frequency were compared across gender and cross-culturally. In addition, an examination of how emoticons interact with the linguistic text and other unconventional means of communication such as unconventional phonetic spelling, was also given consideration.

**Keywords:** emoticons, gender, positive impact upgraders (PIU's), negative impact downgraders (NID's), Japanese, American, speech act markers, culture

## 1. Introduction

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a form of interaction conducted predominantly online with or without the aid of visual and auditory cues. With the use of a microphone or a webcam, families and friends can be brought together from around the world in applications such as Facetime, in what is perhaps the closest thing to face-to-face communication that CMC and its technology provides us with. However, without the use of webcams and microphones which make up the bulk of online CMC, these auditory and visual pieces of information are missing. This is essentially what makes CMC and face-to-face communication different. However, "there is ample evidence that users compensate textually for missing auditory and gestural cues, and that CMD (computer-mediated discourse) can be richly expressive" (Herring 2003: 615).



This research examines and compares how American and Japanese blog writers convey semantic and pragmatic meaning in text-based online personal blogs using emoticons. The paper aims to look at how emoticons function within American and Japanese asynchronous blog comments and examines how gender and culture may shape their usage, frequency and function. In addition, how emoticons interact with the linguistic text and other “oralization” marks such as unconventional phonetic spelling, which Yus (2011) describes as an attempt to reflect key elements of face-to-face communication, is also examined.

## 2. A review of the emoticon literature: Function, gender and cultural factors

The emoticon was born in the 1980's and has been an omnipresent feature of on-line communication in both asynchronous and synchronous communication platforms ever since. The initial wave of literature regarding emoticons suggested that they were used to compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues found in face-to-face interaction (Carey 1980). These studies examined how the user's emotion was replicated in these icons as a result of such cues being absent in a text-based CMC environment. In this research emoticons were found to have an impact on message interpretation as tools in influencing the intensity of the verbal text message. Results also suggested that emoticons predominantly expressed emotion and acted in the same way as actual non-verbal facial expressions found in face-to-face communication (Derks, Bos and von Grumbkow 2008). These emoticons were also seen as helping to create the impression that emoticon users are friendlier, more interesting and creative (Huffaker and Calvert 2005; Harris and Paradice 2007).

The next wave of literature aimed to look at how emoticons are not merely icons of emotion but can also play a pragmatic role (see Dainas and Herring, this volume). These consequent studies have suggested that emoticons and emoji act as indicators of illocutionary force (Dresner and Herring 2010) or expressive speech acts and directives (Skovholt, Grønning and Kankaanranta 2014). Other studies have shown how emoticons can indicate sarcasm or irony (Riordan and Kreuz 2010), index politeness strategies (Kavanagh 2016), show rapport (Sampietro 2019) and act as contextual cues (Rashdi 2018). Some studies have even proposed a taxonomy of pragmatic functions such as Kavanagh's (2010) 9-point classification of how these extra-linguistic signs can act as devices of modesty, hedging devices, and request softeners. Similarly, Yus (2014) created an 8-function classification of emoticons that stipulates how emoticons can help in the strengthening and mitigating of the illocutionary force of a speech act as well as to add feeling or emotion toward the propositional content of the utterance.

Interestingly, the majority of the English language and Japanese language-based literature has examined Japanese emoticons or *kaomoji* from a predominantly pragmatic and cultural perspective. Katsuno and Yano (2002) suggest that the rise of *kaomoji* and its widespread usage is a result of the conventions of play and aesthetics in traditional writing systems in Japan and also the influence of *manga* (comics) with its highly codified visual language. Many of the Japanese *kaomoji* derive from *manga* and are often tied in with Japanese communication concepts of indirectness and modesty (Kavanagh 2010). The use of ‘;’ on the side of the face of the ^\_^; *kaomoji*, for example, represents sweat and is used when the writer feels what they are saying is perhaps too assertive (Sugimoto and Levin 2000).

Miyake (2007) found that, unlike western emoticons, which function primarily to accentuate emphasis, tone or meaning, Japanese emoticons do not often represent a specific semantic meaning but reveal important emotional cues or act as an atmosphere-building device. She concludes that “the passion for creating a comfortable atmosphere seems to parallel the Japanese tendency, in face-to-face conversation, to greatly emphasize harmonious setting and atmosphere over the content of the talk” (Miyake 2007: 70; see also Miyake 2020).

Markman and Oshima (2007) found that both emoticons and *kaomoji* act to punctuate sentences with the purposes of marking how they are intended to be read, to compliment the text meaning and to clarify author mood. They conclude that *kaomoji*, however, have more variations than the western emoticons which only tend to be facial representations. The *kaomoji*, they point out, can be more similar to non-verbal communication in face-to-face communication than their emoticon counterparts.

Harada (2004) states that the Japanese *kaomoji* have three main roles: they are fun to use, they can easily express one’s emotions, and they can change the image of the utterance to make it sound softer or kinder. What permeates through the literature on Japanese emoticon usage is how they are utilized in the sense of showing *hairyo* (配慮) or consideration for their reader. For example, Harada (2004) writes that emoticons promote smooth communication by showing this consideration to the author. In addition, Nakamura (2001) suggests that these signs help conversation participants avoid friction; and Tanaka (2001) states that they are used to maintain good relations with their interlocutor.

Another line of enquiry that is also a focus of the literature is research on gender and online emoticon usage. Wolf (2000) found, that through a sample of USENET support groups, that the stereotype of the emotional woman and the inexpressive man holds true for same-gender newsgroups postings. Her findings showed that women used emoticons more frequently to express their emotion than men. Similarly, in a study of 3,000 online messages, Witmer and Katzman

(1997) discovered that females used more graphical accents, including emoticons, to express emotion in their discourse than males.

A study by Tossell et al. (2012) concluded that women used more emoticons in smartphone text messaging dialogues and attributed it to the notion of the stereotypical emotional female: "Our findings show that text messaging seems to follow similar patterns as F2F communication. That is, females are more emotionally expressive and use more non-verbal cues compared to males on SNS, which corresponds to their more frequent non-verbal displays in F2F communication" (Tossell et al. 2012: 662).

Within the Japanese context, Kishimoto (2002) and Kato, Kato and Scott (2009) found that Japanese women used more emoticons than men in mobile phone role-play interaction and Net diaries respectively. Similarly, Hamada's (2007) results show that in mail exchanges the use of *kaomaji*, *emoji* and *kigō* (symbols such as ♪ and ★) was significantly more frequent in female e-mails. Nakamura (2001) found, from a study of 400 e-mails from 140 university students, that extra-linguistic signs were used to replace the lost cues found within face-to-face interaction. He concluded by suggesting that emoticons may accentuate a communication style particular to women and cites complimenting and 'rapport talk' as an example.

Some studies have shown that it is women more so than men who write personal blogs (Chen 2012). Other research suggests that these female authors' personal blogs mirror face to face communication in that these women seek social outlets and opinions, express emotion and release tension (Nardi et al. 2004; Huang, Yen and Zhang 2008). In addition, Chen (2012) suggests that the need for self-disclosure and affiliation certainly plays a role in why women write personal blogs.

Huffaker and Calvert (2005) analyzed blog language and found that boys used more language associated with being active, inflexible, and resolute in contrast to girls using more passive, cooperative, and accommodating language. Some studies have suggested that the topic of the online discourse may influence the usage of emoticons or writing style. The topic of a blog may determine how many emoticons are used (Kavanagh 2010); and Kapidzic and Herring (2011) suggest that word choice and speech acts are determined more so by the topic of the online conversation rather than gender.

A number of studies have also looked at other UMC's such as letter repetition and exclamation usage. Darics (2013) argues that unconventional digital discourse is complex and the focus should be placed on how these notations play a role within the contextualization of the verbal message. The effect of letter repetition, she argues; is that these representations of orality can contribute to socio-emotional information and add friendly intent into the writing. This can result in the contextualization of the relational content of the message. Kalman and Gergle (2014) found similar results from a corpus of nearly 500,000 e-mails

by employees of the Enron Corporation. Their findings suggest that letter repetitions as in ‘Yeeeeeeeeehaaaaaw!!!!!!’ are often, but not necessarily always, representations of spoken nonverbal cues. Waseleski (2006) found, in a study of an analysis of 200 exclamations posted to two electronic discussion groups, that exclamation mark usage was not necessarily a marker of excitability but rather may function as a marker of friendly interaction. With respect to gender, Herring and Zelenkauskaite (2009) found evidence for gendered typography and how it is manipulated to reflect a gendered identity and gender roles in Italian SMS.

Within the literature, the ‘pragmatic function’ of emoticons is still under-researched especially with regards to how men and women may use emoticons differently. Most studies use introspective, isolated examples that focus only on one or two emoticon functions and have no corpus data as a frame of reference which may limit how they work in particular contexts and online environments. In addition, how emoticons interact with other online extra-linguistic signs or unconventional phonetic spellings, termed collectively as unconventional means of communication (UMC’s) in this paper, has also been ignored in the literature. Few studies (Kavanagh 2012a, 2016) have examined emoticon usage across cultures and none have compared gender and emoticon habits across the English and Japanese languages and how cultural factors can also influence their distribution and usage. In order to address these gaps, the following research questions were formulated and applied to the corpora:

1. What are the semantic and pragmatic functions of emoticons in online synchronous online blogging communities?
2. Do cultural and gender parameters affect emoticon distribution, usage and frequency?
3. What is the interplay and relationship between emoticons and other UMC’s?

### 3. Data

The corpus from which our data were taken was originally created to examine the usage of extra-linguistic signs and unconventional linguistic notation cross-culturally from differing perspectives. Although they are now competing with other SNS platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, blogs continue to be a very popular online writing platform throughout the world (Internet 1),<sup>1</sup> with the

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1. See <https://99firms.com/blog/blogging-statistics/#gref> (accessed 10 May 2020).

number of American users set to reach 31.7 million in 2020 (Internet 2).<sup>2</sup> Ameba, a famous Japanese blog hosting website celebrated 15 years of blog service last year, and announced that they have 65 million registered users with a combined total of 2.5 billion blog posts (Internet 3).<sup>3</sup> A glance through the literature suggests that blogging is popular because it allows people to disclose personal events or information, share knowledge and interact with people with similar ideas (Nardi et al. 2004; Huang, Yen and Zhang 2008). Jung, Vorderer and Song (2007) state that blogging allows its users to create a virtual space where they strategically construct their desired identities. Through this option users can create a unique online identity that may differ considerably from their own one, an alter ego if you will. The writer can then be seen to be appealing to their positive face, a face that wants to be liked and admired (see Perelmutter, this volume, on nick-mediated impoliteness).

The personal online blog, therefore, seems to fulfill the need to express emotion or embrace self-disclosure (under a real or handle name) and the writing of blog posts can accomplish this. The writing of comments on these blog posts in turn accomplishes the need to interact with others, to find affiliation and to seek or exchange opinions. It is also a platform that allows creativity and language play such as the usage of emoticons and other forms of UMC's. This was therefore, the main rationale for looking at blogs and these data in particular.

Altogether, 100 Japanese and 100 American blogs were selected from websites that rank all personal blogs, such as the Japanese *Nihon blogumura* and the American blog catalogue, based on the number of hits the blogs receive. Popular blogs tend to have the most comments and unpopular ones have few if any followers and consequently few comments. An equal balance of the most popular female and male-authored blogs were selected, 100 per gender, 50 in English and Japanese respectively, giving an even representative balance of weblog data. Five blog postings were chosen from the latest entry of each blog and, if a blog entry had no comments, the previous blog entry was chosen.

As the counting of emoticons that included their type and function formed the basis of this paper the number of comment sentences per blog article in both the English and Japanese corpus was counted manually. Sentences were counted rather than words or characters so that the two languages that use different scripts could be compared for the frequency of emoticons use. The number of sentences that had an emoticon attached was recorded. Therefore, the counting of words, which normally describes corpus size, would not be applicable to the aims of

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2. See <https://www.statista.com/statistics/187267/number-of-bloggers-in-usa/> (accessed 9 May 2020).

3. See <https://www.cyberagent.co.jp/news/detail/id=23617> (accessed 10 May 2020).

this study. To compare emoticon frequency a Mann-Whitney test was conducted through SPSS software and the statistical level of significance was set at  $p < .05$ .

### 3.1 Gender clarification

The original blog comments were mixed with both men and women writing comments on these personal blogs. The comments therefore had to be divided by their respective gender. The gender of the writer was determined through the link at the end of the comment. The link, usually the author's name, when clicked on takes you to their blog, and through the blog profile the gender of the author can be determined. Their gender was described as being either male or female and therefore this data takes a rather traditional and binary view of gender by default. If gender was not documented in the profile a reading of the blog usually confirmed the gender of the author. As this paper specifically looked at gender, if confirmation could not be attained through these measures or no link was available, as in anonymous comments, the comment was rejected and categorized as unknown. Although there are instances of online users writing under the opposite sex as opposed to their own, there was no evidence of that within the data here.

Tables 1 and 2 show the number of sentences divided by gender per each corpus and also stipulates how many were classified as unknown in origin.

**Table 1.** Gender divided Japanese comment data

Total Japanese comment sentences	32,675
Female-authored sentences	20,225
Male-authored sentences	5,568
Sentences categorized as unknown	6,882

**Table 2.** Gender divided American comment data

Total American comment sentences	24,316
Female-authored sentences	15,201
Male-authored sentences	4,519
Sentences categorized as unknown	4,596

In both the Japanese and American corpora, the number of female comments was significantly larger than their male counterparts. This may reflect the notion that personal online blogs are mainly written by women (Chen 2012). Although a few men blogged about work and electronic gadgets, on the whole both men and women, Japanese and American, blogged about TV dramas, parenting, food, restaurants, fashion and about their children. Within these blogging communities,

online friendships were formed through the coming together of similar interests, and although comments from both genders were written under these blog entries, women posted more comments and more often than men did.

#### 4. Emoticons analyzed

The emoticons analyzed within the corpora are illustrated in the tables below. These text-based emoticons can be created with the computer keyboard with a series of strokes. The variety of western emoticons is now vast but the Japanese emoticon is incredibly diverse in comparison. Western emoticons are drawn side-ways whilst Japanese emoticons are written front facing. Tables 3 and 4 show the most common and basic western and Japanese emoticons.

**Table 3.** English text-based basic emoticons

:-) The basic smiley face (happy, grin)	:-l To express indifference
:) The simpler variation of the basic smiling emoticon	:-e To express disappointment
:-( A frown (unhappy)	>:-< To express being mad or angry
:-o To be surprised or shocked	:-D To express laughter or the feeling of happiness
:-@ To express a scream or shout	;-) A smile with a wink (to express joking, kidding, or sarcasm).

