SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON EVERYDAY DIGITAL PRACTICES

Panel Introduction

The four presenters in this panel are linguists who share a common approach to the study of language combining discourse studies and ethnographic approaches to the analysis of people's experiences of online life. There are 4 distinct studies: an examination of academics' changing writing practices and likes and hates in their work and everyday lives; a study of new forms of meaning-making which protestors have drawn upon, including the use of hashtags online and offline; people's experience and positioning in relation to online surveillance as a social and discursive practice; and the discursive dynamics in parodies of online consumer reviews. Each paper demonstrates the value of detailed analysis of language to reveal more about how the online world works and to bring in users' perspectives. These are all research sites where there are relationships of unequal power, alongside tensions and disagreements. Themes cutting across all 4 papers include: the interweaving of online and offline practices; the making and breaking of rules; affect, emotion and evaluation; and the constructions of digital identities.

PANEL PAPER 1: *"WHAT ANNOYS YOU ABOUT TECHNOLOGY?" ACADEMICS' STANCE ON WRITING TECHNOLOGY*

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This paper concentrates on 3 themes concerning technology and academics' contemporary writing practices: Affect, the strong likes and hates which academics express about their digital lives; how everyday devices and practices get drawn upon in work contexts; and how academics cope with increasing demands placed upon their writing lives. It is part of a bigger project examining changes in academic knowledge production in the context of new technologies.

One strand of previous research on academic writing has focused on students learning to be academics. Another strand analyses linguistic aspects of academic texts such as

genres associated with particular disciplines, or the structure of academic articles. But there is little work on academics' actual practices. We approach academic writing as a workplace practice and ask "what do professional academics do in academic writing work?" The research is located in the literature on digital scholarship and accepts that all aspects of academic life are transformed in the digital world (Weller 2011). We adopt a social practice view of language and literacy which is informed by literacy studies and linguistic ethnography. This assumes that practices differ across contexts and are always situated. (See Barton, D. & C. Lee, 2013, for more on this approach). We aim to make sense of individual people's lives. Analysis then consists of weaving common themes across individual cases. The study examines academics' writing practices across 3 universities in England and in 3 disciplines, History, Marketing and Mathematics. The project is interested in all types of writing, not just articles and books, and identifies writing as knowledge creation in teaching, impact work and writing for public audiences. This paper draws primarily on repeated interviews with focal academics in each of the 3 disciplines.

The work is consciously multimethod. It includes innovative research methods, online and offline. This paper draws on data from the first phase of the project, including techno-biographic interviews, 'walk around' interviews and 'day in the life' interviews. Being academics, we are all participating in these changes. The study draws upon auto-ethnographies of our own activities as members of the research team.

Technological change needs to be discussed in the context of other social changes. This paper first identifies broad influences on higher education workplaces in England. There are transformations in relationships with students, including: Massification, ie a greater proportion of young people are going to university; Consumerisation, whereby students paying for courses; and Internationalisation, where many postgraduate programmes are primarily overseas students and a UK university may have more students abroad than in their UK campus. In addition there are transformations in managerial practices, where funding mechanisms, league tables and research excellence frameworks shape priorities.

One very revealing question in our interviews was **"*What annoys you about technology at work?"*** Academics were keen to tell us, often at length and passionately, about their likes and hates. They loved or hated Twitter. They were annoyed with others' usage of phones or tablets. They loved their smart phone and felt anxious if it wasn't in sight.

In fact this question about affect was a good way to engage people and it proved very revealing about changes in people's practices. We analysed affect as part of the concept of stance-taking, as used in sociolinguistics and discourse studies. Stance-taking is broadly defined as taking up a position with respect to the form or the content of one's utterance (Jaffe, 2009, p.3). There are different kinds of stance: Affective stance is the stance-taker's feelings, for example, 'I like...'. Stance is frequently implicit and inferred from the utterance and surrounding context. We examined affect as expressed in the interviews, identifying it firstly by reading the transcripts and coding them for affect and secondly by searching the whole data set for examples of affect terms such as 'like', 'love', 'enjoy'. Often interviewees expressed a positive stance towards their overall jobs or specific aspects such as teaching or doing research.

