

**TO ONLINE OR
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THAT IS
CERTAINLY
THE QUESTION**

**IDEOLOGIES
ABOUT LANGUAGE
AND DIGITAL MEDIA**

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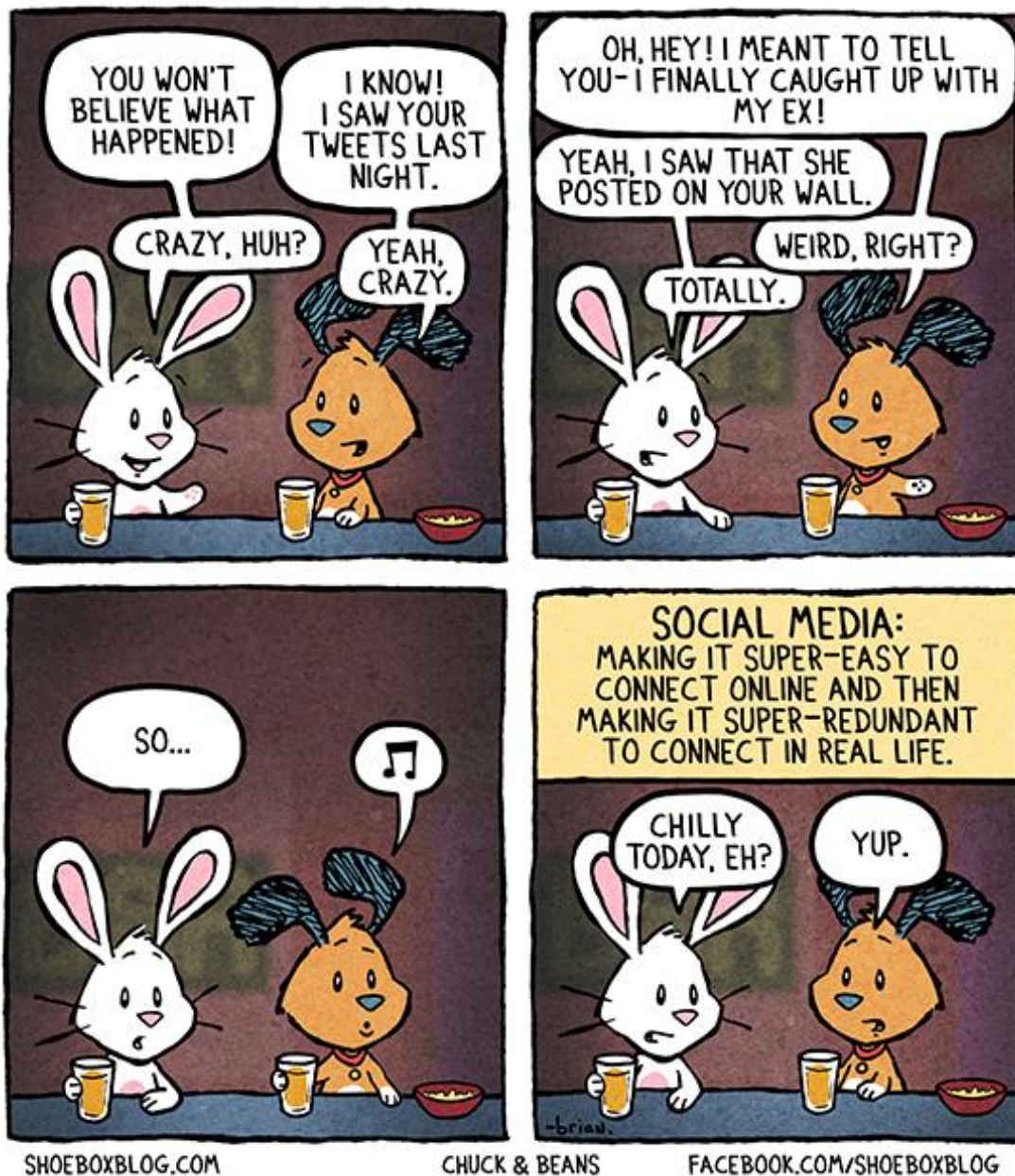
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IDEOLOGIES ABOUT LANGUAGE AND DIGITAL MEDIA**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The advent of so-called social technologies has fueled a heated debate about the way people use these technologies in their daily lives. Most specifically, what has become the locus of the discussion seems to be the adequacy and appropriateness of new technological artefacts, typically computers and mobile phones, in navigating and mediating our social world, and, by extension, the narrative that treats our online communicative practices as

more significant than something that simply opposes our offline communicative practices.

Miller points out the importance of acknowledging that the internet, computers and mobile technologies are more than just technologies, "...they are a set of social relations that incorporate the use of technologies with various results..." (2020: 3). Therefore, it is not so much the technical properties of these gadgets (or any other social media platform for that matter) as their social affordances, i.e. the way users exploit the possibilities for communication that the technology offers, that come to be foregrounded in the study of new media. So for example, we may argue that synchronicity, as a contextual feature of digitally-mediated communication, can be conceptualised not only in terms of the inherent technological properties offered by a particular medium as allowing communication to be more or less synchronous but also, and perhaps more importantly in the study of media ideologies, in terms of how users perceive synchronicity as fulfilling their communicative needs and expectations. That is, users may be said to assign different degrees of synchronicity to different types of communicative situations in terms of how fast they expect their addressees to respond to their messages, regardless of the medium they are using. Thus, contemporary research on new technologies has generally taken a social constructivist perspective (Stabile and Ershler 2015; Mattheaman 2011; Lister et al. 2003; Hutchby 2001; MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999; Bolter 1997; Bijker, et. al. 1987, among others) that accounts for the way users exploit the technological affordances available with a view to constructing social meaning.

So agency in the use of social technologies or new media is partly shaped by how users perceive and evaluate the possibilities for communication on offer. This evaluation is most often verbalised in different communicative settings, from newspapers, to television, to casual and mundane conversations among friends, family, acquaintances, co-workers, etc. Thus, the way new media get talked about not only manifests users' ideologies but also shapes how they use them.

New media, like language, have long been victims of moral panics created not least by the traditional media and other influential actors in the community to spread the fear that some evil is threatening the well-being of society. In the case of new media, these moral panics are mostly about the dehumanisation of communication and interaction, and in the case of language they are about the degrading of linguistic standards that, as a result, impoverish communication. So both new media and language are constantly being scrutinised by society in terms of how well, or how badly, they fulfil their roles as crucial components of human communication.

Therefore, the way people think about new media and about language merits attention since, as Gershon observes, “Just as people’s ideas about language and how language functions shape the ways they speak, people’s ideas about different communicative media and how different media function shape the way they use these media” (2010: 8).

Now, the way people think about the use of language over digital media opens a new chapter in the study of modern communication that is at the interface between media and language ideologies. On the one hand, new communication technologies are accompanied by exacerbated public reactions regarding their impact on the way people organise their lives, their relationships and their human experiences as a whole. On the other, these reactions also involve concerns about the way language is affected by the use of technology, and so technology becomes the focus of public debates about declining standards of language use. These debates about both technology and language are typically polarised by judgements of their being either all good or all bad.

In this work, we look at how language and media ideologies are manifested through the evaluations that a group of students make of the uses to which certain digital channels of communication are put in the process of mediating interpersonal relationships. By media ideologies we are not referring to people’s beliefs about the material artefacts through which communication

is established in contemporary society, but to their beliefs about the online platforms or environments that constitute the channels of communication (for example, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.). By language ideologies we refer to the feelings and conceptions that speakers have about language structure and use, and that index relations between speakers and particular cultural contexts of communication.

Thus, media ideologies can arguably be said to be intertwined with language ideologies in two ways: a) by the linguistic and discourse resources employed in the evaluations made by the students of what they perceive as appropriate or inappropriate uses of certain digital media in relation to different social domains of use or social tasks performed, and b) by the evaluative metalinguistic comments that the participants make of how they perceive that language is being used in digitally-mediated communication.

Against this background, in this study we explore the different ideologies that emerge in the students' responses and that seem to (dis)align with public discourses about new media and about language that circulate in contemporary society today. Specifically, we look at how a group of Argentinian university undergraduates evaluate the use of language over new media, and the use of new media as resources in the process of mediating their interpersonal relationships. Thus, this work examines commentary about digital media and language use over new media. As such, we are less concerned with the way the participants actually use digital media and language and more with the ways digitally mediated practices are perceived and talked about.

We are aware that the term new media can sometimes be misleading as what is new about media today may be old tomorrow, and so as technology continues to advance, the definition of new media continually changes. However, in this work, we take new media to mean any form of communication that is delivered digitally and, therefore, we use the terms new media and digital media interchangeably.

This work is organised as follows: this introduction is followed by section two that presents an overview of the notions of language and media ideologies. This is followed by section three that describes the data and methodology employed in the study. Section four presents the analysis of the ideologies that emerged from the comments made by the students in their answers to a series of questions administered in the form of personal interviews. Section 5 presents the analysis of the ideologies that emerged from the comments made by the participants in three focus groups. Finally, the last section provides some concluding remarks.

2. LANGUAGE AND NEW MEDIA IDEOLOGIES

The ideas and beliefs that speakers hold about language are generally subject to their shifting evaluative attitudes towards linguistic forms and discursive practices. These beliefs are intrinsically linked to the larger social and cultural systems of which speakers are part. Thus, in the words of Kroskrity (2010: 195), “language ideologies represent the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group.”

In their work on Standard English, Milroy and Milroy (1985) explore the standard language ideology in Britain and the United States focusing on the relation that this has to large-scale social and political institutions. The authors argue that speakers in both nations develop their language ideologies on the basis of the different socio-cultural and political structures that make up their societies or communities. These ideologies, the authors explain, are manifested through the evaluations that speakers make of language forms and language varieties despite the fact that formal structures of language are not appropriate phenomena for value-judgements.

Ideologies about language in digital communication seem to be deeply rooted in rather apocalyptic views that permeate through society and that explicitly or implicitly state that the use of or the exposure to “textese” (Crystal 2006), or online writing, may have a detrimental effect on standard language varieties, and on communication more generally.

Nevertheless, these views have been refuted by a substantial number of studies in this area. For example, in the field of education, O’Connor (2005) stresses the importance that online writing has in raising the students’ awareness of the appropriateness of the use of different linguistic varieties depending on the communicative context. Similarly, Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya (2015) explore language ideologies and moral panics in digital communication by looking at the discourse features and communicative

practices in the use of “textese” in WhatsApp across two generations. The authors argue that, although moral panics that spread the idea that online writing triggers a failure in young people's ability to communicate exist, there is not enough academic evidence to suggest that textese obstructs young people's ability to comply with the standards of any language. They conclude that textese is “a different variety of any linguistic standard, which users consciously adopt or not according to the communicative context and its circumstances”.

