Constructing gender identities in public and private Facebook discourse

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Literature review

According to Zappavigna (2012) the development of Web 2.0 has been a milestone for linguistics along with the inventions of writing and voice recording. The development of Web 1.0 and especially of Web 2.0 gave birth to the Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) field which uses Discourse Analysis tools in order to describe online communication.

CMC researchers are mostly interested in issues such as social bonding, ideology, intertextuality, identity performance, online discourse and the relation between context and social media discourse. (Thurlow & Mroczek 2011, Jones, Chik & Hafner 2015, Seargant & Tagg 2014).

However, research is almost exclusively focused on social media public discourse, for instance posts and comments (Georgalou 2014 on Greek Facebook), while it's quite limited regarding private conversations (Meredith 2014) even though Facebook's Messenger is really popular among internet users. Messenger works like a regular chat room except the fact that participants usually are friends with each other on Facebook. In this way two parallel contexts, a public and a private, are generated in a single social medium by the same, generally, participants.

This dissertation aims to examine how Facebook users construct gender identities on public and private discourse, in order to study the emerging differences regarding identity construction as well as their linguistic choices.

Data – Methodology

There will be two stages regarding data collection. During the first stage we will collect data from private conversations on Facebook, providing that all the participants, which can be more than two, will have given their permission. The conversations, that will be studied, will have been held before the beginning of the collection, in order to eliminate the observer effect. During the second stage we will collect excerpts from participants' public posts on their profiles as well as on some

Facebook's pages. Those pages will be chosen based on their popularity, considering Facebook's metrics, and their subject, as pages that deal with gender issues will be preferred.

Data analysis will be at first qualitative, followed by a quantitative one, after the data collection stages provide two corpora respectively. Those corpora will be compared in order to determine which elements occur frequently as well as collocations linked to gender issues.

Analysis

Identity construction is a verbal process through which we define ourselves and others. Identities are not static and they are not just reflected in speech but they are produced and reproduced dynamically and constantly through language (Georgakopoulou 1997) and are connected to social environment (Gee 2000). Our dissertation will study gender, sex and sexual orientation representations which are constructed and co-constructed by Facebook users, in order to answer the following questions.

- If and why users construct different identities on private and social sphere.
- How are they positioning themselves regarding their interlocutor's gender and gender representations that emerge in discourse. For instance how they construct gender identities in a friendly conversation, an argument or a dispute, when they want to approach someone or get distance. Thus we will study which context related situations are linked to gender related characteristics and vice versa. We will base our analysis on "positioning theory" (Harré & Langenhove, 1999; Moghaddam & Harré, 2010) that is the way people use words (and discourse of all types) to locate themselves and others ascribing rights, claiming them for ourselves and place duties on others.
- In which ways are multimodality features placed in discourse and how viral elements and memes are used to create gender identities.
- Finally, regarding lexicogrammatical choices, we will examine gender related neologisms such as "φεμιναζί" [fɛmɪnaˈzi], along with semantic change of existing terms such as "κάρχια" [ˈkaɾça] or "γύπας" [ˈjipas] and some new collocations such as "λαϊκό μαστόρι" [laiˈko mastˈoɾi] or "λαϊκό κοράσιο" [laiˈko koɾˈasio] that have been observed from an initial research.

Subsequently we will examine the degree to which these terms represent certain identities as well as the way in which Facebook users negotiate them.

Possible results

- One of the most important results of this research will be relevant to existing tendencies on gender and sexuality discourse.

- Possible differences between private and public discourse will indicate political correctness's impact since we will observe the identities that users represent only privately but not publicly.

- Gender's significance on argumentation will emerge, that is to what extent users construct gender identities for themselves and the others, in order to increase or decrease their argument's power.

- Finally, identities that will be linked to neologisms and possibly new collocations will be noted.

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