However, not all affect is positive. We also searched for terms such as 'dislike' and 'hate', as in 'I hate Skype… it's a simplistic thing, the dislocation between eye contact.' Such examples of affect enabled us to see other issues and to explore our central question of how digital communications technologies are shaping academics writing practices. Often affect was expressed towards devices and platforms, such as iPhones, Skype, Twitter, PowerPoints. They mixed in work examples and everyday likes and hates. There was great individual variation and each person seemed to have a personal profile of what devices and platforms they utilized. Through these, we see individual routes to common ends of arranging meetings, or providing student feedback.

The paper explores two examples of digital writing practices. Firstly, emailing, which was the most common practice referred to. People have email on every device, mentioned it in passing when discussing other topics and they wanted to talk about it. It encapsulates most aspects of being an academic. Everyone is struggling to keep up with it, and they are doing this in many different ways. The most common expression of negative affect was the expectation that they would be 'Always-on'. The second example is PowerPoint where distinct individual uses were most apparent. People usually saw it as the default presentation software. They used it in different ways for different purposes, especially distinguishing conference papers from giving lectures.

In terms of adopting new practices, people might not take up changes to familiar software like Word if they have existing ways which work for them. The stimulus for changing practices was often collaborating with colleagues over shared teaching or joint conference papers. Also people often referred to improved collaborations as a result of utilizing digital technologies, especially at a distance across countries. This improved collaboration was something people liked, and was reported as a positive aspect of speeding up.

The paper turns to general issues around how digital communications technologies are shaping academics' writing practices. Having identified new tools and resources available in the past decade, we explore how everyday devices and practices get drawn upon in work contexts. The boundaries between work life and everyday life are being eroded. Academics in many disciplines have a long tradition of working in their own homes where they pay for the furniture, heating and coffee, now they also pay for and use their own computers, printers, phones, software, apps and internet connection for work. This can involve new online identities for social media and expectations that they blog or tweet as part of their job.

Finally, the paper discusses how general tensions of new technologies play out in academic life. We see here that academics seem to be getting busier: they are having more demands placed upon them; they are carrying out a wider variety of writing tasks; and boundaries between work and not-work are collapsing. Everything is speeded up and they have less control over their lives. We explore this conflicted stance. In some ways academic freedom is enhanced, but at the same time technologies enable greater managerial control.

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PANEL PAPER 2: HASHTAG POLITICS AND AFFECTIVE PUBLICS: PERFORMATIVITY AND PERFORMANCE OF EMOTIONS ON INSTAGRAM

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Digital media have provided ample opportunities for ordinary people to express their opinions and attitudes, or stance, towards social events. This paper focuses on one aspect of attitudes, *affect*, the displays and representations of emotions through *hashtags* in social media. More specifically, it investigates affective hashtags about the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong from three language-based perspectives: (i) language choice, the linguistic codes used to create hashtags, (ii) linguistic performativity, what gets done by posting hashtags, and (iii) linguistic performance, hashtags as a resource for self-positioning and claims of identities. Understanding affective hashtags in terms of linguistic performativity and performance sheds light on the interplay between people's emotional experiences in the 'offline world' and their online participation.

Tagging is a social practice in that it is embedded in people's everyday online lives (Barton, 2015). People have been increasingly involved in creating and using *hashtags* (user-defined keywords prefixed by the # symbol) alongside their uploaded contents on various social media. Existing research on Twitter has identified some common functions of hashtags such as community building, news reporting, and self-branding (Small, 2011; Page, 2012). Social tagging also plays an important role in organizing and planning political events and movements. For example, Twitter and Facebook enabled student protestors to be engaged in the #unibrennt protest in Vienna in 2009 (Maireder and Schwarzeneger, 2012). One of the reasons why hashtags have been taken up widely in political movements is that they connect people easily – hashtags are hyperlinked and searchable, thus giving rise to "ambient affiliation" (Zappavigna, 2015). Political events represented in social media are also charged with intense emotions. Papacharissi (2014) found that posts related to #egypt politics on Twitter presented "affective news", with a blend of facts, opinions, and emotions.