In our interactions with the students, we observe that different ideologies about good language and bad language emerge in the context of digitally-mediated forms of communication. Several authors (Parini and Giammatteo 2017; Jones, Chik and Hafner 2015; Seargeant and Tagg 2014; Thurlow and Mroczek 2011, among others) have addressed the language and communication issues that emerge in relation to social media and have explored, from different perspectives, how users appropriate and exploit technology to fulfil their diverse social needs in a digital world. In our study, the students’ evaluations of how people use new media in managing their personal relations reveal interesting insights into how these participants conceptualise the use of a particular medium to achieve a particular social function, and into how they assess language use in technology-mediated, non-physicalised communicative environments. Their comments or responses then lie at the heart of the interface between their language ideologies and their digital media ideologies.

Media ideologies is defined by Iliana Gershon as a “set of beliefs about communicative technologies with which users and designers explain perceived media structure and meaning” (2010a: 3). So people's ideas or ideologies about a particular medium can add meaning to the message being conveyed. In this sense, the medium becomes part of what is being implicitly communicated, it becomes a metamessage (Bateson 1972, Tannen 2013).

Media ideologies about one medium are always influenced by media

ideologies about other media. Bolter and Grusin (1999: 28) use the term “remediation” to describe the ways that people interlink media. They argue that people define every technology in terms of the other communicative technologies available to them.

So the suitability of the use of the medium is not determined by its inherent properties but is rather dependent on people’s media ideologies. These ideologies are developed within what Gershon (2010a) calls *idioms of practice*, a term she uses to define the way people figure out together how to make use of different media and reach some kind of consensus as to how socially appropriate the use of a particular medium is in a given context of communication. This is done, according to Gershon, by asking for advice and sharing stories with each other. So people come to use different technologies in much the same way as they use different dialects or idioms, and so these idioms of practice can be said to emerge out of collective discussions and shared practices within families, groups of friends, coworkers, etc.

Ideologies about digital media, as Gershon (2010b) explains, are multiple, strategic, and are always in a state of flux as users try to cope with the complexities surrounding the sheer number of technological options at their disposal. This has led scholars like Barker 2008; Schieffelin 2000; Spitulnik 1998, among others, to ethnographically examine how people understand the ways the medium shapes the message in a particular communicative activity. Other scholars (Androutsopoulos 2013; Oksman and Turtiainen 2004; Anderson 2003; Drotner 2000, among others) have looked at young people's mobile communication culture more generally in order to explore the meanings that they attribute to technology-mediated communication in the light of the interrelatedness of different media.

In this work, we particularly look at Facebook and WhatsApp as they are the two of the most frequent types of digital media that the students at the time of the interviews and participants at the time of the focus groups claimed to

use on a daily basis. Facebook belongs to the most common type of social networking site which Eisenlauer (2013: 21) defines as “a social software-based website whose primary aim is establishing and maintaining online communities by asking participants to present themselves and to connect and communicate with other participants.” WhatsApp, as Ahd and Ariff Lim (2014) explain, is a mobile instant messaging application that offers real-time communication including the ease of sending and receiving information and media content like images, audio and videos. So these are two different platforms that offer different communication affordances in terms of the level of synchronicity with which communication is processed, with Facebook being more likely to be asynchronous and WhatsApp more likely to be synchronous. Also, as they offer different types of digital environments in which communication takes place, they may differ in how users perceive them as resources to achieve their communicative needs and negotiate their interpersonal relationships. It is this aspect that becomes particularly relevant to our investigation as the perceptions that the students have about the use of Facebook and WhatsApp can be said to constitute manifestations of their ideologies.

A number of studies have investigated people’s perceptions and beliefs – i.e. their ideologies – about the use of Facebook and WhatsApp in different communicative situations. For example, in their study of the comparison between WhatsApp and traditional messaging services, Church and de Oliveira (2013) report on the advantages and disadvantages of using one medium over the other as mentioned by the participants interviewed in their study in Spain, and conclude that most of the participants express a preference for the use of WhatsApp for chatting and planning social activities and less for sharing personal news. Personal news is preferably shared through traditional messaging services, which the participants evaluate as being more private and more formal than WhatsApp. Similar findings were seen in a study that explored WhatsApp use and its motivational factors among university students in Riyadh (Soliman and

Salem 2014). Looking at the domestication of WhatsApp among a group of undergraduates at the University of Brunei, Ahad and Lim (2014) conclude that the students surveyed in their study positively evaluate WhatsApp as the preferred online medium of communication as it is easy to use and helps strengthen bonds with family and friends.

Sadowski et al. (2017) investigate the perceptions of networking sites among a group of students at the Federation University in Australia and conclude that the majority of the participants claim to use Facebook as their preferred social networking site, that the main purpose of their use of Facebook is to connect with friends and that they perceive this platform as a positive tool for facilitating peer-to-peer student connectedness. Also, in a study of the role of Facebook in maintaining social relationships, Ellison et al. (2014) examine how users' behaviour on Facebook enables different forms of social capital. Through data collected from interviews with a group of non-academic staff at the Midwestern University in the United States, the authors are able to explore the dynamics of the networking site by analysing how the participants evaluate their different forms of social engagement on the site in the process of cultivating interpersonal relationships. They conclude that the true benefits of Facebook, for the participants, is not just the technical connection that it makes possible but the opportunities it offers to create an environment in which meaningful communicative exchanges can occur.

The media and language ideologies embraced by the participants in our study are manifested through their evaluations of the use of Facebook and WhatsApp, and their evaluations of language as it is used in WhatsApp messages. Following Du Bois's work on the interrelationship between evaluation, positioning and alignment (Du Bois 2007) and Jaffe's classification of stance as affective – expressed through emotions and feelings about a stance object – and epistemic – as referring to the claiming of knowledge or belief towards a stance object – (Jaffe 2009), we argue that these evaluations can be said to constitute stancetaking acts through which the participants seem to position themselves vis-a-vis people's behaviour as

users of both technology and language in certain communicative situations. Moreover, the interpersonal dimension of evaluation is also foregrounded in its recognition as a salient form of stancetaking. In our study, this interpersonal aspect of stancetaking is manifested through the overt evaluations that the participants make of how people behave when using Facebook and WhatsApp to fulfil their communicative needs. These evaluations are construed by the participants' positioning, in the form of alignment or disalignment with respect to circulating public discourses in society about language and digital media.

These public discourses are often constructed and disseminated by the media, including social media that, with their institutional and cultural investment, reproduce language-ideological depictions of digital discourse practices which exaggerate their distinctiveness and create moral panics. These moral panics are reinforced by disproportionately negative views of the impact of digital technology especially with regard to young people's linguistic and communicative practices (see Thurlow 2006).

From newspaper headlines such as *Emojis: the new enemy of language?* (Infobae, Argentina), *Using emojis makes other people think you are incompetent, research finds* (Telegraph, UK) to heated debates on YouTube proposing provocative titles such as *Texting is killing language*, to postings on blogs such as *How technology has corrupted language*, the panic about language endangerment seems to emerge as a discursive practice beyond traditional mass media.

The same seems to be observed for how interpersonal relations are seen in connection with the use of technology in creating and maintaining social ties. Again, moral panics are created and circulated by media scoops and by the general public on social media through the discursive construction of the evils of technology in mediating interpersonal relations. This can be seen in how online relationships are often depicted as being doomed to failure because they are enacted in a context that is usually blamed for favouring

and encouraging lack of commitment, anonymity and frivolity.

But although this is not necessarily always true, headlines like *How social media is killing relationships* (Business Insider), or *Social Media is making cheaters out of all of us* (The Sun Newspaper) that populate the media, and particularly social media, reinforce stereotypes that hide the complexities surrounding human relationships and blame new media and technology for ruining them. These sensational announcements most often constitute sweeping statements based on unsound lines of arguments that portray interpersonal relations conducted online as ephemeral, elusive and frivolous.

Thus, these circulating discursive practices constitute a backdrop against which people construct their ideas and beliefs about language in online communication, and about the role of technology in navigating the social world in contemporary society. In our study, the participants construct their own language and media ideologies by evaluating people's linguistic and social behaviour in relation to Facebook and WhatsApp, and by (dis)aligning with these circulating public discourses.

Ideologies are then shaped individually and collectively and people acquire, express and reproduce them largely by text and talk. Therefore, our study, which looks at language and new media ideologies in terms of how these get talked about, becomes relevant since by engaging in discussions about language and new media practices the participants define and reconstruct their ideological viewpoints. These viewpoints are played out against the background of the presumed voice of the masses that seems to filter through the participants' evaluations of people's linguistic and digital communication behaviour.

3. THE STUDY

In order to explore contemporary language and media ideologies among university students in Buenos Aires, we have resorted to two data collection instruments. This has allowed us to collect different kinds of data for our study over the course of three years. For this reason, we can present our work in two phases.

Phase 1 started in 2014, when we decided to conduct 50 interviews as a first step to approaching undergraduate students and finding out about their perceptions in relation to how interpersonal relations are managed and how language is used over new media. In this case, students answered a series of questions and their replies were recorded and later transcribed. Therefore, by gathering data in this way (i.e. by having interviewers limit themselves to asking a specific set of questions), we have always encountered individual voices expressing ideas that were never challenged by anybody else and that could only be said to (dis)align with circulating public discourses about digital communication. During this phase, the emphasis was placed on inquiring about online social interaction and interpersonal relationships, while language ideologies were explored in a less detailed manner.

Phase 2 began in 2017, when we invited other students to participate in 4 focus groups, in which similar questions —as well as new ones— were asked, and greater emphasis was placed on the exploration of language ideologies. The decision to conduct focus groups was taken after analysing the data obtained in Phase 1 and after considering that a different interactional context, such as the one provided by a debate or peer discussion, would offer richer data for analysis. In the context of a debate, certain ideas could be challenged by others and (dis)alignment could more easily (or explicitly) take place among the participants. In other words, using focus groups as a research instrument allowed us to explore instances of intersubjective positionings in more detail, taking into account how students collectively form and negotiate their opinions, how they may take sides,

support each other's views or express disagreement by direct and indirect means.