**Table 4.** Japanese text-based basic emoticons (*kaomoji*)

(^_^)/ Hi!	(>_<") To express pain or 'Ouch'!
(^^) A smile	(';') A baby's face
(^O^) To be glad	(~o~) A yawn
^_^; To be in a cold sweat	<^_^; - To express embarrassment through the scratching of one's head
(/--)/ To express 'Oh no'!	(/_;)/ To express embarrassment
(;_;) To express crying and sobbing	(TOT) To express sadness and a crying countenance
(^_-)--- A wink	(T^T) To bow
	m(._.)m

Adapted from Kavanagh (2015)

## 5. Methods of emoticon classification

Emoticons were divided according to how they function, as either propositional or politeness-affiliated speech act markers. These two categories were further sub-divided into categories pertaining to their specific function. Emoticons were classified into these categories based on the context in which they were used. This context included examining the sentence the emoticon was attached to and the context and interaction in which the comment was written, as well as the emoticon itself. The majority of the literature that examines the function of emoticons does so in this way but it can be subjective. Speaking with the actual bloggers about their writing practices would be ideal but this was difficult to accomplish with the 200 users within the corpus. To reduce the possibility of researcher subjectivity, a team of active American and Japanese bloggers was asked to verify the meaning of particular emoticons within the context in which they were found. Bloggers ranged in age from people in their twenties to those in their forties. This matched the demographic of blog users within the corpus and data sets within this study. The bloggers were given the corpus data and read the comments in the context in which they were created. The bloggers were then asked to write down their interpretations of the emoticon and this was followed up with interviews by the researcher to gather further opinions about the emoticon's meaning and pragmatic usage. Most of the time the researcher and bloggers concurred, but if a consensus was not reached among the bloggers on the meaning or interpretation of the emoticon, it would not be used for analysis.

In addition, emoticon dictionaries or websites were also referred to especially for Japanese emoticons or *kaomoji*. Speaking with the actual bloggers about their writing practices would be ideal but this was difficult to accomplish with the 200 users within the corpus and therefore the researcher sought other ways to help with an objective emoticon interpretation. The interpretation of examples within this paper is therefore a result of researcher and blogger interpretation.

### 5.1 Emoticons as propositional markers

These emoticons are connected to sentences that express author feeling independent and separate from feelings towards the reader. They are used to support the writer's emotion towards what is written within the text and represent the author's feelings towards the propositional content and may fall into one or more of the following sub-categories.

#### *Emoticons as iconic/emotion strengtheners*

These emoticons resemble the feeling being expressed by the author as in a happy face used to project the author's feelings of happiness. They may be attached to



lexical items such as adjectives of which the emoticon supports and the emoticon may be used repeatedly to strengthen emotional stance.

### *Emoticons that enhance verbal linguistic content*

These enhance the verbal content of the sentence itself by emphasizing and supporting its entire meaning rather than just a particular lexical item.

### *Emoticons as lexical replacements*

Here the emoticon is used instead of the lexical item. It can be used creatively to substitute a noun or stand alone to represent the author's emotion.

## 5.2 Emoticons as politeness-affiliated speech act markers

Spencer-Oatey (2008) states that people choose from a repertoire of linguistic options to manage rapport with each other. These options, or "rapport management strategies," include the use of "upgraders or downgraders" which intensify or weaken the force of certain speech acts. She states that a way of analyzing these "upgraders and downgraders" is by examining how they upgrade or boost particular speech acts or downgrade, mitigate or soften speech acts. Requests for example can be downgraded, softened or mitigated so that they function to reduce any negative impact that may be linked with the speech act. Upgraders can be used to strengthen the negative impact of a speech act such as in requesting but in speech acts such as compliments an upgrade would mean to heighten the positive impact associated with the speech act. By utilizing this framework an analytical tool that can be applied to analyzing emoticon data and how they can be used to upgrade and downgrade speech acts across gender and culture.

The emphasis with emoticons as politeness-affiliated speech act markers is on how the writer feels about or how they wish to interact with the person he or she is communicating with as opposed to the content of the comment itself.

As blog comments are a written form of communication and the voice or facial expression of the user cannot be heard/seen, it is argued that emoticons attached to speech acts can act as downgraders or upgraders and therefore help their relational goals. In other words, this kind of emoticon usage is aimed at managing participants' relationships such as strengthening their (online) friendships.

Emoticons as politeness-affiliated speech act markers were categorized into two categories. The first category of positive impact upgraders (PIU's) is the placement of emoticons to visually assist in the upgrading and emphasis of the positive impact of the speech act such as in complimenting, agreeing and expressing solidarity. The second category, negative impact downgraders (NID's), concerns

emoticons that were attached to speech acts to downgrade, mitigate or soften their illocutionary force, as in requests.

### *Emoticons that act as PIU's*

Emoticons were attached to the following to function as PIU's.

1. **Solidarity markers.** Categorized as expressions of support, empathy, sympathy, approval and the assertion of common ground.
2. **Comment openings and closings.** Shown by intensifying interest to the reader at the time of comment openings/closings.
3. **Expressing gratitude.** Enhance the positive face of the addressee when expressing gratitude/thanks towards the addressee.
4. **Compliments.** Showing praise towards the reader.
5. **Jokes.** Expressions of playfulness and humor.

### *Emoticons that act as negative impact downgraders (NID)*

These emoticons were attached to comments with the aim of mitigating the illocutionary force or awkwardness of the comment and to soften the linguistic content.

1. Mitigating illocutionary acts through hedging.
2. Minimizing the imposition at the time of requests.
3. Being conventionally indirect at the time of expressing one's opinion.

### *Supplementary UMC's*

In addition to emoticons, there was a third extra-linguistic sign that is collectively called *kigō*, or symbols such as ♪ and ★. They were frequently used but only within the Japanese data and were therefore included in the analysis. Unconventional linguistic notation such as unconventional phonetic spelling as shown in Table 5 were also given consideration in how they interacted with emoticons. Kavanagh (2012a) labels these online linguistic and non-linguistic depictions found online as UMC's. The term is used in this paper and they are examined in relation to how these UMC's supplement emoticons.

**Table 5.** Unconventional phonetic spelling

Japanese examples	イイですねえ	That's good hey
	そうなんですか〜	Really
	かわいいじゃないのお	Cute, isn't it
American examples	Amaaaaaaaaaazing!	
	Sooo COOL!	
	ABSOLUTELY WITH YOU THERE!	

Japanese unconventional phonetic spelling, as illustrated in some of the examples in Table 5, consisted of vowel and consonant lengthening, as in a wavy dash  $\sim$  that represents the lengthening of the vowel sound, or the use of a small *hiragana* font as in  $\text{え}$  (e) and  $\text{お}$  (o), which again represents a lengthening of the vowel sound. These representations are unorthodox and are not considered conventional. English examples also included the lengthening of vowels and consonants suggesting how they should sound. Capitalization, which emphasizes the tone of the lexical item, but is not possible in Japanese and therefore not present in the Japanese corpus, was also included in the analysis. If a sentence had at least one instance of capitalization or unconventional phonetic spelling, it was counted as one occurrence of the respective UMC.

## 6. Results

The results are broken down into three parts, emoticon frequency, emoticon function (as prepositional and politeness-affiliated speech act markers) and how they are used with other UMC's. The discussion then examines the results in relation to the three research questions outlined in Section 2.

### 6.1 Japanese emoticon frequency

Japanese female writers used significantly more emoticons than their Japanese male counterparts ( $p < .01$ ) and also wrote significantly more sentences, as illustrated in Table 6. This parallels the literature that suggests that females use more emoticons than males in both Japan and America (Witmer and Katzman 1997; Miyake 2004; Tossell et al. 2012).

When broken down into their functions of propositional and politeness-affiliated speech act markers, Japanese women again used significantly more emoticons than men did ( $p < .01$ ).

Table 6. Japanese blog comment emoticons data

	Japanese female blog comments ( $n = 100$ )		Japanese male blog comments ( $n = 100$ )	
	Total	Mean $\pm$ S.D.	Total	Mean $\pm$ S.D.
Total number of sentences	20,225**	202.3 $\pm$ 346.2	5568	55.7 $\pm$ 108.7
Emoticons	4,322**	43.2 $\pm$ 93.0	984	9.8 $\pm$ 35.0
Propositional	3,226**	32.3 $\pm$ 66.6	708	7.1 $\pm$ 22.9
Politeness-affiliated speech act markers	1,100**	11.0 $\pm$ 28.0	276	2.8 $\pm$ 12.7

\*\*( $p < .01$ )

## 6.2 American emoticon frequency

Female American comment writers wrote significantly more comments than their male counterparts did ( $p < .01$ ). This result parallels the Japanese data finding and again shows that females predominantly write online personal blogs and comments. In general, emoticon use was less frequent within the American data compared to the Japanese blog comments.

Although American women used more text-based emoticons than American men, there were no statistically significant differences in the overall totals and in the propositional and politeness-affiliated speech act functions. This is in contrast to the bulk of the literature that suggests that women use more emoticons than men (Tossell et al. 2012). This result also seems to parallel some studies (e.g., Tidwell and Walther 2002) that have found that there are no significant differences in the frequency and usage of male and female emoticons.

Table 7. American blog comment emoticons data

	American female blog comments ( $n = 100$ )		American male blog comments ( $n = 100$ )	
	Total	Mean±S.D.	Total	Mean±S.D.
Total number of sentences	15,201**	152±335.6	4519	45.2±109.9
Emoticons	717	7.1±15.8	169	1.7±5.8
Propositional	340	3.4±7.5	54	0.5±1.5
Politeness-affiliated speech act markers	377	3.8±8.7	115	1.2±5.2

\*\*( $p < .01$ )

## 6.3 Cross-cultural emoticon frequency

Table 8 gives the results of emoticon frequency when comparing the American and Japanese data.

Within all the pairs compared, Japanese comment writers, regardless of gender, used emoticons significantly more than Americans. The only exception was that there was no significant difference within the Japanese male and American female gender pairing for overall total and propositional markers. Japanese men, however, did use significantly more emoticons to indicate politeness affiliation ( $p < .05$ ).

Table 8. Emoticon usage across data sets

	Japanese female vs. American male	Japanese female vs. American female	Japanese male vs. American female	Japanese male vs. American male
Total sentences	Japanese female **	Japanese female **	X	X
Total text-based emoticons	Japanese female **	Japanese female **	X	Japanese male **
Propositional	Japanese female **	Japanese female **	X	Japanese male **
Politeness-affiliated speech act markers	Japanese female **	Japanese female **	Japanese male *	Japanese male *

\*( $p < .05$ )\*\*( $p < .01$ )

X = NO significance

#### 6.4 Functions: Emoticons as propositional markers

Within this and the following sections, some examples will be shown to illustrate how these emoticons were used by both Japanese and American female and male comment writers. The sections are broken down initially into propositional examples followed by the next section that focuses on instances of politeness-affiliated speech act markers. The interpretation of each example was discussed with blog users, as outlined in the methods section, in order to interpret their function as accurately as possible. They were interpreted within the context in which they were found.

##### *Japanese female examples (Emoticons as iconic/emotion strengtheners)*

(1) 最後の 写真、サイコー(≧▽≦)/ㄟ 犬 好きには

last GEN photo, amazing dog to\_like

たまりません!^^

cannot help<sup>4</sup>

‘The last photo (of a dog) was amazing (≧▽≦)/ㄟ Can’t help but love the dog!^^’

#### 4. Abbreviations used in Japanese language glosses are as follows:

COP: copula

GEN: genitive

HON: honorific

NOM: nominalizer

OBJ: object marker

QUEST: question marker

SUBJ: subject marker

SFP: sentence final particle

TOP: topic marker.

- (2) そうなの? 恐竜 が いた? Σ(O\_O;) ビックリい〜  
 really? dinosaurs SUBJ were\_there surprising  
 ‘There were really dinosaurs there? Σ(O\_O;)Surprising’

Within the first example, the emoticon supports and strengthens the adjective ‘amazing’ and adds emotion to the utterance, it is iconic in that it represents an elated facial expression that compliments the lexical item. The second example is similar in that it supplements the adjective surprise and iconic in that it represents a surprised countenance. It is also an example of a rare occasion where the emoticon precedes the lexical item.

Examples (1) and (2) above have instances of unconventional phonetic spelling. Examples (1) and (2) both make use of the smaller *katakana* vowel font オ(o) and the *hiragana* い(i), respectively, to represent a drawn-out vowel sound. The dash (オー) and wavy dash (い〜) signify a long, drawn-out o and i vowel sound, respectively, and are techniques employed to mimic vocal spellings. These examples also illustrate playful representations of words, notably the *katakana* written ビックリ ‘surprise’ and サイコオー ‘amazing’ that are usually written in *hiragana* (びっくり) or *kanji* (最高); *katakana* is a syllabary usually reserved for loanwords. This unorthodox spelling can “mimic the emotional responses from the blog comment writers in an attempt to give a voice to the text they type,” as suggested in Kavanagh (2012a: 187).

#### *Japanese male examples (emoticons as iconic/emotional strengtheners)*

- (3) 大変 です!! 新亜 製麺 が 10月 いっぱい で 閉店  
 awful COP Shin’a Noodles SUBJ October full at closing  
 です。今日 麺 を 購入したら A4 の 紙 に ひっそり  
 COP Today noodles OBJ while\_buying A4 GEN paper on quietly  
 書いてありました。諸般 の 事情 により.. 寂しい です (TT)  
 was\_written variety GEN reasons because\_of missing COP  
 ‘I’m disappointed!! My favorite noodle shop (Shin’a noodles) is closing at the  
 end of October. When I bought some noodles I saw it quietly written on A4  
 paper. For a number of reasons I will miss the shop.’

The above emoticon of a face with tears rolling down their face (as represented by the two ‘T’s) expresses the sadness of the author because their favorite noodle shop is closing.

#### *American female examples (emoticons as iconic/emotion strengtheners)*

- (4) That cracked me up :)  
 (5) Cheese curds are soooo yummy! And if they are freshly made, they squeak in your teeth. Love, love, love them! :) What I really can’t wait for is the state fair, where I will happily enjoy some fried cheese curds!

- (6) I am soooo jealous!! I love all of those wedding shows!! how did you get invited, lucky ducky :) xxxooo

The emoticons used above by female comment writers all help in the conveyance of author emotion, and strengthen the positive feelings expressed within the comments. The use of adverbs such as use the elongated vowel spelling of ‘soooo’ followed by an adjective or emotive verb like “love,” accompanied by other UMCs such as the double exclamation mark and capitalization, were characteristics of the female American comments.

*American male example (emoticons as iconic/emotion strengtheners)*

- (7) Wow...I personally wasn't sure I wanted to know what was gonna happen next but now...AWESOME! 😊

The above example was a rare instance of a male user punctuating an adjective, one that is written in capitals for emphasis, with an emoticon (actually, emoji). The comment itself refers to the plot of a drama.

*Japanese female example (emoticons as lexical replacements/enhancers of verbal linguistic content)*

- (8) (≡^∇^≡)(≡^∇^≡)ほんつとに かわいいうちにも 3匹 います。  
 really cute home in too 3 cats are  
 個性 が あって みんな カワユ (̄▽+̄\*)  
 individuality SUBJ being all cute  
 ‘(≡^∇^≡)(≡^∇^≡)So cute  
 I too have 3 cats. They all have their own individuality and are so cute  
 (̄▽+̄\*)’

The above example is a good instance of creativity with the user using an emoticon to represent the word for ‘cat’ in the first line (the horizontal lines ≡ are whiskers, the triangle ∇ is the nose and ^ represents the eyes). The second emoticon enhances linguistic meaning and emphasizes the feeling the author has toward the propositional content. The last line again uses the emoticons as a lexical replacement. Spelling within this example is also unconventional as in *ほんつと* (*hontto* rather than *hontō* ‘really’) and aims to add a vocal quality to the word, and in *カワユ* *kawayu* which is for *かわいい* *kawaii* ‘cute’, which is usually not written in *katakana* but in *hiragana* (*かわいい*) or *kanji* (*可愛い*). These are playful representations of unconventional orthography and spelling that are accompanied by a visual emoticon. These devices add semantic and pragmatic meaning but can also act as a form of appeal to their reader as to how they wish to be perceived.