Expressions of affect and emotions have been researched extensively in linguistics. In pragmatics, emotions are performed through 'expressive' speech acts, i.e. performative utterances that express feelings and emotions (Searle, 1976). Speech act theory has also been applied in studies of digital discourse such as Dresner and Herring (2010) on emoticons. In this paper, I also understand hashtags as utterances that 'do' emotions.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, affect, or stance in general, is socially constructed (Jaffe, 2009). That is, in addition to expressing emotions, affective utterances also serve as resources for self-positioning and performing identities.

Language-based research on hashtags has emerged only recently. Emotions can be explicitly marked in discourse. In their study of affective stance markers of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign on Twitter and Facebook, Chiluwa and Ifukor (2015) have identified extensive use of emotional language representing negative moods and feelings towards "persons, groups, and governments". Within the limited literature on the language of hashtags, much emphasis has been placed on Twitter and hashtags other than English have been under-explored. To extend this body of work, part of this paper is devoted to the interplay between multilingual resources and affect. This paper examines affective Instagram hashtags about the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong by addressing three questions:

(i) What linguistic resources are deployed to express affect in hashtags about the Umbrella Movement?

(ii) In what ways are hashtags *performative* acts of affect?

(iii) In what ways are affective hashtags *performances* of identities?

Methodologically, the study reported here took an event-based approach to data collection. That is, rather than randomly collecting hashtags on Instagram, data were collected around a particular event – the 2014 "Umbrella Movement" in Hong Kong. The Movement was driven by a series of pro-democracy campaigns and protests where supporters demanded 'real' universal suffrage in Hong Kong. Over 9,000 Instagram hashtags from 700 posts with the Chinese hashtag #雨傘運動 (umbrella movement) were retrieved between September and December, 2014, the key period of the Umbrella Movement. This was then followed by online interviews with selected Instagram users. The study adopts a mixed methods approach through three stages of data analysis:

(i)   Understanding hashtags as speech acts, the hashtags were first classified according to their pragmatic functions, adopting Papacharissi's (2014) broad categories of *facts*, *opinions*, and *emotions*. Those explicitly expressing emotions (e.g. #ilovehk, #hate) were further analyzed into different types of affect, using Zappavigna's (2012) classification of 'dis/inclination', 'un/happiness', 'in/security', and 'dis/satisfaction'.

(ii)   The affective hashtags identified in (i) were categorized by code choice (e.g. Cantonese, standard Chinese, English, mixed code). Elsewhere, I already reported that although many of the hashtags were written in English, across the 700 posts, English hashtags were used alongside Cantonese, a variety of Chinese (Lee and Chau, 2015). In this paper, I present a more in-depth analysis of the correlation between language choice and displays of affect.

(iii)   In addition to understanding the linguistic marking of affect in the hashtags, this paper looks into how affective hashtags perform identities. This is discussed in light of interview data. In the interviews, the Instagram users discussed language choice of hashtags as well as their feelings about the use of hashtags during the Movement.

Overall, the present study rethinks the relations between language and emotion, between language and social actions, and more importantly, between the online and the offline. A number of traditional concepts and theories in linguistics are revisited, including the realization of affect, performatives and performances. If speech acts are about 'doing things by saying something', hashtagging allows people to 'do emotions by posting'. These emotions include expressing (dis)satisfaction and (un)happiness towards persons, events, and governments. My study also highlights hashtags the perform affect *indirectly*. For example, #prayforhk is not an expressive speech act by traditional definition. However, it is an indirect speech act that expresses the writer's feeling through an imperative utterance.

On Instagram, acts of emotions are performed through *intertextual* and *multimodal* ties between the image, the hashtags, and texts from outside Instagram. In my dataset, a large proportion of the Instagram posts are actually photos of texts from the protest sites. These include protest signs and slogans, and lyrics form Cantonese pop songs that trigger shared emotions.

Finally, the paper argues that multilingual hashtags are a powerful linguistic resource for *authentication* of identities. Here, authentication is understood as a process of people claiming authenticity, or 'realness', which can be realized discursively through semiotic resources including language and images. The use of Cantonese hashtags alongside English can be understood as Instagrammers strategically displaying the linguistic resources of Hong Kong people, thus claiming their 'real Hongkonger' identities.