Even though the participants in this study represent the same demographic group in both phases (students of the same age attending the same university), it is important to take into account the temporal gap between the two phases when analysing the students' comments. Even a period as short as three years can imply changes in terms of the social and technological affordances that are made available to students. New social platforms may appear, quickly become popular or get replaced by others in a short time span, thus reconfiguring the interactional landscape and allowing for possible changes, however slight, in people's ideologies concerning language and new media (as well as in the actual ways in which language and new media are used). This explains, for instance, why some questions in Phase 2 were not present in Phase 1.

In general terms, our study has been guided by and structured around the following research questions: How do these university students conceptualise new media in the process of social mediation? How do they relate new media uses to particular social practices or activities? How do they evaluate new media and their users in different communicative situations? How do they evaluate technology-mediated language use when making metalinguistic comments that reflect their language ideologies in relation to their new media ideologies?

For the purpose of this work, we have translated the responses provided by the students from Spanish into English. The translations have been rendered as literal as possible so as to keep the functional meaning of language as expressed in the original language.

3.1. The interviews

The data for analysis for Phase 1 comes from personal interviews with undergraduate students at the University of Belgrano, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The data was collected by means of a questionnaire administered in the form of a semi-structured interview comprising twelve questions aimed at eliciting the participants' opinions and perspectives on different aspects of media use and social behaviour, as well as language use (see Figure 1 below). The questionnaire is divided into three parts: questions 1-2 are intended to elicit the type of medium that the participants say they most frequently use; questions 3-11 focus on how the participants evaluate the use of different media in different communicative situations; and question 12 centres the attention on the participants' evaluation of how language is used over new media, especially when communicating through WhatsApp messages.

In the interviews, participants were not asked to talk about their own personal experiences or behaviour over new media, but about people's social conduct and media use in general. We considered that this was important in order to avoid putting pressure on those who may feel intimidated by direct and personal questions and to help them express their views more openly without feeling that they are being judged by how (they say) they act.

All the interviews were carried out and recorded in Spanish in different communal spaces at the university, between the months of June and December 2014. The total recording time amounted to 195 minutes. The participants made up a sample of 50 undergraduate students (25 females and 25 males), from different courses and disciplines, between 18 and 22 years of age.

Questionnaire

How old are you? What do you study?

01) Which of these forms of virtual communication do you mostly use to communicate with friends? Why?

Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Whatsapp, phone calls, SMS messages

02) Which of these forms of virtual communication do you mostly use (or would prefer to use) to communicate with your boyfriend/girlfriend? Why?

Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Whatsapp, phone calls, SMS messages

03) Do you think that new media strengthen or damage social relationships? Why? In what ways or in which cases?

04) What do you think of the use of video calls through Skype or Facebook among friends? That is, using video calls instead of text messages or emails to communicate with friends. Why?

05) And what about the use of video calls among love partners? Why?

06) What do you think of someone who breaks up with their boyfriend/girlfriend through a text message or Whatsapp? Why?

07) If two people meet and become friends at a party, how would you expect them to start their first conversation after the party? Why?

Through a phone call, SMS message, an instant messaging app, Facebook

08) What do you think of someone who announces important news (e.g. pregnancy, a wedding, or the death of a loved one) to their friends through a text message or Whatsapp? Why?

09) What if they post this news on their Facebook wall or timeline? Why?

10) What do you think of someone who answers a phone call while they are hanging out and talking with their friends? Why?

11) And what about answering text messages while hanging out with friends? Why?

12) What do you think of the way people write text messages or WhatsApp messages? For example, what do you think of the use of abbreviations, emojis, and the repetition of letters and signs? Why?

Figure 1. Interview questions

In an attempt to reduce as much as possible the potential tension that may be associated with the context of a recorded interview and to create a more relaxed and informal atmosphere, the participants were approached during their coffee breaks, and the interviews were carried out by two students of the same age range, who were taking the translation course at the School of Languages and International Studies at the University of Belgrano and who were trained in the technique of conducting interviews for research purposes.

Once all the interviews were transcribed, five questions, from a total of twelve, were selected for analysis. Given the fact that, as it emerged from the answers to the first two questions, the participants claimed to favour the use of Facebook and WhatsApp over other social media, we decided to focus only on the questions that explore how the participants evaluate the use of these two platforms in managing their interpersonal relationships, and on the question that aims to elicit how they evaluate the use of language in WhatsApp texting. Therefore, in this first phase of the study, by new media we only refer to Facebook, more specifically the Facebook Wall or Timeline, and WhatsApp.

For the sake of clarity, the selected questions were grouped according to two domains: a) new media and language (question 12), and b) new media and interpersonal relations (question 3, 6, 8 and 9). These questions translate into English as follows:

Question 3: Do you think that new media strengthen or damage social relationships?

Question 6: What do you think of someone who breaks up with their boyfriend/girlfriend through a text message/WhatsApp?

Question 8: What do you think of someone who announces important news (e.g. pregnancy, a wedding, or the death of a loved

one) to their friends through a text message or WhatsApp?

Question 9: What if they post this news on their Facebook wall or timeline?

Question 12: What do you think of the way people write text messages or WhatsApp messages? For example, what do you think of the use of abbreviations, emojis, and the repetition of letters and signs?

So our analysis of metalinguistic discourse about new media and language use in new media focuses on the comments that the participants made as answers to the questions asked, which manifest different ideologies by means of the stances adopted by the participants.

3.1.1. New media and language

This section deals with the analysis of the participants' perceptions of the use of language in WhatsApp, which can be described as a social network that allows its users to communicate through instant messaging and, more recently, through other forms of multimedia communication as well.

When commenting on the way people write WhatsApp messages, the participants make a distinction between the use of emojis, on the one hand, and the use of language, on the other. As Figure 2 shows, an overwhelming majority of the participants evaluate emojis positively. The evaluation of language, on the other hand, seems to be divided between those who hold a positive view, those who hold a negative view and those who express a divided opinion.

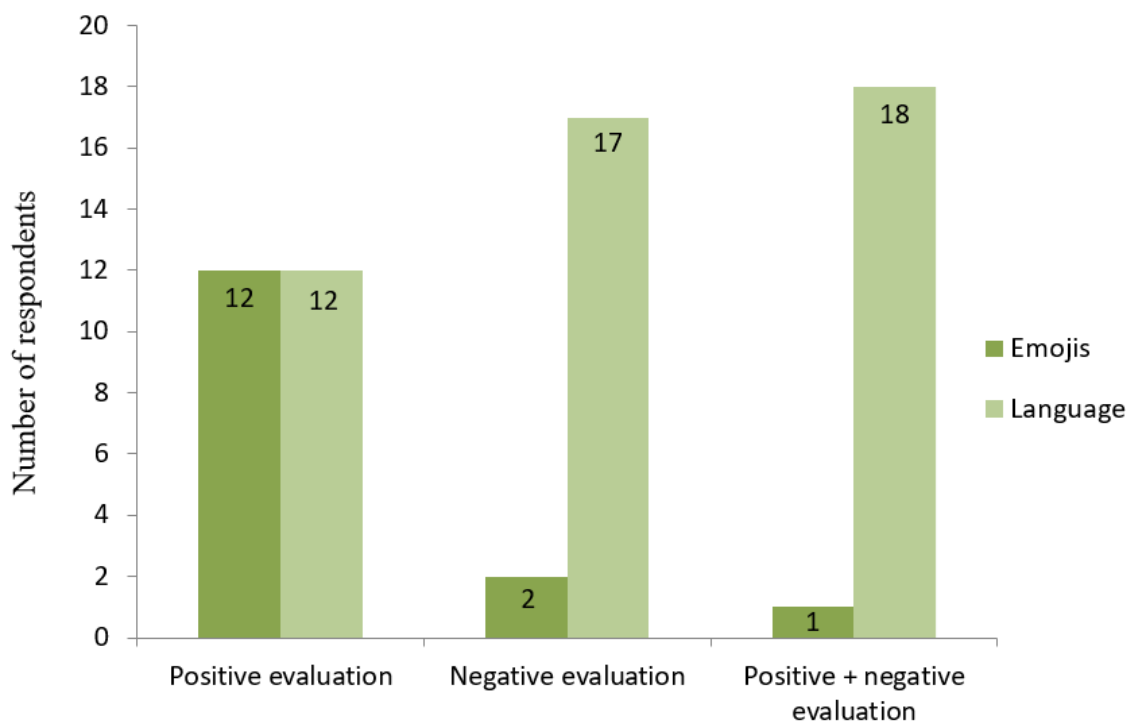


Figure 2. Evaluations of emojis and language

There seems to be a general consensus among the participants that emojis are useful as they complement their messages by providing expressivity, affection, fun, etc., as has also been reported in a number of studies (Markman and Oshima 2007; Dresner and Herring 2010; Yus 2014) that look at the context of use and the interpretation of emoticons or emojis. This positive evaluation of emojis, manifested by means of the use of adjectives and verb phrases that convey positive value judgments, can be observed in the following comments drawn from the responses in the interviews:

Comment 1:

“...the emojis thing is a way of adding emotion or fun to the communication...”

Comment 2:

“...emojis I believe are maybe a way of showing like the gestures...”

Comment 3:

“...emojis are quite useful...”

Comment 4:

“...it’s like it makes the conversation more entertaining, that is, emojis and that stuff, more fun, practical.”

As regards the way language is used in texting, there is a clear lack of consensus among the participants. As seen in the comments below, those who evaluate language positively centre their comments and opinions mostly on the acceptance of certain uses of language (repetition of letters and punctuation marks, abbreviated and truncated forms, etc.) as being conditioned by the affordances of the medium (for example, being fast).

Comment 5:

“It’s fine. It’s faster...”

Comment 6:

“It’s fine. Just because, abbreviations seem good to me because sometimes writing so much makes you lazy.”

Comment 7:

“...it seems to me that they are really an important thing (...) when you write with more [punctuation] marks it’s like you show your mood.”

Comment 8:

“...well, I don’t know. It seems to me that it is fine, I don’t know, it’s a faster way of writing. I don’t see so much harm in that.”

Comment 9:

“I don’t know, to write faster, to... In the case of a text message, to... To economise on the message, yes...”

In these comments, ease of communication seems to prevail over language form. Still, in (5), (6), and (7), participants categorically express a positive attitude to the use of orthographic resources and other language forms when texting. This positive evaluation is manifested through the employment of assertive phrases like *“It’s fine”*, *“It’s faster”*, *“Just because”*, and *“they are really an important thing”*. However, in (8) and (9), the participants show less assertiveness in their evaluations as they tend to hedge their contributions with the use of expressions like *“well”*, *“I don’t know”*, *“It seems to me”*, thus conveying the participants’ epistemic stance.