*Japanese male example (emoticon as lexical replacement/enhancer of verbal linguistic content)*

- (9) ロンドン まで は 成田 から 12 時間 半 の フライト です  
 London until TOP Narita from 12 hours half GEN flight COP  
 が、すでに 福岡→成田 で 2 時間 の フライト なのです..  
 while already Fukuoka→Narita to 2 hour GEN flight NOM COP  
 疲れます よね )^o^(  
 exhausted SFP  
 ‘It takes 12 and a half hours to get to London from Narita, I have already  
 done Fukuoka to Tokyo and I am exhausted)^o^(.’

Example (9) illustrates a simple emoticon expressing the author’s fatigue (a face that is puffing in exhaustion) and acts a visual indicator of the author’s tiring travel schedule.

- (10) すごく 美味し そう で、ヨダレ が でます (¯¬¯)  
 Really delicious looks and saliva SUBJ is\_coming\_out  
 ‘Looks really good. I’m salivating (¯¬¯).’

This example shows the writer’s feelings for the food that was presented in the blog post highlighted by the salivating emoticon that aims to add a humorous tone to the comment.

*American female example (emoticon as lexical replacement/enhancer of verbal linguistic content)*

- (11) All I can say is 😞😞😞😞 and :\_( -> That last one is 😞 with a single tear drop.

Here the visual representation of a sad countenance by an emoji is used to convey meaning without the lexical terminology. It was used in multiples to enhance the emotional impact.

*American male examples (emoticons that enhance verbal linguistic content)*

- (12) I miss those days with my boys :-). Now, I throw my back out trying to lift up my 55 lb 7 year old, and if I do manage it he usually kicks or punches me for my trouble! LOL
- (13) It’s odd that, having read your post, all I can think of are the BAD moments, like when our car broke down in the middle of the French countryside and we had to get it fixed (then towed) at a garage in a village where NOBODY spoke anything but very-local French. Or the time my brother broke his arm in the middle of nowhere. All the happy memories mainly involved relaxing, so they all tend to blur in to one!! :)



- (14) I also shaved my hair to a number 3 this week and wasn't sure if I liked it at first....it's grown on me pretty quick though! Feels much better sleeping and exercising!:)

Similar to female emoticon usage men used these emoticons to make explicit their feeling on a past experience or current situation. Examples (12) and (13) are nostalgic in nature and the emoticons visually enhance the feeling that the reader has towards that period of time. Example (14) reflects the author's satisfaction with his current haircut.

## 7. Politeness-affiliated data

Emoticons as politeness-affiliated speech act markers were divided by the way in which they indexed speech acts that acted as PIU's (positive impact upgraders) and NID's (negative impact downgraders). Japanese women used more emoticons to index PIU's than men and also as NID's to downgrade the illocutionary force of speech acts than men, but these differences were not significant.

**Table 9.** Emoticons as politeness-affiliated speech act markers: The Japanese data

	Japanese female comments ( <i>n</i> = 100)		Japanese male comments ( <i>n</i> = 100)	
	Total	Mean±S.D.	Total	Mean±S.D.
Emoticons as PIU markers total	827	8.3±23.0	191	2.0±8.4
Compliments	38	0.38±0.99	5	0.05±0.29
Rapport markers	427	4.3±11.1	90	0.90±5.1
Comment opening and closings	98	0.98±2.8	36	0.36±1.3
Expressing gratitude	228	2.3±12.6	53	0.53±3.2
Jokes	13	0.13±0.58	6	0.06±0.34
Other	23	0.23±1.0	1	0.01±0.10
Emoticons as NID markers total	273	2.7±7.1	92	0.92±5.0
Mitigate illocutionary acts (hedging)	183	1.83±5.5	55	0.55±3.7
Minimize the imposition at the time of requests	26	0.26±0.62	17	0.17±0.67
Apologies	27	0.27±0.91	4	0.04±0.24
Be conventionally indirect at the time of expressing one's opinion	27	0.27±0.91	4	0.04±0.24
Other	3	0.23±0.17	1	0.01±0.10

Mirroring the Japanese data, when emoticons that acted as politeness-affiliated markers were broken down into politeness strategies, American women used more to both index PIU's and NID's than men, but again these differences were not significant.

**Table 10.** Emoticons as politeness-affiliated speech act markers: The American data

	Japanese female comments ( <i>n</i> = 100)		Japanese male comments ( <i>n</i> = 100)	
	Total	Mean±S.D.	Total	Mean±S.D.
Emoticons as PIU markers total	320	3.20±7.28	87	0.87±3.8
Compliments	48	1.73±5.3	12	0.12±0.64
Rapport markers	171	1.73±5.3	37	0.37±1.6
Comment opening and closings	20	0.20±0.86	5	0.05±0.4
Expressing gratitude	25	0.25±0.6	15	0.15±0.80
Jokes	49	0.49±1.8	15	0.15±0.87
Other	7	0.7±0.3	3	0.03±0.30
Emoticons as PIU markers total	57	0.57±1.72	28	0.28±1.4
Mitigate illocutionary acts (hedging)	21	0.21±0.89	8	0.8±0.44
Minimize the imposition at the time of requests	12	0.12±0.43	4	0.04±0.31
Apologies	2	0.02±0.14	1	0.01±0.10
Be conventionally indirect (at the time of expressing one's opinion)	21	0.21±0.75	12	0.12±0.75
Other	1	0.01±0.10	3	0.03±0.30

*Politeness-affiliated data: Japanese female example (comments opening and solidarity markers)*

- (15) こんばんは!(◡‿◡)ノ お 疲れ様 です (¯‿¯\*)ゞ 温かく  
 Good\_evening! HON tired\_state COP warm  
 して、 ゆっくり 楽しんで ねえ (◡‿◡★)  
 do at your pace take it easy SFP  
 'Good evening (◡‿◡)ノ  
 Thank you for your hard work (¯‿¯\*)ゞ  
 Keep warm and take it easy (◡‿◡★)'

The opening line of Example (15) is a warm greeting towards the reader that is emphasized by the smiling emoticon that has a waving arm on the right. The idiomatic cultural expression *otsukaresama desu* (literally something like 'you are in a state

of exhaustion') in the second line shows appreciation or support on behalf of the speaker to the reader/listener for work or a task done. It is punctuated with a warm smiling emoticon to highlight a sense of intimacy with the reader. Emoticons such as the one in the second line are often seen juxtaposed to certain expressions as in *otsukaresama desu* and are often found in online emoticon dictionaries. These dictionaries often explain how the emoticon is to be used and what it means, as there is a large variety of emoticons and not all users may recognize them immediately. However, their meaning can generally be understood in context.

The final line displays affection toward the reader by asking them to take it easy (they have a cold) and wrap up warm and watch a DVD with a playful winking emoticon (the author mentions this plan in her blog posting). This line is punctuated with the lengthening *ねえ* as in 'nee,' a sentence-final particle that can act as a positive politeness marker (Onodera 2004).

### Japanese male examples (comment openings and closings)

- (16) 楽しい 休日 を、また 明日(^o^)/。  
 fun day off OBJ again tomorrow  
 'Have a good day off, see ya tomorrow (^o^)/.'
- (17) たらこさん はじめまして<(\_ \_)> 町内会 ですか  
 Tarako-san nice\_to\_meet\_you town\_association COP QUEST  
 いろんな お店 が あるもの ですよね.. これからも よろしく  
 various shops SUBJ have thing COP SFP this from also well  
 お願いします(^^)/  
 HON wish  
 'Nice to meet you Tarako-san<(\_ \_)>  
 Is it a town association? (^^)  
 There are a lot of shops hey ..  
 From now on, be kind to me (^^)/.

The examples above are attached to comment openings and closings which create a sense of intimacy and friendship with the reader. Common to both the female and male examples, emoticons attached to comment openings/closings reflect Japanese forms of polite everyday spoken discourse in face-to-face everyday interactions. Some of the emoticons used were more informal than others. Example (16) is a friendly smiling face with an arm wave. Example (17), however, is more formal. This bowing emoticon is a reflection or visualization of how this encounter would happen in a first real-life interaction. The second line is a polite enquiry that shows interest in the blog content and it is punctuated with a smiling emoticon. The final line of the comment is an expression that is also said on first encounters, *yoroshiku*

*o-negai shimasu* (an idiomatic phrase that is difficult to translate but can mean ‘be kind to me’ in this context) and this is also punctuated with an emoticon with a waving arm to indicate a parting greeting. Although it is a customary everyday expression, it is used here as an opportunity to start or emphasize a friendly online encounter. This is emphasized by Katsuno and Yano (2007), who found that in their study of Japanese housewives who used chat rooms, the most extensive use of *kaomaji* was within closings and openings as in greetings and farewells. They state that “entrances and exits spawn sociality, establishing the tone for what is to follow and affirming what has gone before” (Katsuno and Yano 2007: 292).

#### *American male example (comments opening and closing)*

- (18) It’s one of the all time classics of the 80’s hahaha! Yes, you are so right.  
People always want the big things but sometimes it’s the little things that do it for me. Enjoy your Sunday! :)

This comment ends in a wish that the reader will have a good Sunday and the emoticon reinforces this intended meaning.

#### *Japanese male examples (markers of solidarity)*

- (19) 仕事 お互い 頑張りましょう ね^^  
work together let’s\_do\_our\_best SFP  
‘Let’s do our best at work ^^’
- (20) お帰りなさいませ〜♪ イタリア の お話 も 楽しみにしています  
welcome\_back Italy GEN talk also looking\_forward to  
(^^) イタリアって 美味しい 物 が 多 そうな イメージ  
(^^) Italy delicious things SUBJ a\_lot seems image  
です 美味しそう〜 イカ ちゃん コロコロ〜 私のお腹は  
COP looks\_delicious squid chan roly-poly<sup>5</sup> my belly TOP  
ポニョ〜ポニョ〜  
rumbling  
‘Welcome back〜〜♪  
Looking forward to your news about Italy(^^)  
My image of Italy is that there seems to be a lot of culinary delights there.  
Looks delicious (referring to the blog pictures) Squid-chan  
Looks so good my belly is rumbling.’

---

5. A sound symbolic word for a small and round thing rolling.

Example (19) is punctuated with a basic smiling emoticon that expresses a sentiment (both are businessmen) to do their best at work. Example (20) opens with a warm welcome back and expresses an eagerness to know more about the readers' travels in Italy. The emoticon acts as an indicator of friendship and support. This example was a rare instance of a male writer utilizing a combination of other UMC's within their comment as reflected in the unconventional phonetic spelling that is emphasized with the wavy dash ~ within lines 1, 3, and 4.

*American female examples (markers of solidarity and compliments)*

- (21) Your blog always gives me a much needed boost of humor, love it :)
- (22) I am so sorry to hear about your great uncle, but I know that Jesus' peace really is great comfort, especially in difficult times. However, I really do miss your lovely blog posts, although I know you are busy! Try to come back soon :)
- (23) That was a lovely post! :) Thank you so much for the encouragement.... =)
- (24) Your projects are soooo cute, but I have to say ~ your little model is cuter!;) )
- (25) Definitely glad things worked out for the best. And I think you have a nice smile! It's genuine. :)

Paralleling the Japanese female data, these American female comments are again littered with emotive adjectives, like 'lovely,' 'cute' and the use of the extended vowel sound of the adverb 'sooooo'. All the emoticons used are the basic :) except in Examples (23) and (24) where a laughing emoticon and wink are used respectively. Although the emoticons are basic, they are best understood by how they reinforce the written comment rather than mapping the facial expression of the author.

*American male examples (solidarity markers and compliments)*

- (26) Tim, you've changed my life for the better. If I don't get the chance to repay you someday, I'll keep passing it forward.  
You're the man. :)  
Best,  
Charles
- (27) Dude! Thanks for those words that I'm very much agreed with- :))

The comments above all cater towards the positive face of the reader by claiming common ground through agreement and compliments. Example (26) is a compliment on the author's blog and how it affected him, labeling him affectionately as

‘the man.’ The blog author responds in Example (27) by acknowledging the compliment and jokingly strongly agreeing with it, as indicated by the multiple ‘)’ or smiles which indicates emphatic laughter. This interaction was a rare instance of emoticon usage between males.

*Japanese female examples (expressing gratitude)*

- (28) コメント の 難しい 記事 へ の コメント 感謝 します。  
 comment GEN difficult post into GEN comment gratitude give  
 m( )m

‘Thank you for the comment for such a difficult blog post. m( )m.’

- (29) ありがとうございます (\*^▽^\*)  
 thank\_you\_very\_much  
 ‘Thank you very much (\*^▽^\*)’

The two examples above are typical of instances where the blog writer expresses thanks to those who leave comments on his or her blog. The first example is related to Japanese face-to-face communication in the sense that the emoticon is attempting to mimic the gesture of bowing, a gesture used for respect in greetings and for showing gratitude. The m shapes on either side of the parenthesis indicate hands, and within the parenthesis that acts as the face, and the two lines reflect the bowing gesture of the head and the lowering of the eyes. This emoticon indexes the comment pragmatically as a marker of gratitude and the emoticon serves to highlight visually the intention of the comment author. This would be an example of a text/context-dependent emoticon as without the text the emoticon itself may be open to a variety of meanings. It was not just used to convey positive emotion but also for apologies as in Example (30) below.

- (30) もっと 早く 言わなくて ごめん (m\_ )m  
 more early not\_saying sorry  
 ‘Sorry I didn’t tell you earlier m( \_ )m.’

*American female examples (expressing gratitude)*

- (31) Thanks for your sweet comments on my post! :)  
 (32) Thank you very VERY much Johnnyyyyy!!!!!! :-)))

These comments emphasized by an emoticon all enhance the positive face of the addressee when expressing gratitude/thanks towards the reader. The second example is emphatic. The use of the unconventional capitalization of ‘very’ and the

vowel elongation of the name Johnny that is punctuated with multiple parenthesis or smiles emphasizes the feeling of gratitude towards the reader.

### *American male examples (expressing thanks)*

(33) Excellent! Thank you! :D

(34) A very good read! Thank you for sharing. :)

The above emoticons of a smiling variation and a basic smile punctuate linguistic expressions of thanks and add a sense of intimacy to the utterance.

## 8. Interplay and relationship between emoticons and other UMC's

Emoticons that punctuated comment sentences were not always used in isolation. As we have seen in the examples within this paper, comments with emoticons were also littered with other UMCs such as unconventional phonetic spellings and *kigō*. The tables below outline the frequency of these UMC's found in the data.

Japanese women used significantly more unconventional phonetic spelling than their Japanese male counterparts ( $p < .01$ ) as shown in Table 11.

**Table 11.** Phonographic data: Unconventional phonetic spellings

	Japanese female blog comments ( $n = 100$ )		Japanese male blog comments ( $n = 100$ )	
	Total	Mean±S.D.	Total	Mean±S.D.
Unconventional phonetic spelling	3,221**	32.2±65.9	630	6.3±14.8

\*\*( $p < .01$ )

Similar to the Japanese data, it was women who used unconventional phonetic spelling significantly more than American men overall ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table 12.** Phonographic data: Unconventional phonetic spellings

	American female blog comments ( $n = 100$ )		American male blog comments ( $n = 100$ )	
	Total	Mean±S.D.	Total	Mean±S.D.
Unconventional phonetic spelling	450**	4.5±10.7	151	1.5±6.7

\*\*( $p < .01$ )

American women used unconventional phonetic spelling significantly more than American men overall ( $p < .05$ ).