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PANEL PAPER 3 LINGUISTICS AND THE STUDY OF ONLINE SURVEILLANCE

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Among the most conspicuous consequences of the rise of digital technologies is how they have facilitated new forms of *surveillance*. Internet companies regularly collect large amounts of information from users of online social networking sites, search engines, and mobile apps for marketing purposes. At the same time, workplaces and educational institutions regularly monitor the online behavior of employees and students. And law enforcement agencies are increasingly using digital tools to profile and target 'suspicious' citizens. Digital surveillance, however, is not limited to powerful organizations and institutions. Most of the everyday social practices people engage in online involve sharing information about themselves and gathering information about others, and this 'peer-to-peer' surveillance (Andrejevic, 2005) has become an integral part of how we socialize, build careers, conduct romantic relationships and participate in politics and other aspects of public life.

Most academic work on digital surveillance has been carried out by sociologists, anthropologists, legal scholars, media scholars, systems scientists, and scholars working in the burgeoning interdisciplinary field of 'surveillance studies'. Although linguists have a long involvement in supporting surveillance activities through work in areas such as cryptography, natural language processing, and language training for intelligence personnel, there has been surprisingly little work on surveillance as a social

and discursive practice from a linguistic perspective. This is surprising because linguistics, especially the work of interactional sociolinguists, conversation analysts, mediated discourse analysts and critical discourse analysts, has much to contribute to our understanding of how digital surveillance takes place, the strategies people use to monitor others or to evade monitoring, the discursive processes through which people are made into 'willing objects' of surveillance, and the way surveillance is talked about and justified in public discourse.

This paper argues that at the very heart of current debates about digital surveillance and privacy are *linguistic* issues. These are issues about how people manage identities and activities in social interaction with language, issues about how they discursively negotiate participation roles in discourse, and even more fundamental questions about what constitutes a 'text', and what it means to read, write, speak and listen. Drawing on concepts from mediated discourse analysis (Norris & Jones, 2005, Scollon 2001), interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982), and new literacy studies (Barton, 2006; Gee, 2011, 2014), I will describe how practices of surveillance are mediated not just through technological tools, but also through *discursive* resources. These resources help to shape the 'participation formats' (who can see/hear whom) within which people interact, and also determine the ways information gets 'entextualized' (Jones, 2009) (encoded, stored, transmitted, analyzed and recontextualized). I will also describe how digital surveillance is interactionally accomplished, and show how texts and online interactions are designed to compel people to reveal as much information as possible. Surveillance uses strategies of 'framing' (Goffman, 1974) and 'positioning' (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999), and the paper shows how that information is processed in ways that affect the kinds of discourse and interactions that are subsequently made available to people. Finally, I will explore digital surveillance as a form of 'literacy', arguing that being able to successfully manage online privacy requires more than just technological knowledge. It requires being able to read and write in particular kinds of ways, to pragmatically manage particular kinds of interactions, and to construct (or avoid constructing) particular kinds of social identities.

The data for the discussion come from a year long ethnographic study involving university students from Britain, China and Hong Kong, the aim of which was to understand the experience of digital surveillance from the perspective of users of technologies, the linguistic strategies that internet companies use to facilitate surveillance, and the strategies users develop to cope with it.

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PANEL PAPER 4: FOLLOWING AND BREAKING THE RULES: ONLINE REVIEWS AND THEIR PARODIES

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Over the past 15 years, online consumer reviews have emerged as a widespread contemporary vernacular literacy practice (Barton & Lee, 2013). Websites that feature user-generated reviews, such as *Amazon*, *TripAdvisor*, *Yelp*, and others, enable consumers to give voice to their experiences in very public way, via a mass-distributed platform. Although professionally-written consumer product reviews have been available via mass media outlets for decades, this more recent ability for any consumer to publicly share his/her experiences and reactions to a product or service – and to reach an interested, and possibly global, audience in the process – is a digital practice for which there is no precise analog precedent. Typically, user-generated reviews are non-specialist reviews, and this fact is considered by some to contribute to the democratization of expertise brought about by the internet (Mellet, Beauvisge, Beuscart & Trespeuch, 2014). Online reviews can certainly be considered a form of consumer empowerment from the point of view of individuals writing reviews. In addition, online reviews also have the potential to empower the consumers who read them – in the sense that consumers no longer have to rely on a handful of experts for information about which restaurants are worth visiting, or which products represent the best available quality. Instead, internet users now have access to a multitude of different perspectives about a wider number of products and services than was ever previously possible.