Negative evaluation is chiefly constructed around the underlying idea that language as it is used in new media is being degraded. In (10) below, the participant provides a reflection on how badly people (including himself) express themselves in writing, and in (11), the act of shortening words is described as a way of cannibalising language, although no mention is made of the influence that the conditions under which communication usually takes place in WhatsApp (i.e. being mostly synchronous with texts being produced on the fly) may have on language production. Some of the participants mention the negative influence of certain forms of digital writing on non-digital writing (13), while others seem to perceive language as an abstract decontextualised notion, an idealised homogeneous entity that can be assessed as being either correct or incorrect (12 and 13).

Comment 10:

“...we are writing worse and worse...”

Comment 11:

“Horrible. They shorten [words], language is being cannibalised.”

Comment 12:

“...there are many orthographic mistakes, there are many things badly written that... that are not good for me. Things have to be written the way they are. You cannot spell “que” using the letter “k”. You just can’t... Because things [should be] as they are, it is written like that, and that’s how it is.”

Comment 13:

“...for example, if you are in secondary school, there are many people who will then write a project for computer studies with the wrong vocabulary and that is actually harmful if when you go to university you have to use the right vocabulary.”

Expressions like “we are writing worse and worse” (10), “Horrible. They shorten [words], language is being cannibalised.” (11), “badly written” (12), “wrong vocabulary” (13), “harmful” (13) seem to articulate standard language ideologies that are manifested through the students’ affective stances and alignment with certain public discourses circulating in society about how language is being corrupted by new social technologies. This kind of moral panic about language in new media has been documented by Thurlow in his work on the metadiscursive construction of new media language (Thurlow 2006). For our participants, this view of technology as being evil or harmful, however, seems to be tempered by the fact that it makes communication faster and easier. So this appears to show a tension

between the need for the preservation of linguistic correctness, as expressed by some of the participants, and the need for rapidity in modern communication, as expressed by others.

3.1.2. New media and interpersonal relations

This section deals with the analysis of the participants' perceptions of how interpersonal relations are managed over new media. When asked about whether they thought that these new forms of communication strengthen or damage social relationships, the students showed no overwhelming consensus. As Figure 3 shows, out of the 50 participants, 22 expressed a divided opinion on the matter, 13 said that new media strengthen social relationships and 13 said that they damage them, while the remaining 2 provided answers that were too ambiguous to be categorised and were therefore excluded from the analysis.

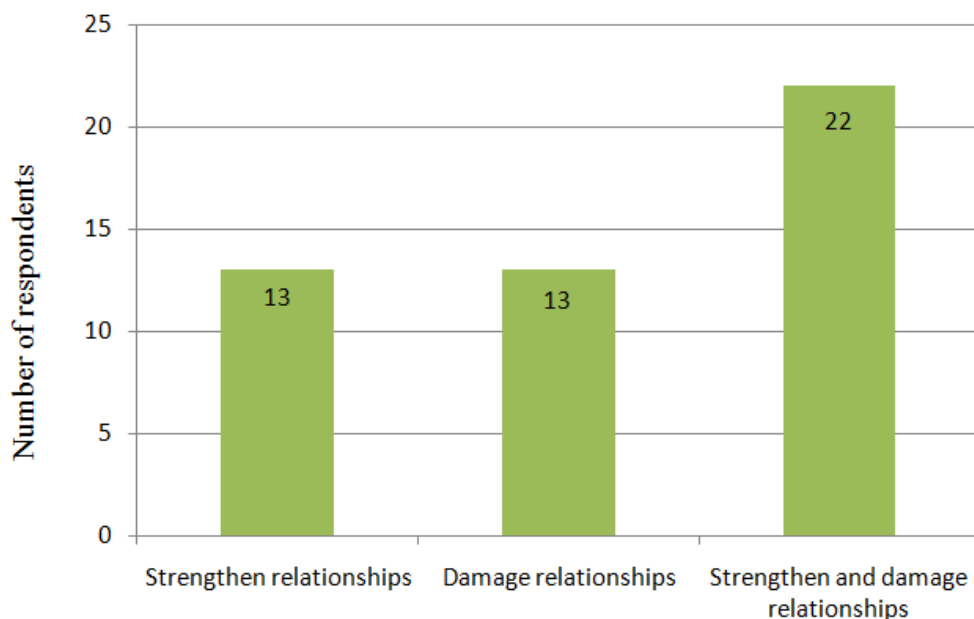


Figure 3. Perceptions of how new media may damage/strengthen interpersonal relationships

It should be noted that, although the participants who showed a divided opinion make up the biggest group (22 out of 50), the other two groups, who showed a polarised opinion, when put together (26 out of 50), make up a slightly bigger group.

Most of the arguments put forward by the participants who claimed to favour or disfavour the use of new media in managing their interpersonal relationships revolved around positive aspects associated with these forms of communications, such as ease of communication, connectedness and rapidity, as well as negative aspects, such as loss of personal contact, divided attention and overuse of technology, as can be seen in the comments below:

Comment 14:

“[These media] strengthen [social relationships], yes. Because you can connect faster, you can express things better, you can communicate more often than before, I guess that’s why.”

Comment 15:

“...for me, [these media] damage [relationships], because in the end instead of meeting up you always end up talking through [digital] media instead of planning to get together or meet up [with someone].”

Comment 16:

“I suppose a bit of both, they help strengthen [relationships] and also in a way the thing about communication, about maybe meeting up, is lost because you are, let’s say, you relate more [with others] by text messages and Whatsapp and things like that and perhaps you don’t meet the other person so often.”

The lack of an overwhelming consensus among the participants can be seen in the preference for the use of heteroglossic evaluations over the use of monoglossic evaluations (Martin and White 2005). Thus, expressions like “*I guess that’s why*”, “*for me*”, “*I suppose*”, “*maybe*”, and “*perhaps*” in (14), (15) and (16) serve as hedges that open up the dialogic space and, in some cases, help convey a feeling of uncertainty about how the participants perceive and evaluate the way in which new media can damage or strengthen interpersonal relationships.

When asked to evaluate social behaviour specifically on WhatsApp and Facebook, the participants related their evaluations to the nature of what is being communicated over these two media. For example, when asked to comment on what they thought about a person who ends a romantic relationship over WhatsApp, the participants showed an overwhelming consensus — 43 participants out of 50 condemned this practice — that breakups, as potentially conflictual situations, should be dealt with face to face. The same results were found by Gershon in her ethnographic study of a group of undergraduates at Cornell University in the United States (Gershon 2010a). These consensual evaluations are expressed through the use of monoglossic expressions that do not seem to open up the discussion as they convey the propositional content in the form of categorical assertions introduced by the verb form *es* (“is” in English) and followed by an evaluative adjective. This can be seen in the following comments where the person being alluded to is described as a coward:

Comment 17:

“He’s a coward.”

Comment 18:

“...that’s typical of a wuss...”

Comment 19:

“It’s awful. It’s horrendous.”

In (17) and (18) the evaluation is overtly directed at the person who performs the breakup through a mediated form of communication whereas in (19) this evaluation is indirectly manifested through an overt evaluation of breaking up over new media. In both cases, the participants seem to position themselves as moral judges who take a negative affective stance towards either those who adopt this type of behaviour or the behaviour itself. In the first case, negative evaluation is manifested through the use of the words “*coward*” and “*wuss*”, which explicitly describe the person as someone who lacks in courage and refuses to take responsibility for their own acts. In the second case, however, the pejorative expressions “*awful*” and “*horrendous*” are used to orient the evaluation towards the act of breaking up over WhatsApp itself, and at the same time to implicitly pass judgement on the performer of this act.

Although it is worth noting that a breakup can be a traumatic event that triggers a highly emotional and strong reaction, what the participants seem to be reacting to here is the medium chosen to communicate such event, rather than the event itself. So it would appear that the participants interpret that by breaking up over WhatsApp, someone could be metacommunicating that the relationship is not important or that it does not merit a physical encounter to discuss it. This seems to be regarded as a type of behaviour that appears to be morally wrong and socially inappropriate, and therefore we may argue that this may be the reason for the use of monoglossic, categorical, and negative evaluations in the participants’ reactions to the question.

When asked to comment on what they thought about a person who announces important news (e.g. pregnancy, a wedding, or the death of a loved one) via WhatsApp texts, the participants showed a divided opinion: those who expressed that these types of events should not be announced

through this medium (18 participants), those who approved of this (17 participants), and those who seemed to have mixed feelings about it (15 participants).

In the first case, those who do not approve of WhatsApp as an appropriate medium to announce important news construct their arguments on the basis of negative evaluations of this particular medium as a suitable form of communication in this context, and on the emphasis they place on communicating these events more personally through face to face interaction. As can be seen in (20), (21) and (22), these arguments make use of monoglossic evaluative expressions such as “*No. It’s not right*” and “*it is not the right medium*”, and the use of deontic modality, as in “*you have to communicate them more directly*” and “*[the event] should be communicated with a suitable tone of voice...*”, which in a way close the dialogic space for negotiation. In contrast, Comments 23 and 24 show a more heteroglossic type of argumentation through the use of expressions like “*I think that it should be done in person*” and “*for me, no way!*”. These make explicit the participants’ viewpoint, which may be different from that of others’, and thus open up the dialogic space in the stancetaking process.

Comment 20:

“No. It is not right. These are important things and you have to communicate them more directly. It is something personal.”

Comment 21:

“...it is not the right medium to communicate such important news and they should do it personally.”

Comment 22:

“...[the event] should be communicated with a suitable tone of voice...”

Comment 23:

“...I think that it should be done in person...”

Comment 24:

“...for me, no way! Either in person or, at least, if you can't meet up, make a phone call.”

Moreover, in all these comments, the participants seem to put a premium on the value of face to face interaction for communicating these events, as can be observed in the use of the words “*personal*”, “*personally*” and “*directly*”. We could therefore infer that, at least for this group of participants, this perceived inappropriateness of the use of WhatsApp for communicating important personal news could be linked to the idea that only unimportant matters should be channelled through this medium, or to the possibility that the recipient of such news may feel that (s)he is not considered to be important enough or to be affectively close to the sender of the message to be given such news face to face. It seems then that meaning is constructed not only by the sender's actual words but also by what is implied by the use of this particular medium. Thus, WhatsApp as a medium of communication, in this case, becomes a metamessage.

In the second case, those who do approve of WhatsApp as an appropriate medium to announce important news centre their attention on the technological properties of the medium, which they describe as being “*faster*” and “*easier*”, as well as on the use of new media as an acceptable standard social practice, as seen in the following comments:

Comment 25:

“It seems fine to me because the information flows faster among everybody.”