There is no literature that examines the differences in unconventional phonetic spelling in male and female online discourse but the findings here suggest that women favor this kind of unorthodox depiction than men.

In comparison to the American data Japanese comments used a variety of UMC's which not only included online unconventional spelling but also the use of symbols as in ♪ or ♥ rather than just the sole emoticon. The Japanese female use of these symbols or *kigō* tended to be used in conjunction with other UMC's. Sometimes a ♪ was attached to an emoticon or used after a phonetic spelling. According to the Japanese bloggers I consulted with regard to emoticon interpretation, the use of these symbols (and in conjunction with other UMC's) helps to make the comment more interesting or intimate. These examples are very jovial and visual-looking comments and the writers may use these UMC's to present themselves as young, feminine and approachable. In this respect a unique online identity, a form of self-representation, can be created which may mirror their offline persona or may simply be an alternative personality that only lives online. This can be reflected in the notion that gender displayed in an online persona may be very different to how they display it offline.

Overall *kigō* or symbol totals amounted to around half of the emoticon totals by both Japanese men and women with females using significantly more ( $p < .01$ ).

Table 13. The *kigō* (symbols)

	Japanese female blog comments ( $n = 100$ )		Japanese male blog comments ( $n = 100$ )	
	Total	Mean±S.D.	Total	Mean±S.D.
<i>Kigō</i> (symbols)	2,305**	23.1±60.1	425	4.3±16.0

\*\*( $p < .01$ )

There were no *kigō* within the American data. Although these symbols can be produced on a keyboard, their usage seems to be very rare in American online asynchronous communication platforms.

Below are some examples of the interplay of these UMC's with emoticons in the Japanese data.

- (35) 今日 は お休みなん ですw` (\*^。^\*)/ いええ〜い  
 Today TOP day off COP Yeah!  
 だんな様も 休みなんで ちょっと 出かけて こよう か な  
 husband too day\_off COP a\_bit go\_out maybe QUEST SFP  
 w(o'w`o) うふふ  
 ufufu  
 'Today is my day off w`(\*^。^\*)/, Yeah!  
 My husband is off too so I wonder if we will go out w(o'w`o)'



- (36) こんばんは^^ 蟹 の パスタ、 大好き です♪  
 Good evening crab GEN pasta big\_like COP  
 凄く 美味し そう です♪  
 amazingly delicious look COP  
 いつもは 旦那様 が 作ってくださる パスタ なの です ね ~^^  
 always TOP husband SUBJ makes pasta NOM COP SFP  
 いい なあ ~^^♪  
 good SFP  
 ‘Good evening.  
 I love crab pasta.  
 Looks so good.  
 Your husband always cooks it for you.  
 That’s wonderful.’

The examples above all aid in how the comment should be read through these unconventional depictions or clues, such as the vowel lengthening, the deliberate use of small *hiragana* where conventionally it does not belong, and the use of the ~ to indicate elongated vowel sounds that are present in the examples above. They add a ‘voice’ to what is otherwise a black text on a webpage. They are very playful and the fact that Japanese employs three scripts, *kanji*, *hiragana* and *katakana* as well as *romaji* (Latin alphabet) allows for this creative use of the language.

American examples of UMC usage were evident but were never used in conjunction with or as extensions of the emoticons. The example below shows examples of phonetic spelling as in the elongation of the vowel sound in groovy, followed by the spelt out ‘Heeeeeee !!’ sound representing laughter and finally punctuated with an emoticon. All of these emoticons help to convey the mood of the writer both towards the propositional content and towards their reader.

- (37) Wow! Now who is that groooovy dude up there? Geez it’s Ronnie!  
 Heeeeeee !! What a blast :)

## 9. Discussion

This paper aims to examine how emoticons convey semantic and pragmatic meaning in online blog comments and how gender and culture can affect their usage. In addition, how emoticons work with other UMC’s was examined. Three research questions were looked at to examine these factors, and although the findings overlap across these enquiries, each question is addressed in this discussion section.

### 1. What are the semantic and pragmatic functions of emoticons in online synchronous online blogging communities?

Emoticons were found to have both propositional (semantic) and politeness-affiliated speech act functions (pragmatic) and were broken down into categories that illustrated their use. Specifically, as propositional markers they were used as iconic and emotion strengtheners, utilized to enhance the verbal linguistic content and deployed as lexical replacements.

These emoticons, however, were not just merely visual replications of the author's emotion mapped on to an emoticon such as a happy face. They were far more complex than that. Through interviews with blog users who use the same blog platforms and are regular blog readers and comment writers, they suggested that these emoticons also served as atmosphere building devices, a way to enhance visual interest, impression formation, make a banal comment more interesting, show a desire to be liked and help create a clear pragmatic intention so as to avoid misunderstanding. The Japanese bloggers who were interviewed focused more on this latter point and often referred to a desire to not hurt their readers' feelings. In a text-based CMC environment, they suggested, this consequently leads to the deployment of emoticons to avoid misinterpretation and create a warm and friendly online community.

Based on the data within the corpora, emoticon usage helps to create a rapport and harmony driven blog community and enhance a positive and intimate online society. This was more evident within the Japanese data where there were significantly more emoticons that strengthened or mitigated politeness-affiliated speech acts than American bloggers.

The emoticons acted as contextual cues into how the writer wished their intended meaning to be perceived in an attempt to maintain and manage relationships. There were more positive emoticons than negative ones, which reflects the nature of the blogging community where enjoyable fun interactions are the primary reason users converge and interact with people of similar interests. Unlike the American emoticons, which were very basic and could therefore have a multitude of meanings depending on their context, there were many instances of face mapping involved with the Japanese emoticons as they aimed to replicate specific face characteristics, such as bowing, in order to replicate what the interaction would be like offline. This is both a reflection of Japanese culture but also the word processing technology which enables users to create a multitude of creative emoticons.

## **2. Do cultural and gender parameters affect emoticon distribution, usage and frequency?**

Japanese female comment writers used significantly more emoticons than Japanese men to highlight and mark propositional and polite content. This reflects the literature that women use more emoticons. This pattern however was not repeated within the American data where no significant gender differences were found.

Emoticons that were used to index speech acts by both Americans and Japanese immaterial of gender shared the goal of maintaining intimacy online. This goal, however, was more prominent within the Japanese data as reflected in Japanese using significantly more emoticons to emphasize PIU's and NID's than Americans regardless of gender. This could reflect the notion that Japanese culture focuses on the concept of strong personal relationships that incorporate 和 *wa* 'harmony,' 甘え *amae* 'dependency or interdependence,' and 遠慮 *enryo* 'reserve or restraint' (Gudykunst and Nishida 1994). This could also be a reason why Japanese men use more emoticons for politeness affiliation than both American men and women and reflects the notion that culture rather than gender may have a significant influence on the use of these emoticons within these Japanese blogging communities.

Yamada (1997) suggests that the rapport talk of American women is similar to the talk of Japanese regardless of gender and that the need for harmony forms the basis of Japanese interaction. Miyake (2007) found for example that Japanese writers use emoticons for self-expression and language play and stated that these emoticon users "are very concerned, when writing their messages, not to hurt their interlocutor, and not to be thought badly of. This anxiety is very much a characteristic of traditional Japanese communication" (Miyake 2007: 69).

In terms of frequency, women used emoticons more often than men but perhaps a better question to ask is, with the exception of speech acts, in what way did the use of emoticons differ among men and women? Some of the gender characteristics of emoticon use could be found when attempting to answer the final research question.

### 3. *What is the interplay and relationship between emoticons and other UMC's?*

The Japanese comments were found to have more UMC's (phonetic spellings and *kigō*) than their American counterparts. This may be a product of a tradition of language play within Japan. Gottlieb (2010: 396) suggests that in Japan "the practice of playing with the script itself has long been firmly entrenched in the country's written culture and in public spaces."

Gottlieb (2010) argues that language play such as the UMC's within the data discussed in this paper is not the product of new computer technologies, but builds on the already existing orthographic creativity facilitated by the nature and flexibility of the writing system. For Gottlieb, it is old wine in new bottles, the only real difference being that it has moved into the cyberspace arena. The Japanese system with its four scripts of the Chinese characters called *kanji*, *hiragana*, *katakana* and Latin script (*romaji*) offer an incredible ability to be flexible when making an orthographic choice (Smith and Schmidt 1996; Gottlieb 2010). Smith and Schmidt suggest that "Japanese writers fashion their script type choices to specific contexts, as the writing system allows, for sociolinguistic and stylistic ends" and

that “writing systems and practices [are] independent channels for expressions of creativity, social self-identity and cultural forms” (Smith and Schmidt 1996: 47). The four scripts, argues Gottlieb (2010), offer greater possibility for language play when compared to English, which only uses one, Roman script.

The use of such unconventional orthography in *manga* that acts as paralinguistic or phonetic devices has also influenced such language play online (Katsuno and Yano 2002, 2007; Miyake 2004; Akizuki 2009; Kavanagh 2012a, 2012b, 2017). In addition, Miyake (2007) states that the flexible orthographic choice given to the writer allows for greater emotional states and even self-presentation. Miyake (2004) and Akizuki (2009) suggest that creative orthography and emoticon usage are the digital version of *shojo moji* or young girls’ deformed characters that were popular in the 1970’s and 1980’s. This may be a reason as to why Japanese females use more emoticons and UMC’s than Japanese male users.

Danet, Ruedenberg and Rosenbaum-Tamari (1997) describe the innovative forms of CMC that the keyboard produces as ‘typed jazz.’ They describe computer-mediated communication as strikingly playful. However, this was not as predominant in the American data in comparison to the Japanese corpus. This may have been the result of the communication platform and perhaps a time-sensitive, synchronous form of online communication whereby messages need to be typed quickly may have produced different findings.

A characteristic common to the American and Japanese female data was that emoticons were used to punctuate emotive adjectives such as ‘lovely’ and ‘cute’.

There were numerous examples of the phonetic spelling of the adverb ‘so’ as ‘soooo’ or examples of vowel elongation of emotive adjectives in the American female data and was not reflected within the male data sets. A similar observation was reflected within the Japanese female data. Many of the female examples of emoticon usage were attached to emotive adjectives, predominantly the adjectives いい ‘good,’ すごい ‘great’ and かわいい ‘cute,’ and these adjectives were often written creatively and unconventionally, as we have seen in the data samples.

Unlike the female examples there were few instances within the American and Japanese male data of emoticons attached to emotive adjectives like ‘cute’ and ‘great,’ and when emoticons were used they were deployed in conjunction with conventionally written sentences that did not include instances of UMC’s such as unconventional phonetic spellings.

Below is a summary of the characteristics of Japanese and American emoticon usage divided according to gender.

**Table 14.** Summary of overall characteristics of male and female emoticon usage in blog comments

Females	Males
More likely to use / emoticons and UMCs in sentence endings.*	More likely to use just one emoticon in sentence endings.
More expressive emotionally through emoticons and UMCs.	Less expressive emotionally.
Emoticons punctuate more emotive adjectives.	Emoticons rarely punctuate emotive adjectives.

\*Especially strong within the Japanese female data

## 10. Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the functions of emoticons as used by men and women within Japanese and American blog comments in addition to how they are used cross-culturally. Both Americans and Japanese used emoticons to create a harmonious online atmosphere as reflected in how emoticons were used as PIU's and NID's.

Regardless of gender, however, Japanese users resorted to far more PIU's and NID's for rapport management than Americans. This is reflected in both the intercultural communication literature on Japanese communication styles that emphasize a desire for harmonious interaction (Gudykunst and Nishida 1994) and the answers given by Japanese bloggers, who commented that many of the emoticons were used to create fun interactions that aimed to build rapport and maintain relationships with their users.

The American data did not reflect the current literature that suggests that women use more emoticons. However, this was not repeated within the Japanese data where Japanese used significantly more emoticons than Americans as a whole. Japanese women used more emoticons as propositional and politeness-affiliated markers than any other group and reasons for this may stem from a combination of both Japanese cultural practices that encourages harmonious interaction and language play that has its roots in offline 'written culture in public spaces' and orthographic creativity.

The way emoticons were used in relation to the linguistic text differed between males and females. Women tended to use more emotive adjectives juxtaposed with emoticons and a combination of emoticons and other UMCs such as phonetic unconventional spelling in comparison to men. Women therefore tended to express more emotion through these linguistic and extra-linguistic depictions and

displayed distinct ways of using emoticons that differed from the male samples of the data. This notion was also reflected within the Japanese data.

There are a multitude of factors that may be influential in how and why emoticons are used in online blogs including the culture and technology that produces the emoticon, in addition to gender-related factors. Age, which could only be guessed at within our data, and a difference in the communication platform such as instant messaging could display different results and demographics. The use of emoticons is also highly personalized and subjective, and although bloggers were interviewed and consulted for this research, further studies will need to address the users themselves on why they use emoticons, in what context and to whom, in order to attain a fuller picture of how people communicate in text-based language environments.

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# Migration through the English-Greek translated press

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The chapter problematizes pragmatic shifts in 2015 web-retrieved English-Greek translated press news texts on the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe. There seems to be a gate-keeping role of the traditional media to locally reshape global dissemination of inference-making through verbal material, which changes the realism of the news. The study analyses patterns of shifts in verbally mediated instances of suffering and migration in the Greek translated press to show the contribution of the receiving institutions' and the translator's critical view in re-narrating news items in specific historical and political conditions. Managing discursal inferences may involve making intended inferences explicit in a target version, reshaping world representations to affect inclusion/exclusion strategizing in the reception environment, manipulating metaphors to avoid unintended connotations which may be favoured on a global scale, etc. Local perceptions of global conflicts may de/mobilize public sentiment and construct ethical intended sensibilities and citizenship roles.

**Keywords:** migration, press translation, smuggling, discrimination, inferencing, statelessness, undocumented resident, militarization, mediascape, distant suffering

## 1. The circumstances, re/mediation, translation and politics

Greece has experienced an unprecedented migration pressure in 2015. "Greece, Italy and Spain, being the southeast corner of Europe and close to the emigration and transit countries like the Maghreb, Turkey, Egypt and Libya, have found themselves directly affected by the increasing migration and asylum pressures from Africa and Asia" (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis 2012: 16). Forced migration research highlights a set of factors which motivated and facilitated this pressure. Antonopoulos and Winterdyk (2006), in discussing the smuggling of migrants in Greece, analyze push, pull and facilitating factors which enforced the migration

flow. Push factors may be poverty, armed conflict, demographic pressures, environmental degradation etc., and a pull factor may be the relative political stability of a destination country. Among the facilitating factors, the authors mention the media, infrastructure and transport, removal of barriers etc. They assume that the media “facilitate the whole migratory process and play a key role in promoting and mediating mass migration from Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America to the rich industrialized world” (Antonopoulos and Winterdyk 2006: 446).

Researchers have attempted to define the ways and means by which people obtain information about the world (Wright 2014). There is a politics of mediation in the media, which seems to vary diachronically as it is “embedded in processes of historical intermediality” (Ekström 2016). Scholars have focused on the politics of mediation (Kellner 1995), on audience engagement with the media (Huggins 2001; Livingstone, Lunt and Miller 2007) or how humanitarian sensibility can be mobilized discursively by the media.