Yet online reviews invite more complex readings as well – readings that extend beyond optimistic notions of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), distributed expertise, and democratization of information. News reports from the mass media typically emphasize the nefarious side of online reviews, as they offer stories of "rule breakers" – for instance, the companies and individuals who engage in opinion fraud, by writing fake reviews for profit, and who work out various ways to "game the system" of online reviews. More recently, reports in the media have also begun to show what happens when business owners respond publicly to reviews, as they engage in processes of "service recovery" and "online reputation management." But these reports, too, tend to focus on the most sensationalistic of accounts – selecting remarkable instances in which business owners and consumers trade increasingly offensive insults in the review spaces on *Facebook*, or *Yelp*. Where "rule breaking" and online reviews are concerned, the topics covered by the media typically raise issues of authenticity, anonymity, and (in)civility: issues which underlie many popular public discourses about the role of technologies in contemporary life. To these topics, I contribute a third line of discussion – by considering how the review site can also serve as a space for creative contestation and playful resistance. I do this by illustrating various ways in which users re-imagine and re-purpose the review space, as a site for entertainment and activism. I focus specifically on parody reviews found on *Amazon*, and other review sites.

In earlier work, I have described the online review as a genre. In Vasquez (2014), I considered 1,000 reviews from five different websites, and I identified a set of core discourse practices that appear across all sites, which include evaluation, identity claims, and narrativity. Evaluation is central to the genre of reviews, and individual authors employ a wide and diverse range of linguistic resources to describe and evaluate the product or service they are writing about. Reviewers also disclose information about themselves within their review texts, not only to provide readers with a sense of credibility but also to provide readers additional relevant context for interpreting their comments. Finally, on all sites, reviewers "story" their experiences in different ways. In other words, many reviewers do not simply provide a descriptive list of product features, but they also present a temporally-sequenced, first-person narrative account of their relationship with a product, or about their service experience. I illustrate each these practices from a sample of user-generated online reviews, and show what goes into making this genre "recognizable."

I then extend research on the topic by focusing on a different, yet related, genre: parodies of user-generated reviews. Over the past decade, *Amazon* users have contributed thousands of parodies of reviews written about actual consumer products (Skalicky & Crossley, 2015: Ray, 2016). By intertextually drawing on, and creatively re-appropriating, recognizable features of bona fide reviews, authors of review parodies demonstrate their knowledge of the very genre they are imitating. Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of online reviews appropriated by authors of parody texts is the overarching structure of the narrative of personal experience. These parodies take the form of "mock narratives," as authors enlist a range of discursive resources to perform particular identities and to create imagined stories. Although bona fide *Amazon* product reviews often include narrative elements, they tend to focus at least somewhat on the description and evaluation of the given product as well. In contrast, parody reviews are almost always presented as fully-formed personal narratives – even when they are

crafted as concise "small stories," composed of only a few sentences. What further marks these online narratives as obvious parodies is the use of hyperbole, exaggeration, and transgressive humor centering on taboo subjects. Similar to authors of legitimate reviews, authors of parodies provide personal information about their "identities." My analysis of parody reviews demonstrates how performed self-disclosure in parodies functions to construct fictional personae, which often rely on categories, or "types," of people who rarely appear in legitimate reviews. Such performed self-presentations also help to set the stage for the highly improbable narrative events that follow.

I draw attention to the ways in which parody reviews appear to mock, challenge, and critique specific products, product marketing efforts, and consumer practices. I argue that although many of these playful texts appear to be subverting the primary consumerist goal- orientation of the review site, their meanings ultimately remain ambivalent. Following Hutcheon (2000), I highlight the central paradox of parody: "its transgression is always authorized. In imitating, even with a critical difference, it always reinforces" (p. 26). I further explore how other users react to parodies in terms of helpfulness votes, as well as in both appreciative responses and "policing behaviors" that are found on the site's "Comments" section. In doing so, I highlight users' various understandings of the tacit "rules" underlying what kinds of content is appropriate for the review space, and what kind of content is not appropriate.

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