Comment 26:

“Well, it's fine. Communication is already gearing towards digital media so it is acceptable.”

Comment 27:

*“It seems to me that if they do so, it's because it's a matter of speed and because it's **easier** and, I don't know, perhaps to avoid, I guess... if you call them it's like a more direct contact, and they might not want to go through that, I don't know.”*

Comment 28:

“Each madman on his high horse [laughing]. I don't know, I believe it's because of the use these things are put to today. I mean, all that fuss about social networks...”

In the third case, those who show uncertainty about the use of this medium to communicate this type of events condition the appropriateness of such use to the physical distance between the interlocutors (as in Comment 29), the type of relation (i.e. intimate or less intimate) (as in Comment 30), the mood the person is in at the moment of announcing the event (as in Comment 31), the compliance with established social norms of behaviour regarding the use of new media (as in Comment 32), and the type of communicative event being announced (e.g. pregnancy, a wedding, or the death of a loved one) (as in Comment 33).

Comment 29:

“I reckon it's okay if, for example, their friends are... they all live pretty far away from each other, I believe it's perfectly fine because it's easy and it doesn't take as much time, let's say.”

Comment 30:

“It depends on the relationship you have with the other person, if it's your best friend, you won't tell them via text, but if it's a friend you perhaps don't see very often, I don't think it's wrong.”

Comment 31:

“Respectable. I wouldn't do it. But it is respectable, someone who communicates that, it's okay, they want to communicate their joy or their sadness, and they do so by texting. I wouldn't do it.”

Comment 32:

“...Today I think it's very— it's the easiest way, and it's already established, I mean... I believe that on the one hand, maybe, for events, perhaps you can gather more people together by sending a group message, for example. But I believe that in the case of someone's death, for instance, I think it is better to post— say it in person, right?”

Comment 33:

“Well, yes... Someone's death, I think it's wrong. And pregnancy..., I don't know, it might be okay.”

The same question about announcing important news or events was asked in relation to Facebook, more specifically in relation to wall postings on Facebook, thus excluding other forms of communication made possible by this social network such as private messages or chats. Wall postings are messages that bear a public/private nature, as users can configure who can have access to them: everyone who has a Facebook account, only those who are listed as contacts (“friends”) of a given user, or only a group of specific contacts chosen by a given user.

Responses to this question, unlike those about WhatsApp, show that Facebook attracts more negative evaluations (29 negative evaluations vs. 9 positive evaluations) when it comes to communicating the same events through these two media platforms. These negative evaluations can be related to the fact that, although users can choose to share content either publicly or privately on Facebook, most of the participants seem to conceptualise this social network mainly as a public space, which they consider inappropriate for communicating personal or intimate matters. We could argue that this manifested publicness of Facebook can be attributed to the one-to-many type of communication in which users engage when publishing or posting comments on their Facebook walls, which they share with related or even unrelated others.

The following comments show the negative evaluations expressed by the participants in relation to the inappropriateness of the use of Facebook in this type of communicative events.

Comment 34:

“It seems to me that the event is more private. I wouldn't do it. I would tell my closest friends and that's it. I wouldn't publish [post] it. I wouldn't expose it that way.”

Comment 35:

“Facebook can be accessed by loads of people, and maybe you have people who aren't close to you and will learn about it too.”

In these comments the participants centre their arguments on the clash between the private nature of what is being shared and the perceived public nature of the medium, as can be seen in the expressions *“It seems to me that the event is more private”*, *“I wouldn't post it”* and *“I wouldn't expose it that way”* in (34), where the adjective *“private”* is implicitly contrasted with

“public” and the verbs *“publish”* and *“expose”* reinforce the idea of publicness, and the negativity attributed to it in this context by the participants. Also, in (35), the expression *“Facebook can be accessed by loads of people”* contributes to the manifestation of a negative stance towards Facebook as being too public a medium on which to announce certain personal events. Moreover, the participants disapprove of the act of posting private news on Facebook since this can be read by people who are not part of their intimate network, as can be seen in the expressions *“maybe you have people who aren't close to you”* (35) and *“I would tell my closest friends and that's it”* (34).

Although this perceived publicness of Facebook attracts mostly negative evaluation, when looking at the types of events that can be posted on this platform, we observe that some of the participants seem to distinguish between the posting of happy events and the posting of sad events. They seem to concede that positive news is worth communicating through this medium, whereas bad news is not, as can be seen in the following comments:

Comment 36:

“It depends. In the case of pregnancy, it might be happy news and it might be okay. In the case of someone's death, awful.”

Comment 37:

“It depends. Pregnancy, okay. Someone's death... I don't know. It depends on who it is because if the person who passed away is a relative, one feels sad.”

Comment 38:

“It depends on how serious it is, meaning, if it's something, I don't know, for example, if you've passed a test or finished something, like a personal achievement, it's good.”

In these comments, participants positively evaluate the act of announcing good news (e.g. *“In the case of pregnancy, it might be happy news”* in (36), or *“if you've passed a test or finished something, like a personal achievement, it's good”* in (38)), while adopting a negative stance towards the posting of bad news (*“In the case of someone's death, awful”* in (36), or *“if the person who passed away is a relative, one feels sad”* in (37)). So within the culture of sharing and editing that Facebook is known to encourage among its users, we could argue that the posting of good news can be exploited as a resource in the construction and projection of a positive self-image. In other words, what is positive seems to qualify as Facebook material.

Finally, in some of the comments that the participants make when evaluating Facebook, we observe that Facebook itself, as a medium, becomes a metamessage, that is, the participants say that by posting news on the Facebook wall, users seek to show off or brag about events in which they are involved and through which they try to show a positive image of themselves and/or boost their ego. In summary, for these participants, Facebook seems to epitomise the act of potentiating ego. For example, the comments below reveal the critical stance that participants adopt towards Facebook users who post news about themselves:

Comment 39:

“Nowadays, the things they post are rather to get more likes and stuff like that these days.”

Comment 40:

“He is arrogant.”

Comment 41:

“I think it's to call people's attention. I'm sure.”

Comment 42:

“If you want to make it public because you believe you are a rock star and need to inform all your contacts you are going to have a baby, well, fine.”

Comment 43:

“Ehm, no, not in that case, because it's kind of like ‘mediatising’ it.”

The use of expressions like *“the things they post are rather to get more likes”* (39), *“He is arrogant”* (40), *“it's to call people's attention”* (41), *“you believe you are a rock star”* (42), and *“it's kind of like ‘mediatising’ it”* (43), which convey negative evaluation, are exploited by the participants to help position themselves as being against this type of behaviour. So in taking this critical stance, they seem to foreground these negative aspects of the social persona, and background the nature and importance of the events posted on Facebook.

From this analysis, we can observe that the way the participants evaluate the use of WhatsApp and Facebook seems to be influenced by how they conceptualise these two media in terms of their affordances. WhatsApp seems to be perceived as a controlled social space where users necessarily have to select the intended recipient(s) of the message. Thus, this may convey the idea of a more intimate form of interaction. As a general evaluation, and similar to what Church and de Oliveira (2013) and Ahad and Lim (2014) found in their studies of the attitudes to WhatsApp by university students, the participants in our study highlight the technical affordances of this medium in terms of ease of communication and quick-information sharing as the most positive feature. Looking in more detail into the (in)appropriacy of WhatsApp to communicate personal news, positive evaluations seem to be mostly medium-centred, that is, what the participants value most when communicating this news by means of WhatsApp is the easy and fast way in which this can be done. Negative evaluation, on the

other hand, seems to be more people-centred in that the participants condition the appropriacy of the medium when communicating this news to the type of relationship they have with the recipients of the message, and more topic-centred in terms of the suitability of the medium to communicate what they consider to be important news.

The Facebook wall, on the other hand, appears to be seen as a less controlled social space where messages are aired and where there is no designated addressee. Therefore, the comments made on the (in)appropriacy of using Facebook to communicate personal news appear to be more medium-centred, with the emphasis placed on the public character of Facebook, and also topic-centred in terms of what is considered appropriate to post on the Facebook Wall – i.e. happy or sad news – as a way of handling impression management on the site. This is consonant with other studies (Bazarova, Taft, Choi, and Cosley 2012; Chen and Marcus 2012; Pennington 2014, among others) that look into the different resources, including topics, exploited by Facebook users in the construction of positive self-presentation.

3.2. The focus groups

The data for analysis for Phase 2 was collected from 4 focus group sessions carried out between August and October 2017. The participants were 37 undergraduate students (12 males and 25 females) from the University of Belgrano, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, who anonymously volunteered to participate in this study and gave their prior written consent. In each focus group session, the participants knew one another as classmates since they shared between 1 and 4 years of university life.

The focus group sessions were conducted in a Gesell Chamber with two moderators that interacted with the participants in one side of the room, and two observers who took notes of the students' comments and reactions, without being seen by the participants, from behind a screen in the other side

of the room. The interactions with the participants were recorded using an MP3 audio format. These recordings yielded 195 minutes of recorded material that was later transcribed for the analysis. Additionally, the interpretation of the data was informed by the notes taken by the two observers.

Each session was introduced by a video clip in the form of a satire that portrayed an everyday scene in which members of a family sitting at a table use their mobile phones during the meal. This was intended as an ice-breaker and a lead-in to the topics to be discussed during the session. After this short introduction, the interactions were guided by a set of questions that sought to elicit the participants' opinions and perspectives on different aspects of social and linguistic behaviour in the use of new media. These questions were grouped into three sets as follows:

- a) Some aimed to make participants interact with each other and discuss their viewpoints on the use of new media (see Figure 4),
- b) some were oriented towards the use of language over new media (see Figure 5), and
- c) others were prompted by visual aids which sought to elicit the participants' stances on linguistic and social behaviour over new media (see Figure 6).

1) Which of the following forms of virtual communication do you most frequently use and why?

Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Whatsapp, phone calls, text messages, etc.

2) Do you think that these new technologies can strengthen social relationships?

3) Do you think that there are topics that should **not** be discussed or things that should **not** be done through WhatsApp? Or do you think that there are no restrictions and anything can be communicated through this platform? Think of the following situations:

- **Breaking up with a love partner.**

- **Planning a meetup with friends.**

- **Wishing someone a happy birthday.**

- **Letting someone know that a person passed away.**

4) Does the same apply to Facebook?

5) What do you think about sending voice messages through Whatsapp, instead of text messages?

6) What is your opinion of someone who takes long to answer Whatsapp messages?