One of the significant – yet rather neglected – dimensions of mediation in Western Journalism is the translation remediation practice and perhaps the manipulation of the visuals accompanying target versions of articles. Translation in the news involves a lot of editing for the text to conform to local conventions and to gain communicative force (Scammell 2018; Xia 2019). Translation is “inevitably a transforming and generative practice that changes what is taken up, making it into something new” (Gal, Kowalski and Moore 2015: 610). Schäffner (2012) talks about ‘transediting’ in the news rather than news translation. The study attempts to account for the transforming processes the verbal material undergoes. It is a process of translanguaging mediated political messages, which adjusts translated material to varied geo-political agendas in target environments. Researching translation mediation can eloquently reveal the potential of translation practice to reshape and mobilize moralizing ethics in a target environment, thus establishing sovereign power hierarchies. Translation mediation in conflict zones has attracted the attention of translation scholars (Valdeón 2005, 2012; Baker 2006; Kang 2007), and media scholars (Livingstone 2015).

The intention is to show that the translated verbal message is highly eloquent in revealing aspects of an analytics of mediation. Economy, democracy, sovereignty, security, equality are among the narratives renegotiated through media translation and have an impact on audiences. For example, Statham (2010: 125) argues that media performance is often held responsible for the European Union’s perceived “deficit.” As Derrida affirms, “[w]hatever the apparent immediacy of transmission or broadcast, it negotiates choices with framing, with selectivity” (Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 40).

The type of data in this study derives from what has been called a hierarchical, top-down mass communication type of journalism which has been challenged

in new media environments (Dahlgren 2001). Wright (2014: 2) suggests that unlike newspapers, UK television has “a statutory requirement to provide balanced and fair reports [...]. Consequently, the newspapers have become easy targets for research as discriminatory standpoints are relatively unrestricted and are often quite transparent.” He points to bias with respect to representing the image of refugees in the media (e.g., on television) and acknowledges the role of translators in the process: “In addition to our prejudices and perspectives, the institutional discourses of television reporting have not been kind to refugees. Rather than being allowed to speak for themselves, they are spoken about by NGOs reps, translators, television reporters, TV studies, anchopersons and politicians” (Wright 2014: 3).

The Greek data are culled from digital sources (the websites of high-circulation Greek newspapers, *I Kathimerini*, *To Vima* 2015). The intention is to focus on the high potential of verbal communication to frame reality and shape public ethics through managing target inferencing, which comes as a critical reaction to the potentially discriminatory stance of news reports in the (source) newspapers.

The analysis first focuses on the headlines of twenty source-and-target pairs of news articles re-framing and re-narrating a news story which was originally traced in a different context. All articles in the data set are web-retrieved, including those prepared for the print editions of the newspapers. The decision to include web-retrieved texts of print editions is based on the assumption that these too are consumed through the internet and that the multiple information flows of the digital media era are a ‘polymedia’ ensemble (Wright 2014) rather than separate information flows. Headlines have attracted the attention of media and translation scholars (Hall 1980; Sidiropoulou 1995; Schneider 2000; Kontos and Sidiropoulou 2012; Kaniklidou and House 2013) to show the role of the translated regime of signification in shaping target public life. Media scholars study how news stories are mediated and broadcasted and how they shape the reality of the news. In Chouliaraki’s (2013) terms, translation in the news is an additional layer of mediation, a ‘re-mediation’ process highly eloquent in showing how local intention reshapes the form of realism in the news, and may be associated and analyzed on a par with two other dimensions of mediation, namely, ‘inter-mediation’ [social media] or ‘trans-mediation’ [effect on audiences]. The assumption has been that news translation, a key mediation mechanism, could unveil a broad set of framing strategies, which could effectively help regulate ethical sensibility in audiences.

## 2. The migration experience

Migration has been an ongoing process across time. This study, however, draws on a 21st century forced migration paradigm when people, once again, abandoned

homes to seek refuge elsewhere. Inghilleri (2017: 7) describes the ‘isolation, depression and restricted opportunity’ migrant population experienced at a time when numbers surpass World War II mobility:

A new twenty-first century wave is currently taking place as autocratic regimes in the Middle East long supported by the United States and Europe are being challenged, and in some cases, ousted by their own populations. In Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria political and economic turmoil caused by invasion and civil war have driven millions to leave their homes to seek refuge in neighboring countries, Europe, and elsewhere. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has indicated that these and other conflicts have forced more people than at any other time since records began – surpassing World War II – to flee their homes and seek refuge elsewhere.

Brettell and Hollifield (2015) call migration a ‘bridging’ theme across disciplines attracting the attention of historians, political scientists, economists, geographers, law researchers, sociologists, demographers. The question arises as to how translation studies can contribute to forced migration studies.

Another reason why migration is worth examining is because constructions of migration in the media affect performance of inclusion and exclusion practices, in the destination environment. Migration is an ‘issue regime’ (Wolfsfeld 2003), which has dominated media attention. It is a news story which fulfills the criteria for stories to become printed news stories, due to the “volume [...] or degree of increased intensity” (Bignell 2002: 84). One question is how translators manipulate calculability of inferences through the verbal material and how perception of reality may be reshaped and affect conflict mediation. Researchwise, Wolfsfeld suggests that a comparative approach to conflict mediation should look at (a) a conflict at different countries (how the same conflict may be re-narrated in different countries), (b) different conflicts within the same culture, and (c) variation that occurs in the course of conflict. The analysis in this study provides instances of (a) and (c).

Triandafyllidou (2016) suggests that the flow of migration has occasionally raised a xenophobic sentiment in Europe at the time of global financial crisis in the second decade of the 21st century, which permeated global media discourses (Triandafyllidou 2016: 2):

The crisis has fuelled the ranks of populist and xenophobic parties in Europe, North America and Australia. Those dramatically ‘visible’ immigrants and asylum seekers landing on the southern European shores from war torn countries in Asia and Africa were pointed at as threatening ‘our’ public order and security. At the same time, irregular migration and asylum seeking flows have been further fueled by political instability and civil war in North Africa and the Middle East (the Arab spring and its aftermath), as well as by continuing political unrest and ethnic

conflict in several parts of Asia (such as Iraq and Afghanistan) and Africa (such as Sudan and Somalia).

O'Reilly (2016: 25) argues that “[t]o a great extent lay, policy, government and mass media understandings of migration are based on an assumption that there is a problem to address or something unusual to explain.” The study explores (press) media understandings of the ‘problem.’

Disaster displays addressing distant audiences seem to have a long history (Ekström 2012) in mediation practice and constructing suffering has attracted researchers’ attention in media studies (Chouliaraki 2006). The focus here is on showing how media translation may be reshaping public opinion by manipulating headlines and snippets of texts, to de/mobilize civic action.

The Greek society is reminiscent of the woes emanating from refugee experience. The population exchange between Greece and Turkey after the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, left a trauma in Greek society which is still deeply distressing. For instance, the target version of headline below shows awareness of refugee suffering by accentuating power imbalance (see the bold items in the back-translation [BT] of the TT), whereas in the English version this is undercover and the inference of suffering is not easily calculable.

ST “Tackling the other Taliban”

*The Economist*, 15 October 2009

TT “The Economist: Στο έλεος εξτρεμιστών το βόρειο Πακιστάν. Εκατοντάδες οι επιθέσεις των Ταλιμπάν, εκατομμύρια οι πρόσφυγες”

*Η Καθημερινή*, 18 October 2009

(BT) *The Economist: North Pakistan in the mercy of extremists. Hundreds of Taliban attacks, millions of refugees.*

Section 3 examines translation mediation of a particular type of suffering, as experienced through news construction of the 2015 migration crisis in the Greek translated press. The section shows instances of translation mediation discursively regulating ethical sensibility in readers, as the example above does. The data derive from news reports on the 2015 migration crisis. “The year 2015 was marked by an increasing crisis of both EU governance and human rights concerns for people fleeing difficult situations in countries such as Syria and Eritrea as they sought to cross Southeastern Europe” (Casas-Cortés, Cobarrubias and Pickles 2019: 262). Greece has been on the route of irregular migration across the Eastern Mediterranean area to the EU, namely, “from Turkey to Greece – both by sea and land in the Evros region (the Eastern Mediterranean route)” (Last and Spijkerboer 2014: 85). The parallel data, in Section 3, have been selected by (1) identifying a translated article on migration in the Greek press, which acknowledges the source and (2) by searching the source newspaper for an identifiable source article through key words and by

the reporter's name ('identifiable' means that enough parallel fragments have been identified in the body of the article across versions). The pairs of parallel English-Greek articles have registered a varying perception of the migration experience, with the local Greek data registering awareness of the suffering experienced all along. The data have been accounted for in terms of Wodak's (2009: 44) five discursive strategy model, where appropriate, namely, the strategies of

- Nomination, the labelling of social actors, positively or negatively, appreciatively or depreciatorily
- Predication, the construction of in-groups and out-groups
- Perspectivization, the framing or positioning of the speaker's point of view through the statement of assumptions or/and interdiscursivity
- Argumentation, the justification of positive or negative attributions through *topoi* in the form of argumentation schema
- Intensification/Mitigation, the modification of the epistemic meaning of a proposition

Although the strategies have not been exclusively devised for translation data and they overlap at points, they seem to be operative in describing variation in the strategies employed across source and target versions of the data. For instance, in the example offered above, the target version seems to favour "intensification" in that it modifies the epistemic meaning of the target proposition through the items *hundreds* and *millions*.

### 3. Mediating migration in translated press

This section shows cross-cultural variation of how conflict has been constructed through English-Greek press translation, namely, how a conflict *has been portrayed at different places* (Wolfsfeld 2003), the local and the global. As language is crucial to our understanding of the public sphere, the different constructions are assumed to have an impact on readerships. Awareness of the traumatic nature of migration and refugee experience reverberates in the translated press news, suggesting that "[t]he exodus of refugees has created new pressures on European powers and radical reassessments of the nature of the European Union" (Inghilleri 2017: 7).

The following is an extract from the body of an article on migration resettlement issues, spring 2015, which refers to the pressure exercised on the European powers. The Greek version instead shows a humanitarian awareness of what could have pressurized the EU (*consecutive tragedies at sea*), over a rather vague outline of the source of pressure, in the English version which could have been diplomatic or other).

- ST1 ... [x], despite **widespread and growing** pressure.  
 “EU summit to offer resettlement to only 5,000 refugees”  
*The Guardian*, 22 April 2015
- TT1 ... [x], παρά τις πιέσεις που ασκούνται **έπειτα από τις αλυσιδωτές τραγωδίες στη θάλασσα**.  
 “Guardian: Οι περισσότεροι μετανάστες θα στέλνονται πίσω στη χώρα τους”  
*Η Καθημερινή*, 23 April 2015  
 (BT) ... [x], *despite the pressure arising from consecutive tragedies at sea*.  
 “Guardian: Most migrants will be sent back to their country”

The very make-up of the Greek headline has a holistic approach to the migration problem as a public issue, by being concerned about what will become of ‘most immigrants’ who would have to go back to their countries, whereas the *Guardian* headline refers to the very few to be accommodated. In Wodak’s (2009) terms, this is a “perspectivization” strategy, where assumptions are stated.

Developing EU defense industry against migration is argued to be a solution facilitated for a reason (Fotiadis 2015): the EU solution to the immigration problem is that of constant management because this increases ability to exploit it as a market. The defense industry would much rather see the protracted management of the problem than a final solution (*Kathimerini* English edition, comment on Fotiadis’ book). Likewise, Doomernik (2013: 113) suggests that governments tend to intervene to the migration issue in a way that goes “against the logic inherent in migration processes and instead create a market for human smuggling.” As shown in pair 2, the Greek version seems to be aware that defence operations ultimately make use of desperate refugees. Besides, the Greek version of headline pair 2 focuses on help to refugees and asylum seekers, rather than solving the EU (migrant) crisis. Translator interference in Example (2) shows awareness of the fact that “[g]lobal hospitality remains elusive for many of the world’s citizens, despite globalization and the economic and political interdependence among all members of the global community it entails” (Inghilleri 2017: 15).

- ST2 ... Boats stuffed with human cargo regularly set off in broad daylight. And a cynical industry has sprung up **to help them on their way**.  
 “Can Turkey help solve EU migrant crisis?” *BBC*, 5 October 2015
- TT2 ... Σκάφη γεμάτα με ανθρώπινο φορτίο σαλπάρουν τακτικά στο φως της ημέρας. Και μια κυνική βιομηχανία έχει ξεπηδήσει **για την εκμετάλλευση απελπισμένων προσφύγων**.  
 “BBC: Θέλει και μπορεί η Τουρκία να βοηθήσει τους πρόσφυγες;”  
*Το Βήμα*, 6 October 2015



(BT) ...*Boats filled with human cargo sail regularly in daylight. And a cynical industry has sprung up to exploit desperate refugees.* “BBC: Does Turkey want and can it help refugees?”

The Greek version foregrounds an ideological realism which is undercover in the English version. This is a de-centering process of recognition, which enhances voicing of distant others. The example assumes “the social need to name and represent the world” (Chouliaraki 2008: 215). In Wodak’s (2008, 2009) terms, one of the five research questions relevant for theoretical and methodological approaches to inclusion/exclusion, from a discourse-historical perspective, is how people are named and referred to linguistically. It is the discursive strategy of “predication” (2009: 44), the labelling of social actors. In the target version, ‘helping’ (assuming inclusion) is nominated as ‘exploiting’ (assuming exclusion). Example (3) raises the issue of “the total loss of any illegal citizenship anywhere, which is the fate of those rendered stateless” (Inghilleri 2017: 11). The translation version in Example (3) tackles the illegal stateless status of refugees, in an attempt to mitigate the aggression of reception environments towards incoming refugees.

TT3 also offers a materialization of the ‘nomination’ strategy. The shifts in TT3 show variation in the framing or positioning of the speaker’s point of view, what Wodak (2009: 44) would call a “nomination” discursive strategy. Thus, the Greek version avoids the exclusion strategy when referring to illegal migrants, by not translating *illegal migrants* literally (*παράνομους*) but rather as *παράτυπους* (*atypical/irregular migrants*), which tones down offensiveness and facilitates an inclusion interpretation. Vogel (2016) suggests that the term ‘irregular’ or ‘undocumented’ resident or (im)migrant avoids the negative connotations of the terms ‘illegal,’ ‘clandestine’ or ‘unauthorised.’

ST3 ... “there are seven bodies of **illegal** migrants that sank off Khoms [...]”  
“Migrant boat sinks off Libyan coast, kills at least seven: official”

*Reuters*, 30 August 2015

TT3 ... “υπάρχουν επτά πτώματα **παράτυπων** μεταναστών από σκάφος που βυθίστηκε ανοικτά της Χομς [...]”  
“Τουλάχιστον επτά νεκροί μετανάστες ανοικτά της Λιβύης”

*Η Καθημερινή*, 30 August 2015

(BT) “*there are seven corpses of **irregular** migrants from a boat which sank off Khoms [...]*”

“*At least seven dead migrants off the Libyan coast*”

The source version points to a securitization approach which is an area of migration studies, namely, “the conceptualization and treatment of immigrants as a threat and problem and is connected with illegitimation and criminalization

research” (Iosifides 2018: 98). Iosifides (2018: 106) opts for “a critical stance of social relations, of power inequality, exploitation and domination” which he considers extremely important for contemporary migration researchers; the same holds for Jacobs (2018: 147), who calls for critical reflection on potential bias in migration research. Manifestations like the one in ST3 may echo the “host hostility and nativism” perspective, which has attracted the attention of scholars (Bozorgmehr, Bakalian and Salman 2013: 189).

