

# CREATIVITY AND EXPRESSIVITY IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Nowadays, social media has become a significant part of human life in all Western cultures; online interaction goes beyond the mere sharing of useful information: it is a parallel universe of human relations, where people can freely express emotions, thoughts, opinions, humor a. s. o. Every major event or crisis is discussed, and it sometimes leads to fractures within civil society, for divergent opinions are maintained fiercely, with all sorts of arguments, albeit wrong or farfetched. Moreover, the pandemic context that affected the world in the last two years, with its successive lockdowns, acted as a catalyst for the increase in the online communication between individuals all over the world, and this phenomenon has both advantages and disadvantages: on the one side, it provides information, it brings people together, it solves real problems – such as personal, professional, or medical ones – in real time, it acts as a next-best-thing substitute for a real social life. On the other hand, it allows misinformation to be disseminated among those who are prone to a creative (distorted?) vision of reality and fall for the fatal attraction of the conspiracy theories.

Not surprisingly, the scientific exploration of social media has become increasingly appealing to researchers in various fields in the recent years. Social media is, undoubtedly, the most fascinating and genuine corpus for the study of our contemporary society by historians, sociologists, psychologists and last, but not least, linguists. Recently, the publishing house of the University of Suceava, Romania, has released impressive research on this topic: Silvia Corina Nuțu's *Linguistic Challenges in Social Media*. Conceived as a doctoral thesis, this book focuses on two main aspects: the general characteristics of virtual communication in social media and the creative manipulation of the Romanian and Spanish lexis both in comments and memes.

The first part of the book establishes the main features of communication in social media. An entire “digital” generation of teenagers and young adults has access to a variety of platforms and apps that provide the opportunity to share information and

entertainment, opinions and personal experience, so the users of such services are both generators and consumers of content. Such content is transmitted – synchronically or not – in a hybrid form of image and language (iconotext), so the first characteristic that comes to mind is this syncretism that brings together two main forms of communication. The discourse in social media is based on the spoken languages, so it usually suspends the norm of the standard languages and manifest several features associated to oral communication, such as spontaneity (interjections, vocatives, all-purpose words, etc.), expressivity (word formation, manipulation of idioms), clichés (catch phrases, idioms, etc.), economy of language (abbreviations, emoticons, etc.). The author insists on the importance of the latter as one of the main features of online communication on social media and presents a series of lexical manifestations of this principle. From a formal viewpoint, she notices the creation of lexical variants of the signifier, without any changes in the signified and opposes the semantic techniques (s. a. loanwords or polysemantic words) to the hybrid ones (s. a. portmanteau words, abbreviations, or derivative words). Besides, online interaction implies a specific instrument of paralinguistic communication in the form of emoticons provided by the platform itself or the conventional sets of characters that are equivalent to emoticons.

The second part of the book deals with the context and means of creation of both morphological and semantic neologisms in Romanian and Spanish. The author distinguishes between the necessary (referential) neologisms and the luxury (stylistic) ones, thus emphasizing the peculiarities of the language used in social media, which oscillates between the necessity to assign names to new realities and the urge for expressivity. The means of word formation at a morphological level include, among other, derivation (using traditional or neological affixes), parasynthesis, conversion, composition, haplology, etc. Morphological neologisms appear both in Romanian and Spanish, although the preference for a type or another may differ, for example in the case of compound words.

Nuțu dedicates a whole chapter to loanwords; American English in general, and Internet English in particular, are a permanent source for loanwords in both Romance languages, though the degree of assimilation may vary. Romanian, as well as American Spanish, are open to English influences and tend to accept loanwords with little or no adaptation to the phonological and orthographical systems. On the other hand, European Spanish has a different attitude towards loanwords: calques are preferred to loanwords, and loanwords – where allowed – are adapted to the Spanish orthographic norms. The analysis of the examples excerpted from social media by the author consolidates an image of the degree of acceptance of foreign loans in the two languages she studies. This chapter is one of quite high density of information, as it presents, contrastively, two Romance languages that are submitted to the pressure of globalization – represented by a Germanic language.

Semantic neologisms are the results of an expansion of the signifier, by means of a variety of rhetorical figures, especially metaseemes such as metaphors or metonymic figures. Both referential and expressive neologisms act against the background of the particular type of discourse of social media, which can be ironic, aggressive, persuasive, etc.

In the third part of her book, Nuțu analyzes the contextual use of the lexis in the social media communication and its peculiarities according to the intentions of the particular user. Based on a generous corpus, the analysis is conducted both from the stylistic and pragmatic perspectives, and focuses on four main components: the use of slang, the question of euphemism and dysphemism, the pragmatics of (self-) denomination and the ludicity of puns and memes.

Communication in social media displays all the features of oral communication, so its informal character is visible in all the manifestations of a specific written code which combines the written discourse with the use of a variety of symbols and images. The author emphasizes the characteristics of slang – cryptic and expressive – with a fine and detailed study on the lexical phenomena that enrich the lexis of social media, and proposes a classification of the lexical techniques in a series of categories: phono-graphic, by neology (morphologic and semantic), grammatical, lexical and pragmatic.

The chapter dedicated to euphemism and dysphemism emphasizes the divergent tendencies of communication on social media. On the one hand, there is a manifest tendency to impact, to shock, to make a statement, which often translates to the use of taboo words; on the other hand, Nuțu points out that the users of social media are part of a net of both virtual and real-life friends, so, according to their social status, there is a certain degree of self-censorship, based on political correctness, that implies the use of euphemisms in order to attenuate the impact of certain assertions.

The next chapter, dedicated to denomination, self-denomination and creative manipulation of proper names, is an excellent example of rigorous and accurate analysis carried on a peripheral linguistic corpus. Along with the last chapter, dedicated to puns, it establishes a model for further investigations in this field.

This book is more than a valuable scientific work; it is also a good read, since Nuțu knows how to finely dissect the linguistic samples of human creativity that we sometimes take for granted. Linguistic humor seems to be the guiding line of her analysis, which she interprets according to its purposes, in a socio-pragmatic approach. The value of this work consists both in the innovative analysis of an impressive corpus, and in the introduction of new terms and classifications, so it will constitute a must-read for further researches on the same coordinates.

Silvia Corina NUȚU, (2021),  
*Provocări lingvistice în social media. Studiu contrastiv în limbile română și spaniolă*,  
Suceava, Editura Universității „Ștefan cel Mare”, 330 p.