Figure 4. Questions about the use of new media

7) What is your opinion on the way in which people write text messages on Whatsapp? For example, what do you think of the use of abbreviations or short forms, the repetition of letters and punctuation marks, etc.

8) What do you think about the following comments made by some students?

“There are many spelling mistakes, there are many things which are not well written and which are not appropriate. Things should be written the right way. You cannot spell a word like ‘que’ using the letter ‘k’ instead of ‘q’.”

“When you use more punctuation marks, you reveal your mood and feelings.”

“We now write worse than in the past.”

“I think it’s alright, I don’t know, it’s a faster way of writing.”

9) What about emojis? Do you use them? Are they useful in communication? Is there any difference between a message with emojis and another message without them?

Figure 5. Questions about the use of language over new media

10) A) Have a look at this Whatsapp conversation between two friends. What do you think of the different replies? Is there any difference among them? Do they all mean the same?



B) What do you think about the way in which the following messages are written?



Figure 6. Questions about stances on linguistic and social behaviour over new media

After conducting the focus groups, our analysis focused on the language and media ideologies that emerged from the participants' stances on linguistic and social behaviour in the use of new media. These stances were conveyed by the participants' intersubjective positioning which in some cases showed alignment and in other cases disalignment with the questions and prompts given and with one another's viewpoints. In view of this two-fold perspective (linguistic and social behaviour over new media), our analysis of the participants' ideologies focused, once again, on two domains: a) new media and language and b) new media and interpersonal relations.

3.2.1. New media and language

This section deals with the analysis of the participants' perceptions of how language is used over new media. It particularly focuses on participants' evaluative stances on the way language is used in WhatsApp messages.

When asked about the way in which people write messages, most participants in the four focus groups agreed, in general terms, that people write text messages better than they used to, unlike what was elicited through the interviews carried out four years earlier where most participants expressed a negative view of the way people write when texting. However, this positive evaluation of how people write seems to be attributed, almost exclusively, to the correct use of spelling, which can be propped up by the use of the predictive text facility offered by most, if not all, smartphones; a feature that was not available on mobile phones back in 2014.

When asked a general question about the way people write messages on WhatsApp, for example in relation to the repetition of pictorial resources or the abbreviation of words, participants did not express a negative evaluation. Neither did they evaluate these features negatively when asked to comment on a visual prompt simulating a series of WhatsApp conversations containing examples of these linguistic features. However, the participants did express

negative evaluations to the instances of incorrect spelling shown in the prompts, as observed in the comments below:

Comment 44:

“I hate spelling mistakes.”

Comment 45:

“The incorrect spelling of ‘yendo’, the word ‘tuvo’ spelt with a ‘b’... Besides, there is an accent mark missing in the word ‘terminó’.”

Comment 46:

“In my case, right after seeing that someone made a spelling mistake, I explain to them that the right spelling is ‘yendo’ with a ‘y’, like, I write ‘yendo’, but just so they know, not because it bothers me.”

On the contrary, most participants seem to perceive the repetition of pictorial resources and the abbreviation of words as acceptable or appropriate forms in this particular communicative context, as they may be given a specific discourse pragmatic function (for instance, they may be used to express emphasis, emotions, aggressiveness) or be dependent on the conditions under which the text messages are produced as they are written on the fly, as can be seen in the comments below:

Comment 47:

“as long as you don’t write it [with spelling mistakes] like ignorant people in normal life situations, it’s alright... I mean, I don’t know, if you have to write something for university you don’t

write “que” using the letter “k”, or if you have to write a letter...”

Comment 48:

“If the thumbs-up emoji were repeated, would it be more acceptable?”

“If you repeat this emoji, it shows that you are more interested... Maybe if you add more, it is more appropriate.”

Comment 49:

“The thumbs-up emoji seems distant, but if three or four were used, in that case yes, it would be acceptable.”

Comment 50:

“It has happened to me. It seems that the upper case gets locked and then she writes the whole message in capital letters, and that’s when I feel like telling her ‘hey, mum, don’t yell at me’, but I know she won’t understand me... It’s because the upper case got locked and well...”

Comment 51:

“I wouldn’t add those opening exclamation marks because I waste time writing them... It’s a waste of time and the message is understood anyway. If people can understand it in the same way, it is not necessary.”

Comment 52:

“If I’m in the street and I’m in a hurry, maybe yes, I abbreviate the word ‘por’ using the letter ‘x’... It depends on how quickly I’m moving and it also depends on where you are walking, because if you are in an area where you can’t use your phone, but you took it out of your pocket to check something quickly...”

In Comment 47 *“as long as you don’t write it [with spelling mistakes] like ignorant people in normal life situations, it’s alright’ ...”* the participant aligns with the view that the abbreviation of words is an acceptable linguistic practice in this digital environment whereas it is considered unacceptable in other more formal situational contexts such as university work or letter-writing. This reflects the ideology that canonical written linguistic forms are expected in formal communicative situations through the standard variety. In contrast, in WhatsApp messages communication is not negotiated by the standard variety. Communication focuses much more on function rather than on form. By favouring the repetition of emojis in Comment 48 *“if you repeat this emoji, it shows that you are more interested ...”* and Comment 49 *“the thumbs-up emoji seems distant, but if three or four were used, in that case yes, it would be acceptable”* and by disavouring the use of capitalisation in Comment 50 *“... hey, mum, don’t yell at me ...”* the participants align with the view that these linguistic resources may serve different pragmatic functions such as signalling emphasis, emotion or expressing aggressiveness respectively. In some cases, the participants condition the use of these features to the context of production of the message as illustrated by Comment 51 *“I wouldn’t add those opening exclamation marks because I waste time writing them ...”* and Comment 52 *“If I’m in the street and I’m in a hurry, maybe yes, I abbreviate the word ‘por’ using the letter ‘x’ ...”*

From the comments above, we can observe that the participants seem to evaluate the repetition of pictorial resources and the use of abbreviations and capitalisation on relative terms, that is dependent on the desired communicative goal or on the context of production of the message. Spelling, however, seems to be evaluated on absolute terms, whereby orthographic errors are condemned regardless of the production conditions or the communicative environment in which they occur.

When shown a prompt with the use of emojis in WhatsApp messages, most participants evaluated their use positively, as did most of the participants of the interviews. This positive evaluation seems to centre on the view that the

use of emojis as a complement to the written word, *adjunctive emojis*, or as a substitute for the written word, *substitutive emojis*, adds expressivity to the message and boosts the meaning of the message (Danesi 2017). However, their meaning and use is conditioned by the type of communicative situation given the fact that the sole use of emojis may lead to misinterpretations. In other words, these pictorial signs can be used as meaning-boosting devices in the form of a repetition of signs, adjunctive signs or substitutive signs whose meaning is co-dependent on the communicative situation, just as the written word is, as illustrated by the comments below:

Comment 53:

“Emojis go with the text... or not, but they are very meaningful.”

Comment 54:

“Emojis are useful, yes.”

Comment 55:

“Emojis, in my opinion, transmit your mood a lot more.”

Comment 56:

“Emojis can be misunderstood.”

Comment 57:

“The [emoji of a] kiss with a heart can also be misunderstood... It depends on who is sending it to you. For example, if you are in a relationship, it can be misunderstood, as if you were flirting...”

Comment 58:

“It also depends on the person. I can send 40 heart emojis to someone and my boyfriend doesn’t care at all.”

In these comments, the participants adopt a positive stance towards the use of emojis (e.g. “... *they are very meaningful*” in (53), or “*emojis are useful, yes*” in (54) and “*emotions, in my opinion, transmit your mood a lot more*” in (55)), thus positioning themselves favourably towards their use in WhatsApp messages. However, through Comment 56 “*emojis can be misunderstood*” and Comment 57 “... *it depends on who is sending it to you ...*”, participants do also recognise that their use and meaning is highly variable and subject to the context of situation, be it the type and goal of communicative situation, the participants or the topic being discussed.

Finally, when shown a series of prompts with specific orthographic and punctuation features, the participants recognise that some of these features are commonly used by the older generations, typically their parents. These features include the use of capitalisation and the use of full stops at the end of messages, which, for the participants, seem to index age as they are considered marked choices in these online communicative contexts. This can be seen in the following criticism that the participants make of their parents’ texting skills:

Comment 59:

“Lots of [punctuation] marks, opening and closing marks... That is not used.”

Comment 60:

“That’s how my grandmother writes.”

Comment 61:

“For me it’s OK, but I don’t write like that.”

Comment 62:

“If it is a very formal text, then yes. If it is an email, yes.”

Comment 63:

“Our parents, aunts/uncles, cousins or grandparents, whatever, they write “OK” and a period or “YES” and a period.”

Comment 64:

“That is typical of mothers [the use of capital letters for a whole text].”

In addition to the above-mentioned marked choices (the use of the full stop at the end of messages and capitalisation), another feature that appears to index age is the way in which messages are chunked. The participants seem to perceive that older adults write full messages in just one bubble rather than chunking messages into a sequence of meaningful chat bubbles, as illustrated by the following comments:

Comment 65:

“I prefer a chain of short text messages... A long piece of text means that you are in trouble. With a long text message, you wait for a long time. A long piece of text makes you worry.”

Comment 66:

“Short text messages make it more dynamic.”

Comment 67:

“I find it funny when my grandmother includes many things in just one single message.”

From the comments the participants made, we can observe that older adults appear to conceptualise WhatsApp messages more like canonical written

texts, which try to follow the conventions of written language and focus more on form than on function — correct use of orthography, punctuation and a self-contained text. However, the participants in the focus groups seem to conceptualise WhatsApp messages as oralised texts which should, therefore, include certain features of spoken interaction represented in this digital environment by means of the repetition of orthographic resources, the use of capitalisation to express emphasis or emotions, the use of emojis to add expressivity and clarity to the message and the fragmentation of the message into a sequence of chat bubbles to resemble the flow and dynamism of a spoken exchange.

3.2.2. New media and interpersonal relations

Through communication, people assign symbolic meanings to new media, and technology more generally. That is, the messages that they communicate about new media reveal as much about the communicators as they do about new media. When people communicate about digital media, they are communicating about themselves, as individuals, groups and societies. This is represented through their words, images, stories, experiences, and so on by means of which they collectively negotiate their interpersonal relationships and (co)construct different stances towards the social world around them.