As mentioned, Fotiadis (2015) suggests that migration is seen primarily as a security and military issue in the EU context, rather than a humanitarian one. The Greek translated press seems to be occasionally foregrounding the military nature of operations (as in TT4), which Fotiadis assumes to be an issue of critical importance. For instance, in TT4, the ST item *camp* could have been rendered as *εγκαταστάσεις προσφύγων* or *καταυλισμούς προσφύγων* (*refugee establishments*). Instead it is given a pragmatically transparent rendition, as *στρατόπεδα* (military camps or camps with imposed discipline by a state power).

- ST4 Swedish authorities will start setting up **camp**s for refugees ...  
 “Sweden could house tens of thousands refugees in tents: Migration Agency” *Reuters*, 15 October 2015
- TT4 Στην κατασκευή **στρατοπέδων** υποδοχής προσφύγων προχωρεί η Σουηδία...  
 “**Στρατόπεδα** υποδοχής προσφύγων στη Σουηδία”  
*Η Καθημερινή*, 16 October 2015
- (BT) *Sweden proceeds to the construction of refugee reception (military) camps ...*  
 “*Refugee reception (military) camps in Sweden*”

The military gloss arising from *στρατόπεδα* (military camps) tallies with Angeli and Triandafyllidou’s (2016: 126; emphasis added) view when discussing the situation in the Aegean Sea: “The recent *militarization* of the fight against migrant smuggling in Europe, primarily triggered by the deployment of NATO vessels in the Aegean Sea, is likely to open new lines of thought and cut across a series of disciplines.”

The Greek version, in Example (4), seems to highlight border bureaucracy, which includes “not only state authorities and border guards but also non-governmental organisations, international organisations and criminal networks for human smuggling and trafficking” (Triandafyllidou 2016: 347).

On other occasions (TT5), the Greek translated data may show an aestheticizing intention on the part of the mediator, blurring the military character of EU action or assigning the military action implication on the ‘other’ side. For instance, a few months earlier, when the same newspaper translated a press item about the

effectiveness of EU military operations, the target version had silenced the military nature of EU operations (TT5): see *military action* in the English headline disappearing from the Greek version. Besides, the rich connotative meaning of *ξύλινες ψαρόβαρκες* [*wooden fishing boats*] for the ST item *fishing boats* and the aesthetic quality of *ακουμπούν μεταξύ τους στο φύσημα του αέρα* (*they touch each other in the air blast*) for ST item *line the quay* do not seem to set up a politically aware perspective: aestheticization emanating from TT item *wooden fishing boats touching each other in the air blast* tones suffering down. Fictionalizing tones down perception of suffering. Fictionalizing strategies seem to have functioned as a “distorting mirror” in World War I posters (James 2009: 31) which distanced viewers from the reality of war. The only military oriented item in the Greek version is the TT5 item *στόλοι* (*fleet*), but this puts the blame for ‘organized’ action on the traffickers rather than the EU (unlike TT4). In TT5, politics is ‘fictionalized’ in the media setting (Wodak 2009), which seems to obscure the conflict. Example (5) brings up the smuggling phenomenon, which “is skewed towards the poorer migrants” (Triandafyllidou 2016: 349). An aestheticization or voyeuristic intention of the text producer in the press, with reference to smuggling, would contradict the “complex and challenging legal landscape comprised of cumulative rules and obligations imposed under the law of the sea, international human rights law and transnational human rights law” (Gallagher and David 2014: 404).

ST5 In the small Libyan port of Zuwara, one of the main points of departure for migrants seeking to reach Italy, dozens if not hundreds of fishing boats **line the quay**.

“Libya’s people smugglers: **military action** won’t stop this multifaceted trade” *The Guardian*, 10 May 2015

TT5 Στο λιβυκό λιμάνι της Ζουβάρα, δεκάδες, αν όχι εκατοντάδες ξύλινες ψαρόβαρκες **ακουμπούν μεταξύ τους στο φύσημα του αέρα**.

“**Ψαρόβαρκες** οι στόλοι των διακινητών” *Η Καθημερινή*, 17 May 2015 (BT) *In the Libyan port of Zuwara, tens, if not hundreds, of wooden boats touch each other in the air blast*. “*Traffickers’ fleets are fishing boats*”

The shift is assumed to manifest variation occurring “in the course of a conflict” (Wolfsfeld 2003: 153), as the mediation approach differs at two time points of the ongoing migration crisis: the more recent instance (TT4, Oct. 2015) enforces the military character of the defence mechanism as ideologically relevant, shaping “Europeanness” (Wodak 2009: 97). Awareness of the military nature of operations has probably grown, between May and October 2015, and thus shifted positive/negative attributions to social agents, in the Greek press. As pre-war images of World War I were allusive rather than accurate (James 2009: 47), these non/

fictionalizing strategies have reshaped conceptualization of refugee suffering in present-day verbal code.

Examples (4) and (5) also seem to reflect a different perception of the “internal division of the Mediterranean sea into Southern and Northern shores” (Derrida in Chérif 2008: xv). TT4 seems to construct a Southern-Self and Northern-Other (by assuming organized military intention enacted in the North, pragmatically manifested through *στρατόπεδα* [*military camps*]), whereas TT5 rather constructs a Northern-Self and a Southern-Other (by assuming the military intention on the Southern shore, manifested through *στόλοι* [*fleet*]). Both examples echo awareness of harmful balances and inequalities between the West-global vs. South dichotomy, and perhaps echo Derrida’s (in Chérif 2008: 38) call “to deconstruct the European intellectual construct of Islam.” TT4 and TT5 echo the old distinction between fact (as in 4) and fiction (as in 5), politics and culture, public and private (Buckingham 2000) manifested by prioritizing a different part of the binary each time, as a different way of constructing citizenship or reality.

Another headline pair which cancels the fictional gloss of politics in the TT and manifests a different ‘perspectivization’ strategy (Wodak 2008, 2009) between ST and TT, appears in Example (6).

ST6 “Why Do Muslims Flock to the ‘Evil West?’”

*gatestone*, 17 September 2015

TT6 “Ποιοι αδιαφορούν για τους σύρους πρόσφυγες”

*To Bήμα*, 3 October 2015

(BT) “*Who are indifferent to Syrian refugees*”

The MIGRANT=BIRD analogy seems to be operative in English. In discussing migration and gender, Morokvasic (2016: 54) refers to her article ‘Birds of passage are also women’ (IMR 1984), which questions “men as a universal referent and the invisibility of women or their stereotypical representations.” The Greek version avoids the MIGRANT=BIRD analogy.

The ST6 item *flock* resonates a typical foraging activity of birds, for protection, mating, raising families, warmth, aerodynamics (using the surrounding air in energy efficient ways), thus generating misleading connotations with reference to asylum seekers. The English version seems to put the blame for the paradox of ‘flocking to the evil West’ on the ‘foraging flock.’ The Greek version focuses on Syrian refugees and puts the blame (emanating from *αδιαφορούν* [*are indifferent to*]) on other Muslim countries which do not accept fellow-Muslim asylum seekers. This is what Wodak et al. (2009: 36) call “Strategies of Justification and Relativisation,” in examining the discursive construction of national identity, where the shift of blame and responsibility constructs a different ‘us-them’ distinction. In the English headline, the ‘us’ seems to coincide with the West. In the

Greek version of the headline, the ‘us’ seems to coincide with Syrian asylum seekers. Sassi (2001: 940) highlights Stuart Hall’s trust in the potential of the discursive in language and “the metaphorically generated capacity to conceptualize other kinds of practice as operating like a language in a number of important ways” and with massive political consequences. For instance, the foraging conceptualization erases the suffering connotation and inscribes a voyeuristic, distancing, spectacular nature of the process. In analyzing the transformation of citizenship, Coleman (2001: 113) points to McLuhan’s critique of the media emphasizing “the spectacular, voyeuristic, alienating, atomizing and distancing nature of broadcast culture.”

In his book *Distant Suffering*, Boltanski (1999) brings up Hannah Arendt’s (1990) notion ‘politics of pity’ and contrasts it with the ‘politics of justice’ as two tendencies inherent in Western societies. A *politics of pity* relates to unfortunate groups of sufferers, behaving as a collective person. They are assumed to be victims, who do not deserve what they are experiencing. A *politics of justice* relates to sufferers who have what they deserve, and the status of suffering is not definitively attached to the sufferer. The distinction between a *politics of pity* and a *politics of justice* seems to inform the discursive strategies in the source and target version of headline pair 6. In the foraging situation (ST6), the headline seems to assume a *politics of pity* where action cannot impede foraging, and the metaphorical conceptualization integrates distance (birds flying high in the sky). By contrast, in the translated version, the speaker takes the role of the persecutor, the denunciator, and evokes a *politics of justice* approach. While the source strategy distances readers from suffering (politics of pity), the target text strategy alerts them by stigmatizing the ‘insensibility’ of other Muslim countries which are not willing to accept refugees. The latter approach is more attuned to a politics of justice.

The ST6 mediation process seems to realize Appadurai’s (1990) notion of ‘mediascape’: “[m]ediascapes tend to be image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, offering those who experience and enact them a set of resources from which the scripts of imagined lives can be formed” (Sassi 2001: 96). The assumption is that the foraging conceptualization is a misleading script to account for refugee suffering. It exerts a de-politicizing effect which can significantly deteriorate awareness of the political debate and lower democratic sentiment. Media studies have been concerned with how news texts shape public ethics “by shaping the spectators’ encounter with distant suffering” (Chouliaraki 2006: 3) and have distinguished between pamphleteering functions (addressing spectators’ potential for anger) and sublimation functions (distancing spectators from the suffering). TT6 has a pamphleteering intention, ST6 a sublimation one realizing the aesthetic quality of pity. The claim is that there are news narratives which block the spectators’ potential to engage with suffering and others which may enhance this potential, as TT6 does.

Such shifts abound in the data. Another headline pair, which may be assumed to have an effect on audiences, appears in 7. It questions the migration policy effectiveness (Czaika and de Haas 2016), namely, it challenges the effectiveness of the host countries closing borders to refugees.

- ST7 “UN warns European unity at risk as borders close to refugees”  
*The Guardian*, 19 September 2015
- TT7 “The Guardian: Η Ευρώπη σε κίνδυνο από τους χειρισμούς στο μεταναστευτικό”  
*Η Καθημερινή*, 19 September 2015  
 (BT) *The Guardian: Europe at risk from handling the migration issue*

Headline pair 7 seems to assume the Habermasian distinction between the public and the private sphere. As the public sphere in Western societies is declining, a preferable translation strategy would involve strengthening the public dimension, as TT7 does by the use of *μεταναστευτικό* (*migrating [issue]*), which has a public resonance, instead of the ST item *refugees*, which has an individualized resonance. The strategies in the source and target version of headline pair 7, echo the distinction between ‘episodic’ vs. ‘thematic’ frames which Buckingham refers to in discussing the making of citizens. Episodic frames deal with individual case studies and as Iyengar (1991 in Buckingham 2000: 43) argues, the episodic approach “leads viewers to make individualistic rather than societal attributions of responsibility for social problems.”

The study has been concerned with the ‘multifunctional’ (Chouliaraki 2006) dimension of translation mediation in the Greek press, namely, how regimes of pity are discursively constructed or avoided across versions, by focusing on strategies of discourse construction which vary in the English and Greek data set. As the data have been culled from agencies and newspaper digital platforms, where verbal material is almost always accompanied by photos, a future research problem would be for scholars to account for the multimodal dimension of mediation, with a view to tracing potential patterns connecting image to text across versions. This may be done by focusing on visual material which varies in English and Greek. It would be a view into the semiotic processes of language and image by which the local press constructs another regime of truth for portraying refugee suffering.

The study of migration has already been a huge interdisciplinary area, to which translation studies has a lot to offer in highlighting how a global conflict is locally perceived in reception environments. As “efforts to harden nation-state borders” (Gold and Nawyn 2013: 1) increased, the unprecedented flow of human migration left imprinted its own trace in reception environments affecting political, socio-cultural, economic and demographic developments. Media translation is an area of research which may eloquently highlight conflicting aspects of migration reception across the globe, through pragma-linguistic ways of othering

and exclusion, which inform the study of migration (or of translation, in the context of migration).

#### 4. On global conflict, online communication and translation

The study engaged in a cross-country/cross-institution analysis of how news institutions represent the dispossessed through translation. It identified strategies of translation in traditional data and online communication which show an intention to resist practices constructing ‘others’ unfavorably, such as migrants, showing that translation can downplay “the (mis)use of the Internet for spreading fear, anger, and hate against ‘others’” (Pajnik and Sauer 2018: 1).

Watters (2013) argues that the complexity of forced migration needs to address three levels of analysis namely, a

1. “macro level of global political and economic factors” (Watters 2013: 99), a
2. micro level “at which decisions are made by individuals, families, and communities” (Watters 2013: 99) and an
3. “intermediate level that examines the role of various *actors that mediate the relationships* between forced migrants themselves and the national and international institutions that have decisive impact on migrants’ futures” (Watters 2013: 99; emphasis added).

The present study has elaborated on the third level of analysis, namely on global and local “actors who mediate between forced migrants and international institutions.”

As the quality of public discourse is deteriorating, scholars have been concerned with the whole of media culture effect on the public (Davis, Fischer-Hornung and Kardux 2011). Translation is another significant remediation process, where regimes of signification (verbal, visual) undergo a second-order, but equally important, mediation process in the media landscape, which can contribute valuable insights to pragmatic and media studies, because it seems to reshape inferencing and affect the potential for civic action and construction of citizenship roles through “hierarchies of grievability” (Chouliaraki 2015). The analysis aimed at showing the contribution of the linguistic regime of signification to our understanding of the public sphere and to shaping public ethics. Media studies celebrate the priority images are given, in the new media, over reflection emanating from verbal messages. The present data set seems to show that the linguistic regime of signification displays highly operative discursive strategies shaping public view and public ethics. Accompanying images deserve close attention on their own right, for their instant communicative potential.

First, the study expanded theorization of mediation in the direction of translation: if mediation in media studies is about messages shifting platforms of mediation, routes of dissemination and discursive frameworks of re-contextualization and re-moralization (Chouliaraki 2015), the study complicated this by suggesting that there is another, hitherto ignored yet crucial, layer to the discursive dimension, namely, translation. Second, the study exemplified translation mediation through specific examples in the context of a global/UK-to-Greek translation trajectory (*I Kathimerini*, *To Vima*, vs. *The Guardian* and *RT*), through identifying key strategies of mediation. Third, the study drew out the implications of translation mediation processes as attempts at remoralising (and hence regulating/reproducing) a dominant ideology and sensibilities in the Greek public sphere.

The Greek verbal data showed that fictionalized distortion is regulated by players' perception of political landscapes: they showed that instances of aestheticization tendencies (when compared to the source version headlines) occur in cases of *distant* suffering and *low-risk* contexts, as to the safety of local readerships. In high-risk situations and proximal suffering, aestheticization is often abandoned and urgency is re-mediated through discursive strategies which symbolically spell out ideological issues involved in political debates. In high-risk news stories like the ones referring to the migration crisis, the Greek translated press data often seem to de-center processes of recognition, which re-narrate distant others as 'self' and create civic engagement and cosmopolitanism.

In a democratic context experiencing a political turn where market forces and private enterprise redefine social landscapes, where governmental manoeuvrability is narrowing and voter turnouts are decreasing (Dahlgren 2001), journalist-translator trainees are expected to critically focus on inferences to be generated into another language. In the same vein, readers should be more urgently encouraged to become critically aware of the manipulative power of the media shaping the public sphere in intended ways, and avoid the voyeuristic identity attributed to them by the media, as spectators of political action. There seems to be a gate-keeping role of the mainstream digital mass media which locally reshapes global dissemination of verbal material, in shaping ethical sensibilities.

If the internet is a tool of political mobilization and less attention has been paid to ideology and its political role (Kavada 2014), then digital platforms of traditional media, in translation, seem to be a rich source for heightening awareness of ideology and its political role. In considering translation, media studies will be enhancing the variety and depth of digital media scholarship with a view to further enriching and hybridizing media studies (Aslinger and Huntemann 2013) encouraging interdisciplinary research. King (2018) highlights the importance of context for the study of migration, namely, the sending society context, the receiving society context and the places/spaces passed through. The study has added to



“a context-based, qualitative research and multi-sited migration studies in Europe” (King 2018: 35) by exploring aspects of the receiving society (e.g., in Greece) vs. a global view of the matter. King (2018: 35), following Marcus (1995), suggests that a multi-sited research on migration would “trace the social correlates and groundings of associations that are clearly alive in language use and print or visual media,” perhaps parallel with the conflict, e.g., the dramaturgical unfolding of the recent and on-going Syrian refugee crisis with its complex and shifting routes through Turkey” over to Greece.

## 5. Concluding remarks

One of the internet features relating to the community is that it offers “simple and open access to the community for interested parties” (Gattiker 2001: 141). ‘Simple and open access’ to information facilitates pragmatic processing of information and enhances understanding in communication, having an immediate impact on users.

The study has traced a migration-related ‘conflict’ (discrepancy, I would call it) in the way migration and migrant identities are reshaped through English-Greek translation practice, in the news, and has found that the Greek translated version takes a more humanitarian stance to the issue of migration, in contrast to a rather threatening perspective in the English news reports. Zapata-Barrero’s (2018) view, with respect to the migration-based conflict, anticipates the finding by saying that “if you follow a humanitarian-based approach to refugees, the security-based approach followed by most states can be perceived as a threat” (Zapata-Barrero 2018: 80).

The study focused on the representation of refugee identity in translation practice by taking an etic approach to the issue, e.g., by examining how institutional actors may shape refugee identity in original and translated discourse. “[E]mic narratives and representations of the experiences of refugees” (Sigona 2014: 1) are widely used in migration research (e.g., through interviews) and paint a clearer picture of their realities. A translation-oriented emic approach which would involve translation practices by the refugees themselves is an open research problem.

Future research should look into shifts in the visuals accompanying articles on refugee suffering. It may show that there is a pattern of visual selection in the target Greek journalistic environment, which resists a de/aestheticizing intention of the visuals selected by the source English journalistic environment. It may highlight the ideological underpinning of visual selection in the target environment, its potential to dis/engage readers with moralizing. Like a tip of an iceberg, headlines and images may attract public attention and shape public opinion on global conflicts like the one that accentuated migration flow into the Europe of 2015.

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# Name index

- Aarsand, Pål André 235–238  
Abdul Salam, Sobihatun Nur  
110, 128–129  
Abidin, Crystal 209, 213, 227  
Acton, Brian 181  
Androustopoulos, Jannis  
213–214, 239, 242  
Annamalai, Subashini 110,  
128–129  
Antonopoulos, Georgios A.  
321–322  
Appadurai, Arjun 332  
Arenas, Concepción 190  
Arendt, Hannah 332  
Ares, Gastón 108, 110–112,  
127–130, 135–136  
Arnould, Eric J. 36–37  
Attrill, Alison 175  
Austin, John L. 14, 38, 48,  
145–169  
Bakalian, Anny 329  
Barbieri, Francesco 140  
Barron, Anne 8  
Barton, David 238  
Bateson, Gregory 50–51  
Baym, Nancy 180  
Bechar-Israeli, Haya 235–238  
Beldad, Ardion 86  
Bell, Diana Calhoun 181  
Bell, Genevieve 92  
Berners-Lee, Tim 1  
Bertel, Troels F. 91–98  
Bignell, Jonathan 324  
Blades, Rubén 193  
Blakemore, Diana 48  
Blom, Jonas Nygaard 49  
Boczkowski, Pablo J. 2  
Bogdanović, Vesna 61  
Boltanski, Luc 332  
Bos, Arjan E. R. 288  
Bou-Franch, Patricia 149n10  
Bourdieu, Pierre 3  
Bousfield, Derek 236  
Boxer, Diana 240  
boyd, danah m. 209, 212, 264  
Bozorgmehr, Mehdi 329  
Brandom, Robert B. 52, 65  
Brettell, Caroline B. 324  
Brown, B. Bradford 175  
Brown, Penelope 236  
Bucholtz, Mary 54n4  
Buckingham, David 331, 333  
Bulatović, Vesna 61  
Butler, Samuel 31n2  
Buttrick, Samuel 87  
Caiado, Roberta 178  
Calvert, Sandra L. 288–290  
Campbell, Scott W. 93  
Cantamutto, Lucía 178  
Carey, John 288  
Carlson, Thomas B. 66–67  
Carr, Caleb T. 93, 147n6  
Casas-Cortés, Maribel 325  
Castineira-Benitez, Teresa  
A. 178  
Chang, Chen-Wei 75, 84  
Chaplin, Charlie 190  
Chen, Gina Masullo 75, 84,  
290, 293  
Cheng, Zhi-chao 93  
Chérif, Mustafa 331  
Choi, Yuri 111  
Chouliaraki, Lilie 323–335  
Clark, Herbert H. 66–67, 87  
Clinton, Hilary 262  
Cobarrubias, Sebastián 325  
Coleman, Stephen 332  
Collins, James E. 179, 196  
Collister, Lauren B. 263, 265  
Cortés-Conde, Florencia 240  
Coupland, Nikolaus 213  
Cramer, Henriette 85–86, 96,  
109, 113, 133, 140  
Crawford, Kate 98  
Cruz-Moya, Olga 177–187,  
199  
Crystal, David 237  
Culpeper, Jonathan 235, 246,  
252–253  
Czaika, Mathias 333  
da Fonte, Renata 178  
Dahlgren, Peter 323, 335  
Dainas, Ashley 107–141  
Danesi, Marcel 109  
Danet, Brenda 315  
Darics, Erika 290  
Dausà, Joan 191n17  
David, Fiona 330  
Davies, Bronwyn 215, 227  
Davis, Rocío G. 334  
De Fina, Anna 213  
de Haas, Hein 333  
de Juan, Paloma 109, 113,  
133, 140  
de Oliveira, Rodrigo 178  
Derks, Daantje 136, 288  
Derrida, Jacques 322, 331  
de Souza e Silva, Adriana 77,  
83–87, 91–92  
Deumert, Ana 2  
Diamantaki, Katerina 88  
Di Nucci, Darcy 145n2  
Dinur, Rachel 339  
Dobs, Abby Mueller 235  
Domin, Christian 109, 112,  
137, 139  
Doomernik, Jeroen 327  
Dourish, Paul 92  
Drakopoulou, Sophia 76  
Draucker, Fawn 263–265  
Dresner, Eli 112, 117, 134, 139,  
147n6, 152n13, 288  
Dürscheid, Christa 109  
Dynel, Marta 196–197, 212,  
263  
Dyson, Freeman 33, 34n4  
Eimler, Sabrina C. 112  
Eisenchlas, Susana A. 117  
Eisenstein, Jacob 109



- Ekström, Anders 322, 325  
 El Samie, Yara Abd 236  
 Espinosa-Anke, Luis 140  
 Estraiikh, Gennady 240  
 Evans, Leighton 77–78, 84, 90  
 Fazel, Maryam 76  
 Fernández-Amaya, Lucía 211  
 Fetzer, Anita 3, 8–11, 12n10,  
 13, 47–71, 210, 219  
 Fialkova, Larisa L'ovnova 238,  
 249  
 Fischer-Hornung, Dorothea  
 334  
 Fitzsimons, Grain M. 208  
 Flatla, David R. 107, 110–112  
 Flores-Salgado, Elizabeth 178  
 Forabosco, Giovannantonio  
 196–198  
 Fotiadis, Apostolis 327–329  
 Foulger, Davis A. 112  
 Freud, Sigmund 179  
 Frith, Jordan 75–78, 85–91, 94  
 Frizzera, Luciano 78, 81,  
 85, 90  
 Gal, Susan 322  
 Gallagher, Anna T. 330  
 Gallagher, Katherine 218  
 Ganster, Tina 112  
 Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Pilar  
 12, 149n10, 211, 235  
 Garfinkel, Harold 60, 65  
 Georgakopoulou, Alexandra  
 213  
 Gergle, Darren 290–291  
 Giesen, Bernhard 60  
 Gifford, Robert 82  
 Gitelman, Zvi 239, 242, 249  
 Glushkovskaya, Irina  
 239–240, 242  
 Goffman, Erving 14, 66,  
 207–214, 222, 228, 263, 267  
 Goggin, Gerard 83  
 Gold, Stephen J. 333  
 Gordon, Eric 92  
 Gosling, Samuel D. 97  
 Gottlieb, Nanette 314–315  
 Grabowski, Łukasz 246  
 Graham, Lindsay T. 97  
 Graham, Sage L. 10  
 Graham, Todd 261  
 Gramsci, Antonio 6, 6n7  
 Grasmuck, Sherri 189  
 Grice, Herbert Paul 38, 48,  
 56, 64  
 Griss, Irmgard 266–281  
 Grønning, Anette 288  
 Gruber, Helmut 259–287  
 Gu, Kay 77  
 Gu, Yueguo 28–29  
 Gudykunst, William B. 314,  
 316  
 Gullberg, Kajsa 111–112  
 Gumperz, John J. 56, 59–60,  
 64, 138  
 Gwiazdowicz, Dariusz J. 112,  
 117n9  
 Haberland, Hartmut 4, 8,  
 54n4, 92  
 Halegoua, Germaine R.  
 85–87, 90–91, 94, 97  
 Hall, Stuart 332  
 Halliday, M.A.K. 271n12  
 Hamada, Tsukasa 290  
 Hansen, Kenneth Reinecke  
 49  
 Harada, Tomi 289  
 Harré, Ron 215, 227  
 Harris, Ranida B. 288  
 Hayes, Rebecca A. 93  
 Heidegger, Martin 3, 6  
 Heritage, John 51, 63–64  
 Hermans, Liesbeth 261  
 Hernández-López, Maria de  
 la O 211  
 Herring, Susan C. 3, 7, 9,  
 107–124, 134–141, 152n13,  
 287–288, 290–291  
 Hine, Christine 90  
 Hjorth, Larissa 77, 81, 83, 91  
 Hodges, Bert 28  
 Hofer, Norbert 266–283  
 Hoffmann, Christian R. 1,  
 10, 262  
 Hofman, John E. 239  
 Holcomb, Christopher 180,  
 184  
 Hollifield, James F. 324  
 Holmquist, Lars Erik 85–86,  
 96  
 Hsu, Mu-Chiun 85  
 Huang, Albert H. 290, 292  
 Huang, Chun-Hsiung 85  
 Huang, Yan 4  
 Hübler, Mike T. 181  
 Huffaker, David 288, 290  
 Huggins, Richard 322  
 Humphreys, Lee 83, 93  
 Hundstorfer, Rudolf 266–281  
 Hyun, Kyung Hoon 111  
 Ihlen, Øyvind 261  
 Inada, Yoriko 77–78  
 Inghilleri, Moira 324, 326–328  
 Iosifides, Theodoros 329  
 Iyengar, Shanto 333  
 Jackson, Nigel A. 261  
 Jacobs, Dirk 329  
 Jaeger, Sara R. 108–112,  
 127–130, 136  
 Jaffe, Alexandra 57  
 James, Pearl 330  
 Jefferson, Thomas 35, 35n5  
 John, Nicholas A. 271  
 Johnová, Markéta 237–238  
 Jucker, Andreas H. 5n7, 236  
 Jung, Younbo 292  
 Jungherr, Andreas 261, 264  
 Kalman, Yoram 290–291  
 Kalsnes, Bente 283  
 Kankaanranta, Anne 288  
 Kapidzic, Sanja 290  
 Kardux, Johanna C. 334  
 Kato, Shogo 290  
 Kato, Yuuki 290  
 Katsuno, Hirofumi 289,  
 307, 315  
 Katzman, Sandra Lee  
 289–290, 298  
 Kavada, Anastasia 336  
 Kavanagh, Barry 288–291,  
 294, 297, 301  
 Kaye, Linda K. 225  
 Kecskes, Istvan 69, 87, 214  
 Kellner, Douglas 322  
 Kelly, Ryan 112  
 Kempelen, Wolfgang von  
 110n3  
 Khol, Andreas 266–268  
 Kim, Hyang-Sook 86  
 Kishimoto, Chiaki 290  
 Kneidinger-Müller, Bernadette  
 77, 88  
 Koc-Michalska, Karolina 261  
 Kopytowska, Monika 246  
 Kotthoff, Helga 183–184, 198  
 Koum, Jan 181  
 Kowalski, Julia 322  
 Krämer, Nicole C. 112  
 Kreis, Ramona 262