In our study, when evaluating new media in relation to the construction, maintenance and ending of interpersonal relations, the participants position themselves in the discourse by a) underlining the affordances of the medium, b) appealing to moral values, c) underlining the nature of the relationship and d) applying the principle of retribution.

a) Underlining the affordance of the medium

The arguments expressed through the references being made to the communicative potential of the medium in question are centred on two dimensions of the quality or property of the medium. These dimensions are: the technological affordances that are defined in terms of the technological capabilities offered by the medium, and the social affordances that have to do with the properties of the medium and its communication environment that permit social actions, i.e. how users conceptualise, interpret and utilise the medium in order to create and negotiate social meaning.

Technological affordances

The evaluative comments made by the students as regards the technological capabilities for communication offered by Facebook and WhatsApp focus on either the disruptive effect of these digital platforms as potential sources of conflict or misunderstandings (as seen in Comments 68 and 69 below), or the cooperative effect that may be attributed to them as communication facilitators (as seen in Comments 70 and 71).

Comment 68:

“It causes some problems. It’s like, for example, if you are in a relationship and your partner demands that you click the ‘like’ button on her posts, or if you like a guy’s photo, it’s like the other person asks ‘who’s this guy?’”

Comment 69:

“Yes, it can damage the relationship, but mainly because of misunderstandings. Some things can be misunderstood. Tones, for example. You can write ‘it’s alright’, but that doesn’t show your tone... Or writing ‘OK’, which sounds blunt.”

Comment 70:

“It reduces the distance and, for example, my partner lives in Panamá and it is great for me to be able to call her for free and spend one hour speaking with her and send her things through Facebook and everything else...”

Comment 71:

“The opposite can happen, a relationship can be strengthened. You may meet people on Facebook with whom you haven’t spoken in years.”

In (68) the participant’s comment revolves around the potential conflict that may arise when using the function *like* offered by Facebook in the context of a romantic relationship. The conflict here is presented as an example, a hypothetical case, of what may occur and not as a personal experience lived by the participant. She seems to suggest that *likes* are expected or almost mandatory from a romantic partner to the other (“...*your partner demands that you click the like button on her posts...*”), but condemned if given from one of the partners to a person of the opposite sex outside the relationship and unknown to the other partner (“...*if you like a guy’s photo, it’s like the other person asks ‘who’s this guy?’*”). In both cases, the absence or presence of *likes* are presented as potentially conflictual.

In (69) the participant takes a critical stance towards WhatsApp by making reference to the misunderstandings that can occur as a result of the filtering out of contextualisation cues that the medium allows. He argues that communication through this medium can harm a relationship due to the lack of understanding or misinterpretation of messages. He particularly makes reference to how emotions and feelings can be interpreted in the absence of the clues that establish the tone and manner of what is being communicated, i.e. the *key* in Dell Hymes’s SPEAKING model (Dell Hymes 1972).

Interestingly enough, the student does not mention the capability of WhatsApp of allowing the use of, for example, emojis to compensate for the loss of paralinguistic features in texting.

Comments 70 and 71 present a more positive stance to new media, particularly Facebook as a communication facilitator. Both participants evaluate Facebook positively on the basis of its capability of shortening distances in communication and of bringing people together. In Comment 70 emphasis is placed not only on the technological properties of the medium — as giving the participant the opportunity to call their partner who lives thousands of miles away — but also on the fact that the call is free and so they can talk for hours on the phone. Positive evaluation of Facebook is also seen in Comment 71 that focuses on how relationships can be re-established and revitalised on Facebook after remaining dormant for a long time.

Social affordances

The ways people appropriate the use of communication technology, and particularly new digital technology, can be very varied indeed as they are interpreted and experienced differently not only individually but also collectively. That is, individual users can relate the use of technology to their own social world and experience in ways that are different from those experienced by others. Similarly, groups of friends, workers in an office, etc. can give technology their own social meaning by developing their own ways of using that technology to communicate with each other, what Gershon (2010) calls idioms of practice. So how people evaluate the efficacy, the efficiency and the appropriateness of a particular digital medium in a given social context is central to the understanding of media ideologies.

Our conversations with the participants in the focus groups revealed that, although there are many idioms of practice with the use of WhatsApp and Facebook when negotiating social meaning, there is a general consensus

among the students about how to use or not to use these platforms to accomplish different communicative tasks.

This general consensus is represented in the comments below where the participants take a rather critical stance towards the time taken by their addressees to answer their text messages.

Comment 72:

“A person who takes long to answer messages on Whatsapp is useless to talk to... If I am talking, I want continuity and reciprocity, and I don't want to be left on read for half an hour”.

Comment 73:

“It might bother me if you take long to answer, if I see that you are online.”

Comment 74:

“If you take an hour and a half to answer my message, it bothers me... If you take 30 minutes, it's ok, no problem.”

In these three comments, judgement is passed on those who take a long time to answer a text message. Someone who delays responding to a message is labeled as “... *useless to talk to* ...” by the participant in (72). Furthermore, she seems to conceptualise this hypothetical exchange as a conversation with her interlocutor emphasising that when she is talking (“...*if I am talking*”, she says) she wants “*continuity*” and *reciprocity*”, and does not want “... *to be left on read for half an hour*”.

Delayed responses are also judged in connection with social presence as an affordance offered by the medium. For example, the participant in (73) mentions that she may get upset if she sees that her addressee is online and

has not answered her text message. Interestingly enough, social presence, in the sense of being seen available online but not necessarily willing to engage in interaction, was invoked by many of the participants when commenting on the negotiation of romantic relationships through texting, and more specifically on the topic of crushing on someone and playing mind games with them to see who answers a text message first.

Finally, the way responding time is assessed is dependent on the participants' personal judgement in terms of how they perceive and evaluate it as being short or long, and therefore socially acceptable or socially punishable. In (74) the participant makes it clear that she would be upset if her text messages were answered an hour and a half later but not half an hour later. This comment, which reveals a rather whimsical arbitrariness of time negotiation in texting, was one of the many expressed by other participants who regarded very different spans of responding time as acceptable or unacceptable. However, many participants noted that responding time hinges on the type of relationship that is being negotiated through texting, with romantic and friendship relationships being the most vulnerable to delays in responding time. As we expressed earlier, we see how synchronicity is not only technologically enabled but also socially constructed, and therefore influenced by different ideologies.

A general consensus among the participants is also shown when it comes to evaluating the length of voice messages. Here again this evaluation is based on random choice and personal whim. However, all the participants agree that long voice messages are to be discouraged and should be somehow socially penalised. The following comments reveal this disapproving stance on the issue.

Comment 75:

“Voice messages should last no more than 30 seconds. I’m not going to listen to a message that lasts more than 30 seconds.”

Comment 76:

“People get stressed out if you send them long voice messages. They don’t like it. They tell you ‘I’d listen to half of the message, not more than that’.”

As we saw with the evaluation of responding time in texting, the evaluation of voicemail length is also subject to the participants’ beliefs of what constitutes the right acceptable length. The participant in (75) expresses his views of this length categorically by citing a maximum tolerable length of 30 seconds. He is also adamant that he will not listen to a message that lasts longer than that. The other participant in (76) takes a more sympathetic stance towards the recipient of the message by stating that “people get stressed out if you send them long voice messages”. She even brings the voice of this imaginary recipient into her comment by quoting what they would say if they received a long voice message (“... *I’d listen to half of the message, not more than that*”).

The practice of voice messaging as regards the message length seems to be measured and evaluated against the yardstick of some kind of voicemail etiquette that puts a premium on brevity. In our conversations with the students in the focus groups, they expressed almost unanimously that they find every extra second they spend listening to voicemail agonizingly tedious. Again, this shows how users shape technology by creating social meaning out of its use. This way of conceptualising voicemail use seems to be contingent on age as a factor since the students reported, in a rather patronising tone, that their parents are in the habit of sending them long, boring voice messages.

All these comments reveal that ideologies constructed around the social affordances of a medium are fluid and can be in some cases group-specific and age-related.

b) Appealing to moral values

As digital spaces are integrated into everyday life, they come to be seen or depicted as arenas where social grooming flourishes. The role of digital media in relationship building, particularly romantic relationships, has long been assessed against the background of contesting ideologies about what constitutes acceptable moral behaviour and what doesn't. For example, when discussing the topic of breaking-up through WhatsApp, the participants appealed to a set of principles or moral values to evaluate what is right or wrong in this rather traumatic situation. They mentioned respect as the most salient value in a romantic relationship and alluded to the importance of it in shaping the character and personality of those involved in a relationship. For almost all of the students showing respect in a break-up situation meant communicating the end of the relationship to their significant others face to face. Any form of mediated communication in this circumstance was considered inappropriate and an act of cowardice.

Comment 77 below reveals a rather firm stance towards the action of breaking-up over WhatsApp. *“It is a question of respect..”*, the student categorically says at the beginning of her comment, and she conditions the appropriateness of this behaviour to the level of affection in the relationship and to the level of intimacy created by sharing memories and moments spent together. Thus, the violation of this somewhat shared order can only be interpreted, in the student's view, as signalling a lack of respect towards the other person in the relationship.

Comment 77:

“It is a question of respect. If it is someone you love, with whom you have spent nice moments and keep good memories, it should be a question of respect. If you don't respect the other person, then yes, you can break up over Whatsapp.”

Moreover, some of the comments made by the students point to digital media as containing second-order information given that people's ideologies and their understandings of how certain digital platforms should be used add important information to the message. For example, in Comment 78 respect is understood as a principle to be valued in a relationship and therefore the end of a romantic bond via WhatsApp is considered disrespectful. By saying "... *I would take it as if he never respected me, that what we had was not important to him*", the participant reveals how hurt she would feel for receiving the news through a medium that she considers most unsuitable for this situation. That is, the use of WhatsApp conveys extra meanings or metamessages which are interpreted by users regardless of what the textual message may say.

Comment 78:

"Personally, I find it disrespectful. I would take it as if he never respected me, that what we had was not important to him."

The participant in Comment 79 below echoes the same sentiment when he describes the break-up of a romantic relationship through texting as an act of cowardice and a total lack of respect towards the other person. He moves on to reflect that even in the case of discovering later in the relationship that the other person is as he says "*horrible*", the situation merits a phone call. Again, this commentary reveals how perceptions and evaluations of the use of a particular medium of communication becomes crucial in negotiating social meaning.

Comment 79:

“First, it is a question of courage... For me this is typical of a coward. Second, it is a question of respect towards the other person. Maybe the other person is horrible and I realised too late, but it doesn't matter, I should call anyway.”