- Kress, Gunther 219  
 Krefß, Beatrix 236  
 Kruger, Justin 138  
 Kusumadewi, Margareta  
     Citra 86  
 Labinaz, Paolo 147n5  
 Labre, Benoît-Joseph 39n8  
 Larsson, Anders Olof  
     259–261, 283  
 Last, Tamara 325  
 Latour, Bruno 30–31, 34  
 Lawson, Edwin D. 239–240,  
     242  
 Lee, Carmen 236–238  
 Lee, Ji-Hyun 111  
 Lemke, Jay 30–31, 60  
 Lemos, Andre 83  
 Lepore, Ernie 65  
 Levin, James A. 289  
 Levinson, Stephen C. 38n6,  
     50, 57, 66, 236  
 Levordashka, Ana 94  
 Lewinski, Marcin 65, 68  
 Lewis, David 153, 160  
 Li, Yao 82  
 Liao, Tony 83  
 Licoppe, Christian 75, 77–78,  
     81–82, 94–97  
 Liegl, Michael 77  
 Lin, Ruoyun 94  
 Ling, Rich 117  
 Livingstone, Sonia 322  
 Lorenzo-Dus, Nuria 149n10  
 Lü, Dongqing 210  
 Lugner, Richard 266–268,  
     278  
 Lunt, Peter 322  
 MacCannell, Dean 213  
 Magid, Magid 49–70  
 Maiz-Arévalo, Carmen  
     188–191  
 Malone, Stephanie A. 225  
 Manago, Adriana M. 189  
 Manning, Peter K. 211  
 Manning, Phillip 211–212  
 Maqsood, Saba 32  
 Markman, Kris M. 289  
 Maroukis, Thanos 321  
 Marsili, Neri 163n20  
 Martin, James R. 275, 277  
 Martin, Jason 189  
 Martin, Rod A. 179, 184  
 Marwick, Alice E. 212, 264  
 Marx, Karl 31  
 Matulewska, Aleksandra 112,  
     117n9  
 McGuinness, Brian 4  
 McLuhan, Marshall 33  
 Mey, Jacob L. 2n4, 3n6,  
     27–29, 38–40, 43  
 Meyrowitz, Joshua 80  
 Millar, Sharon 32  
 Miller, Hannah 107–111, 116,  
     136–137, 140  
 Miller, Laura 322  
 Mills, C. Wright 7  
 Mirović, Ivana 61  
 Miyake, Kazuko 289, 314–315  
 Moeschler, Jacques 190  
 Montoya, Orion 113  
 Moore, Erin 322  
 Morokvasic, Mirjana 331  
 Mortensen, Janus 8, 54n4  
 Na'aman, Noa 113  
 Nakamura, Isao 289–290  
 Nardi, Bonnie A. 290–292  
 Nawyn, Stephanie J. 333  
 Nishida, Tsukasa 314–316  
 Noë, Nyala 86, 96–97  
 Norrick, Neal R. 179–181, 184,  
     193–196  
 Novak, Petra Kralj 136  
 Nunes, Mark 81  
 Odeunmi, Akin 28  
 Oishi, Etsuko 48  
 Oliveira, Joana 107n1  
 Onodera, Noriko O. 306  
 O'Reilly, Karen 325  
 O'Reilly, Tim 145n2  
 Oshima, Sae 289  
 Ott, Brian L. 262  
 Özkul, Didem 80–81, 86,  
     91, 95  
 Page, Ruth 12n10, 207  
 Pajnik, Mojca 334  
 Palmer, Jerry 179  
 Papacharissi, Zizi 2  
 Papangelis, Konstantinos 84  
 Paradise, David 288  
 Park, Joseph Sung-Yul 54n4  
 Partner, Lynda 41  
 Pavalanathan, Umashanthi  
     109  
 Penco, Carlo 52–53  
 Perelmutter, Renee 236, 239,  
     241n2, 244–246  
 Pickles, John 325  
 Pieber, Darryl A. 80  
 Pink, Sarah 77, 83, 91  
 Pohl, Henning 109, 112, 137,  
     139  
 Pollet, Thomas V. 86, 96–97  
 Posner, Roland 42, 42n10  
 Poulsen, Søren Vigild 41  
 Provenza, Hannah 113  
 Qualman, Erik 208  
 Quan-Haase, Anabel 80  
 Raffel, Stanley 212  
 Rajendran, Lakshmi Priya 76  
 Raskin, Victor 179  
 Recanati, François 38n6  
 Remennick, Larissa 240  
 Riboni, Giorgia 265, 282  
 Ricciardi, Walter 172  
 Riordan, Monica A. 225, 288  
 Rodrigues, David 112  
 Rohs, Michael 109, 112, 137,  
     139  
 Rosenbaum-Tamari, Yehudit  
     315  
 Rost, Mattias 85–86, 96  
 Ruch, Willibald 198–199  
 Ruedenberg, Lucia 315  
 Sacks, Harvey 219  
 Saggion, Horacio 140  
 Saker, Michael 77–78, 84, 86,  
     90, 94  
 Salman, Sara 329  
 Sams, Steven 261  
 Sánchez-Moya, Alfonso  
     178–182, 186–187, 199  
 Sandel, Todd L. 210  
 Sartre, Jean-Paul 41, 41n9  
 Sassi, Sinikka 332  
 Sauer, Birgit 334  
 Sbisà, Marina 64, 147n5,  
     151–152, 152n14–15, 154,  
     154n16, 155, 160–161, 165,  
     266  
 Scammell, Claire 322  
 Scannell, Leila 82  
 Schäffner, Christina 322  
 Schiffrin, Deborah 213  
 Schmidt, David L. 314–315  
 Schneider, Klaus P. 8  
 Schreuder, Robert 87  
 Schwartz, Raz 85–87, 90–91,  
     94, 97

- Schweitzer, Eva Johanna 260,  
262, 268, 281, 283
- Scott, Douglass 290
- Searle, John 38, 52, 65, 155
- Serrat, Joan Manuel 189
- Shultz, Thomas R. 197
- Siever, Christina Margrit 109
- Sifianou, Maria 235
- Simpson, Thomas W. 147n6
- Skovholt, Karianne 288
- Slovacek, Celeste L. 219
- Smith, Janet S. 314–315
- Song, Hayeon 292
- Spencer-Oatey, Helen 296
- Sperber, Dan 38, 78, 85,  
87–88, 190
- Spijkerboer, Thomas 325
- Spilioti, Tereza 239
- Stalnaker, Robert 68
- Statham, Paul 322
- Stefanone, Michael A. 76, 97
- Steinmetz, Katy 109
- Stempfhuber, Martin 77
- Stern, Barbara B. 218
- Stiegler, Bernhard 322
- Stommel, Wyke 236–239
- Strawson, Peter F. 152n14
- Sugimoto, Taku 289
- Suls, Jerry M. 179, 196–197
- Sutko, Daniel M. 87
- Swartz, Luke 290, 292
- Szilágyi, Anna 246
- Taavitsainen, Irma 5n7, 236
- Tanaka, Yukari 289
- Tang, Jian 82
- Tang, Karen P. 85, 96, 98
- Tannen, Deborah 4, 138, 21
- Tatman, Rachael 139
- Tetreault, Joel 109, 113, 133,  
140
- Thibault, Paul J. 60
- Thompson, Philip A. 112
- Thompson, Clive 94, 107n1
- Thompson, Eric C. 209, 213,  
227
- Thompson, Geoff 271n12
- Thuer, Martin 279
- Tidwell, Lisa Collins 208,  
219, 299
- Tigwell, Garreth W. 107,  
110–112
- Tomasello, Michael 65
- Tong, Ying 219
- Tossell, Chad C. 290,  
298–299
- Trester, Anna Marie 4
- Triandafyllidou, Anna 321,  
324, 329–330
- Trump, Donald J. 2, 261–262,  
265n5
- Tsipras, Alexis 172
- Tummala-Narra, Pratyusha  
236, 239–240
- Turkle, Sherry 42
- Utz, Sonja 94
- Valls, Arturo 194
- van der Bellen, Alexander  
266–283
- van Dijck, José 177, 209–210,  
213, 227
- van Leeuwen, Theo 209,  
213, 219
- Vela Delfa, Cristina D. 178
- Vergeer, Maurice 261
- Verschik, Anna 240, 247, 251
- Verschueren, Jef 4, 265
- Vigara Tauste, Ana M.  
177–178
- Vitak, Jessica 263
- Vogel, Dita 328
- Voloshinov, Valentin N. 39
- von Grumbkow, Jasper 136,  
288
- Vorderer, Peter 292
- Wall, Helen J. 225
- Walther, Joseph B. 208, 219,  
299
- Wang, Shaojung Sharon 76,  
93, 97
- Wang, Yang 82
- Waseleski, Carol 291
- Watters, Charles 334
- Watts, Leon 112
- Watzlawik, Meike 239
- Weber, Max 35
- Weinberg, Stephen 34n4
- Weinberger, David 71
- Weizman, Elda 3, 11–12, 67,  
219
- Wellman, Barry 76
- White, Peter R. R. 277
- Widdowson, Henry 8
- Wilken, Rowan 77
- Wilson, Deirdre 38, 61, 78, 85,  
87–88, 190
- Winterdyk, John 321–322
- Witek, Maciej 152, 152n14
- Witmer, Diane F. 289, 298
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig 4, 9
- Wodak, Ruth 326–331
- Wohn, Yvette 93
- Wolf, Alecia 225, 289
- Wolfsfeld, Gadi 324, 326, 330
- Wozniak, Julita 246
- Wright, Terence 322–323
- Wyer, Robert 179, 196
- Xia, Liang 322
- Xie, Chaoqun 2, 9, 39–40,  
208–209, 219
- Xue, Minhui 82
- Yamada, Haru 314
- Yang, Chia-chen 175
- Yano, Christine R. 289, 307
- Yaqub, Ussama 260
- Yeboah, Johnson 178
- Yelenevskaya, Maria N. 238,  
249
- Yen, David C. 290, 292
- Yus, Francisco 2, 10, 12,  
12n10, 66, 75, 78, 80, 87,  
92–93, 97, 112, 176, 178,  
180–181, 184, 208–209,  
235–236, 288
- Zappavigna, Michele 94, 261,  
263n2
- Zelenkauskaite, Asta 291
- Zhang, Xiaoni 290, 292
- Zhao, Shanyang 189

# Subject index

## A

- accommodation 153
- act
  - affiliating 215, 219–220
  - appealing 215, 219–220
  - behabitive 165–168
  - commissive 162–165
  - exercitive 159–162
  - illocutionary 67, 152–168
  - informing 215, 219–220
  - pragmatic 39
  - verdictive 155–159
- action, communicative 64
- activity, rhetorical 264
- adaptability 43
- alignment, flexible 91
- animator 212, 218, 228
- aspect, interpersonal 264
- audience, imagined 264
- authenticity, staged 213–214, 223
- awareness, ambient 94

## B

- backstage 211
- blog 292
  - and gender 293–294

## C

- communication
  - ostensive-inferential 87
  - political 259–285
- community, sense of 93
- computer-mediated discourse analysis 9
- condition, preparatory 152–153
- constraint, contextual 10–11, 80, 83–85, 96
- content category 264
- context 50–55
  - cognitive 52–53
  - collapse 210, 263

- linguistic 53
  - social 54
- contextualisation 59
  - cues 55–56
- co-presence 94
- cyberpragmatics 75, 78–80

## D

- decontextualisation 57
- discourse 8–9
- discourse analysis 8–9
- discourse, computer-mediated 48–49
- discourse connective 48
- discourse pragmatics 64
- Dodgeball 93
- dovetailedness 64

## E

- ecology
  - hybrid 78
  - reflexive hybrid 78
- effect
  - conventional 147, 152
  - non-propositional 11–12, 80, 92–95, 98
- emoji 107–144, 225–227
  - ambiguity 111–112, 137–138
  - definition 107
  - functions 112–113, 119, 124–125, 136–137, 225–227
  - language of 109, 139
- emoticon 152, 287–320
  - and gender 289–290, 298
  - and politeness 304–310
  - types 295–298, 300–304
- entextualisation 54, 57
- environments, cognitive 87
- e-service encounters 211
- espousal 162
- ethnography 36–37
  - discourse-centred 214
- ethnomethodology 60

## F

- Facebook 149
  - check-in 95–98
- footing 212, 219
- force, illocutionary 151–152
- forum 243
- frame 50–51, 212, 218
- frontstage 211
- function, metacommunicative 48

## G

- gathering, multifocused 88
- genre 263
- goal 30–31
- graphicon 113
- Grindr 81
- ground 28
  - collective discourse common 69
  - common 68–71, 87
  - core common 69
  - discourse common 69
  - emergent common 69
  - individual discourse common 69
- group chat 224
- group membership 93

## H

- humor 179–181, 183–184
  - in digital communication 180–181
  - types 179
- hypothesis, informative-first 67

## I

- identity 93
  - discursive 67
  - online 42
- identity marker 237
- impoliteness 244–245

- incongruity 196–198  
 indexicality 60–63  
 individualism, networked 76  
 influencer 208–209, 218–227  
 innovation hypothesis  
 259–260  
 interactivity trigger 97  
 inter-mediation 323  
 internet 1–3, 145  
 internet pragmatics  
 definition 3–5  
 scope 5–6  
 intertextuality 193–198  
 intimacy, ambient 98
- J**  
 jazz, typed 315
- K**  
 kaomoji 289  
 and gender 289–290  
 knowledge, dissemination of  
 145–172
- L**  
 letter repetition 291
- M**  
 macrocoordination 93  
 manifestness 85  
 mutual 87  
 media, locative 75–105  
 mediation 57, 335  
 multimodal 333  
 metarepresentation 61–63  
 metasystem 60–61  
 microcoordination 93  
 migration 239–242, 321–341  
 modality 213  
 multilayeredness 71  
 multimodality 9, 49, 53, 61,  
 67, 113, 178, 181, 207, 213  
*see also* narrative,  
 multimodal
- N**  
 narrative  
 digital 213–214  
 multimodal 223, 227–228  
 network, social 148–149  
 newspaper, online 323  
 nickname 235–256  
 and identity 236–238
- normalization hypothesis  
 260
- O**  
 organization, sequential  
 64–65
- P**  
 parochialization 93  
 participation, multilayered  
 68  
 party, third 263  
 perspectivization strategy 327  
 phonetic spelling,  
 unconventional 310–312  
 and gender 310–311  
 place  
 character of 94  
 presentation of 87  
 place attachment 82  
 politeness 235–236, 296–298  
 politics, *see* communication,  
 political  
 polylogue 149  
 pragmatics 27–28, 38, 49,  
 65–67, 265  
 digital 5  
*see also* value, pragmatics  
 of  
*see also* discourse  
 pragmatics  
 prameme 39–40  
 presence, connected 94  
 presupposition  
 accommodation 159–160
- Q**  
 quotation 61–63
- R**  
 rapport 296, 314  
 reaction button 150, 163  
 recontextualisation 57  
 relationship, documentation  
 of 97  
 re-mediation 323  
 rheme 271
- S**  
 self  
 public 227  
 spatial 86  
 self-presentation 84, 175,  
 177–179, 208–211, 220, 227  
 self-reference 281–282  
 selling, social 208–210  
 sequentiality 29, 65  
 social networks, location-  
 based 77  
 sociolinguistics 60  
 space, hybrid 77, 83, 86  
 speech act theory 147, 150–153  
*see also* act  
 sphere, socioformative 76  
 stance, evaluative 30–31  
 status, *see* WhatsApp status  
 stranger, pseudonymous 82  
 subjectification 213
- T**  
 territory, informational 83  
 text 8–9  
 theme 271  
 translanguaging 239, 322  
 translation 321–323  
 translation mediation 322,  
 325  
 multimodal 333  
 trans-mediation 323  
 turn, locational 83  
 Twitter 259–285
- U**  
 uptake 152
- V**  
 value 28, 30, 39  
 in society 31–33  
 pragmatics of 34–36
- W**  
 Waze 93  
 WeChat 82, 207–233  
 Moments 210  
 WhatsApp 175–205  
 humor 179–181, 183–184,  
 192–200  
 status 176, 181–184  
 status types 188–191  
 world wide web 1, 146

Internet-mediated communication is pervasive nowadays, in an age in which many people shy away from physical settings and often rely, instead, on social media and messaging apps for their everyday communicative needs. Since pragmatics deals with communication in context and how more gets communicated than is said (or typed), applications of this linguistic perspective to internet communication, under the umbrella label of *internet pragmatics*, are not only welcome, but necessary.

The volume covers straightforward applications of pragmatic phenomena to internet interactions, as happens with speech acts and contextualization, and internet-specific kinds of communication such as the one taking place on WhatsApp, WeChat and Twitter. This collection also addresses the role of emoticons and emoji in typed-text dialogues and the importance of “physical place” in internet interactions (exhibiting an interplay of online-offline environments), as is the case in the role of place in locative media and in broader place-related communication, as in migration.

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