However, the use of texting in the nurturing of social ties was not always considered inappropriate by the students who expressed their approval of using WhatsApp to send happy birthday messages to their friends, for example. This means that for the participants the type of communicative situation has a bearing as a decisive factor in the acceptance or rejection of WhatsApp as a suitable communication channel. This is voiced by the participant in Comment 80 who recognises that saying happy birthday to a friend via WhatsApp is easier than using the same medium to end a romantic relationship. She even confesses that she has ended a romantic relationship over WhatsApp herself and that, as she reports, “... *it is not good*”.

Comment 80:

“Saying happy birthday to a friend is easier. Breaking up with your boyfriend over WhatsApp is more difficult. I have done it, but it is not good...”

c) Underlining the nature of the relationship in terms of time and space

For some of the participants the type of bond or relationship that they hold with others constitutes a pivoting point for assessing the social validity of the use of a particular medium to achieve a specific communicative task. For example, when discussing the act of breaking up through texting, the student in the extract below evaluates the appropriateness of the medium on the basis

of the length of the relationship.

Comment 81:

“If your relationship with this person is recent, you may break up over WhatsApp, but if you’ve been with this person for 2 or 3 years, then no.”

Here the participant justifies the use of texting to end a short-term romantic relationship, although she seems to signal probability rather than full certainty by hedging her claim through the use of the modal verb “may”. However, she takes a categorical stance to breaking up through texting when the relationship is two or three years old. For this student, a relationship this long simply cannot end by a text message. This shows again how important media ideologies can be in shaping how people actually interpret not only the messages they receive or send but also the medium they utilise to deliver such a message.

For the student in Comment 82 below, however, the appropriateness of the medium is conditioned by how far away the romantic partners live from each other rather than by how long they have been in a relationship. A text message breakup when partners share the locality is considered disrespectful by the student. However, she goes on to admit that if she lived thousands of kilometres away from her partner (“... 3 thousand kilometres...” in her words), she would end the relationship by text. She says that she wouldn’t wait for “a month” to tell her partner as this would be like faking the relationship. So being honest about how she feels about the relationship is more important for her than the method she uses to communicate the ending of it. In a way, honesty seems to prevail over the potential emotional conflict or damage that a breakup text may cause.

Comment 82:

“It depends on the situation. If I’m in a relationship with someone who lives in the same city as me, who is near, I’m not going to break up over a text message, because it is disrespectful. But if I am far from them, 3 thousand kilometers apart, well, I won’t wait for a month and pretend that everything is alright, I simply won’t.”

Although the use of WhatsApp, or texting more generally, is usually deemed to be controversial in negotiating certain traumatic aspects of romantic relationships, it is considered legitimate and suitable for sending happy birthday messages as expressed by the participants in Comments 83 and 84 below. In (83) the student argues that saying happy birthday via WhatsApp or the telephone does not devalue the strength of the bond or the relationship. She confesses that she uses both mediums but immediately explains that if the recipient of her message is someone she feels very close to, she delivers the message in person, and she adds that if this person is a very good friend, she makes use of emotive words. So the participant seems to suggest that face to face communication and emotive language constitute the ideal combination to nurture close friendships. She then concludes that at the end of the day the willingness to communicate with the other person is what matters, it is an opportunity, she says, to show that she wants to be present in her friend’s life.

Comment 83:

“I don’t think that saying happy birthday over WhatsApp or by phone has less value... I do it both ways, if it’s a very close person, I obviously meet them face to face. And if it’s a really good friend, I may use more emotive words than with someone that maybe I don’t know as well. The communication is there. Maybe it’s the reason to show that I am present, that I want to be part of their life... It’s what allows our communication to continue.”

A similar view is voiced by the participant in Comment 84 who also equates the use of WhatsApp and phone calls with the showing of affection for happy birthday messages. He adds that he logs into Facebook to remind him of his friends' birthdays, and although he admits having a lot of friends, (“...*about two thousands...*”, he says) he clarifies that these are just Facebook friends. It is noticeable how the student seems to somehow undervalue Facebook for trading quantity for quality. This is further reinforced by the fact that he admits selecting from his multitude of friends on the social network to decide which of them merits a WhatsApp message or a phone call for their birthday. Once again, what the use of a particular medium metacommunicates hinges on the strength of the bond between the participants in a given communicative situation.

Comment 84:

“The thing is that nowadays I log into Facebook to see people’s birthdays. So it tells me from my contacts – maybe 2 thousand friends, I have many friends, but Facebook friends, of course... Among all those friends I see who I would greet on Facebook and if it’s a very important person, I use Whatsapp or make a phone call. It depends on the person.”

d) Principle of retribution

In our conversations with the students, some of them seemed to validate a kind of tit-for-tat attitude to negotiating romantic relationships over new media. This was particularly manifested when commenting on delayed responses to text messages between romantic partners or flirts.

The comments below reflect this stance that seems to present the relationship

as a kind of romantic struggle where temporality both as a technical and a perceived affordance plays a pivotal role.

Comment 85:

“If they take long to answer, you do the same to them. If they took one hour to write back, you leave them on read and you keep them waiting for an hour.”

Comment 86:

“That’s like when people like each other but they try to hide it. So, if you’ve just started seeing someone and this person takes 10 or 15 minutes to answer, you should wait 25 minutes to text back.”

Both students adamantly state that they delay answering a text message in retribution for their own messages having been left unresponded for long in the first place. The timespan a message is left unanswered is again arbitrary and seems to hinge on the participants’ ideologies surrounding the etiquette of online courtship and flirting through texting. This shows that this aspect of temporality in negotiating romantic relationships through text messaging provides second-order information that can indicate different emotions and feelings to the participants involved. Of course, the interpretation of this second-order information will depend on the different contextual characteristics of a particular relationship that have a bearing on the negotiation of meaning.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although it is always expectable to find both detractors and supporters of new media, and therefore positive and negative attitudes to the uses to which new forms of communication are put, the rationale behind these attitudes is not always evident as they may be influenced by both individual and collective beliefs, which may be more local culture-related or more global culture-related, and by the ever-changing nature of the communication affordances offered by new technologies, which may lead to mutating consensus.

Thus, this study has tried to explore some of the complexities surrounding the rationale behind the beliefs that this group of students have about certain social practices and uses of language on Facebook and WhatsApp as two of the most popular digital platforms that the students claimed to use at the time when the study was conducted. These beliefs, however, may be age-specific as different results may be obtained by examining how other age groups evaluate communication over new media.

Overall, the stances the participants adopt towards the use of WhatsApp and Facebook in relationship building and nurturing are discursively constructed around their evaluations of the social and technological affordances of the medium, the nature of the relationship and the moral and ethical issues that sometimes arise.

However, the way they conceptualise new media in the process of social mediation reveals a lack of consensus as the majority of the participants show a divided opinion as to whether these forms of communication strengthen or damage relationships. The reasons for this lack of consensus could be attributed to 1) the fact that because these are new media, and therefore new forms of communication that are constantly changing, the participants, and people more generally, have not had the time to reach a general agreement on the social uses to which a particular medium can be put; and 2) the fact

that people's communicative needs and behaviour are indeed varied and unpredictable.

When looking more closely at particular social activities or practices, this consensus seems to vary by type of activity. For example, the overwhelming majority of the participants agree on the inappropriateness of breaking up through WhatsApp messaging, but some of them are in favour of using WhatsApp as a medium to communicate important news or events to people they know. Clearly the difference here lies in the fact that one type of activity refers to the act of fracturing or ending a romantic relationship, a traumatic and delicate experience that requires physical co-presence in the students' view, and the other refers to the mere act of communicating events. Other contextual factors that seem to influence the students' perceptions or evaluations are the type of relationship between the participants involved in the communication and the physical distance between them. As regards their evaluations of Facebook in relation to the practices that they carry out on this medium, the students seem to share the view that Facebook is an essentially public space where people air personal news. The publicness attributed to Facebook seems to disregard the fact that this medium allows users to modify privacy settings and select who they want to share content with. Notwithstanding, the participants, in many of their comments, hint that they are aware of the different audiences to whom their messages can be directed. This possibility of fragmenting the audiences, we can argue, questions the effect of context collapse as an ever-present constraint in all social media communication. At the same time, this perceived contextual feature appears to influence the way the participants assess the nature of the content that would be considered appropriate to appear on Facebook.

Thus, the type of communicative activity or event is evaluated in tandem with the medium used to communicate such an event, with the latter carrying second-order information that may prove to be a critical factor in successful communication.

As regards the evaluation of how language is used in WhatsApp messages, our findings reveal that the participants' beliefs range from those centred on the idea that language is being degraded and corrupted in the context of digital communication to those focused on the acceptance by the participants of the ways in which language accommodates to the affordances of the medium. What seems to be noteworthy here is the fact that although we live in a society where the young seem to be more relaxed about social norms and behaviour, including linguistic behaviour, most of these students are very critical of the way language is used over new media. On the other hand, they consensually regard emojis as pictorial artefacts that enhance communication by providing social cues.

We can also observe that the stances adopted by many of the participants in the study reflect certain moral panics about language and new media in contemporary society. Thus, they seem to align with circulating public discourses about the degradation of language and the banalisation of the ways in which relationships are said to be constructed over digital media. These stances are manifested by means of evaluative metadiscursive comments constructed around the use of affective language.

Although ideologies can be best understood by examining the actual communicative practices in which the students are involved in relation to the use of digital media and the use of language in digital media, it is important to explore what the students actually think about new media and language in new media, or about online and offline communication more generally, to be able to understand how they conceptualise the different social uses to which these new forms of communication are put. This is central to the study of ideologies as the way people understand both language and media will shape, although not determine, their communicative practices.

Many of the ideologies that we have identified in this exploratory work also reveal ideologies about digital presence and physical presence more broadly. That is, the students' preferences for going online or offline to perform

certain social activities seem to be bound up with a contrasting view of the virtual versus the real. However, this contrast is problematic as online presence and offline presence continuously intertwine, mediate and influence each other.

Finally, although one of the pitfalls in researching digital communication can be how fast data becomes outdated, a better understanding of the new always hinges on a full comprehension of the old. Thus, a study of digital ideologies that collects data at any point in time provides valuable information that can help interpret the results of subsequent investigations. In this respect, our study seeks to contribute to future investigative endeavours that aim to capture the fluctuating nature of the beliefs, perspectives and opinions that people hold about the way they navigate the social world through the online-offline interface, and through language as something that binds them together.

So, this exploration of how the students talk about new media and the use of language over new media, despite its limitations in terms of the number of participants studied that does not allow for the generalisation of the results, proves a fruitful avenue of research that can help us better understand the ways in which we negotiate social meaning and relate to each other in the context of digital culture.

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