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Participation framework revisited: (New) media and their audiences/users,  
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Participation framework revisited: (new) media and their audiences/users

Long before the wide-spread use of computer-mediated, electronically-based communication, Goffman (1979) pointed out that the denominations *hearer* and *speaker* are overly simplistic and not useful, based on the assumption that there are two parties only in talk, that both are fully focused on their neatly alternating roles, and that their main concern is the talk at hand. Hence, a dyadic model of communication with a speaker and a hearer has long since been replaced by such concepts as *production format* and *participation framework* with different roles which individuals may display in relation to a given utterance (Goffman 1979, Levinson 1988). Going beyond interpersonal dyadic face-to-face talk-in-interaction, the application of these notions still remains unsatisfactory. So, for instance, regarding classic mass media, there are ongoing discussions about the status of the television audience as overhearers (O’Keeffe 2006). Also, in studies on CMC (computer-mediated communication) often a rather superficial notion of multiple authorship is posited (cf. Landow 1994, Storrer 2008, Crystal 2011), even though the genuine interactivity of the web 2.0 seems to provide fruitful ground for an analysis in these terms. Because of these ongoing debates and unexplored fields, we find it timely to revisit the notion *participation framework* and describe how different reception roles are inscribed in different media or forms of communication, or, in other words, how different production formats allow their users and audiences to position themselves.

In the production format, Goffman differentiates three types of speaker roles: (a) the *animator*, a “talking machine”, (b) the *author* who owns the words, and (c) the *principal* on whose behalf is spoken (1979: 17). If all of these coincide, the participants engage in *fresh talk*. Furthermore, the *figure* is the “I” that features in the talk and inhabits the world portrayed therein, the character that may also be held socially responsible for the actions undertaken. A laminated structure is constructed in which each speaker role is potentially present in an utterance allowing speakers to use language to perform multifarious tasks. The articles in this special issue will illustrate that CMC and media discourse offer a range of different perspectives under which people (or software) can be considered the producer of some text.

Listeners, hearers, or recipients can be categorised according to their participation status:

An utterance does not carve up the world beyond the speaker into precisely two parts, recipients and nonrecipients, but rather opens an array of structurally differentiated possibilities, establishing the framework in which the speaker will be guiding his delivery (Goffman 1979: 11).

The hearers may be *ratified*; hence, they hold the social role or the official status of being the one to whom the talk is geared in an encounter. However, more than one person is often ratified participant and this person, these persons or a subgroup of these persons may or may not be listening. Again, in CMC and media discourse, the notion of listening has to be adjusted. Goffman already notes that in the real world, in contrast to the idealised dyadic conversational model, there are often others in the same social situation who are not part of the direct encounter: these so-called *bystanders* too may or may not be listening: “they

should act so as to maximally encourage the fiction that they aren't present" (1979: 8). However, in media contexts, this pretence does not seem to have a direct equivalent. Such bystanders, when they listen, can be either *overhearers*, i.e. they simply listen in, or *eavesdroppers*, that is they listen secretly:

In some circumstances, they can temporarily follow the talk, or catch bits and pieces of it, becoming thus overhearers. In other circumstances, they may surreptitiously exploit the accessibility they find they have, thus qualifying as eavesdroppers (1979: 8).

In CMC and mass media communication, scholars describe the radio or television audiences as overhearers or eavesdroppers (Heritage 1985, Hutchby 2006, Tolson 2006) whereas O'Keeffe (2006) claims that those audiences are ratified, being the *raison d'être* of the talk, and hence precisely not mere overhearers or eavesdroppers. Goffman also differentiates between *subordinate* and *dominating* communication:

Subordinate communication becomes a recognizable possibility, that is, talk that is manned, timed, and pitched to constitute a perceivedly limited interference to what might be called the dominating communication (1979: 9).

If the subordinate communication is not concealed, one can differentiate between *byplay* (some of the ratified participants are for moments engaged in some other talk), *crossplay* (one of the ratified participants starts talking to a bystander) and *sideplay* (the bystanders quietly exchange remarks). However, if the subordinate communication is concealed, *collusion* can also be created in these three different groups (collusive byplay, crossplay, or sideplay). Again, such secondary activities occur both in the reception of classic mass media (Ayass & Gerhardt 2012) where "watching television" or "listening to the radio" is not necessarily the dominating communication or main frame of action, but also in the context of the new and newest media and their different multimodal environments. Goffman's notion of an *open state of talk* is especially relevant to the reception of media. It has been applied for instance to television viewers and their specific form of talk (Gerhardt 2009), since "participants have the right, but not the obligation to initiate a little flurry of talk, then relapse back into silence, all this with no apparent ritual marking" (Goffman 1979: 10). Finally, on the reception side, Goffman differentiates between different types of audiences. A *live audience*, which would also include the studio audience in media settings, represents "coparticipants in a social occasion, responsive to all the mutual stimulation" (1979: 12), whereas the *broadcast audience* at home "can only vicariously join" (1979: 12). So live audiences are "doing the same thing", whereas the broadcast audiences are part of other social occasions. For instance, they may be having dinner at the same time and that could be the dominating frame. Furthermore, inscribed in the media text is the *imagined audience* of the producers:

A broadcast talk may have a 'live' audience and a broadcast audience, the speaker now styling his projection mainly for the one, now for the other, and only the music of language can lull us into thinking that the same kind of recipient entity is involved (1979: 12).

Such imagined media audiences in the media discourse are a fiction of the media producer and may bear no resemblance to the empirical viewers/listeners/users.

Production formats and participation frameworks are interdependent: “To a degree, then, the capacity in which we are to be active is to select (or to attempt to select) the capacity in which the recipients of our actions are present” (1979: 17). Note that Goffman writes “recipients of actions”, not of talk. In other words, the action could be the talking, but also the listening, so that those roles are partly mutually constitutive.

Goffman also stresses that the terms *speaker* and *hearer* are not very apt because it is often sight rather than sound that is significant in the organization of social encounters and situations (1979: 6). Although languages do have, for instance, terms of address, vocatives, pronouns, imperatives to signal who is a ratified participant and who is a bystander, even in face-to-face encounters, this information often depends on sight: through gaze organization, through embodiment, spatial arrangement and so on. In CMC, the visual becomes even more important; often it represents the only channel.

Goffman’s framework of participation remains the most influential deconstruction of the speaker and hearer dichotomy to date. However, “Goffman has often been accused (...) of substituting arrays of categories for both proper theory and proper observation” (Levinson 1987: 162-163). For this reason, Levinson (1987) explicates the roles more thoroughly and adds categories on empirical grounds. Goodwin points out that Goffman’s framework represents a “typology of participants” (2007: 17) rather than an analysis of how participants construct their different footings moment-by-moment in the unfolding talk. Furthermore, the two sides “inhabit separate worlds” (Goodwin & Goodwin 2004: 124) since different types of analytic models are used to describe them. Often, the speaker is privileged while embodied forms of participation by other actors are neglected (Goodwin & Goodwin 2004). For instance, the lack of gaze by recipients of talk may influence the unfolding production of speech (Goodwin 1986). Other influential models used such as those for audience design (Clark & Carlson 1982 and Bell 1984) or affordances (Gibson 1977 and Hutchby 2001) will be explicated in individual papers in this Special Issue.

This publication attempts to shed light on the many ways that media shape both the behavior of the recipient(s) and the producer(s) of text. The notions of addressivity and ratification will be revisited in the light of mediated forms of communication. In order to address these theoretical issues, however, some of the following questions will have to be answered empirically through minute descriptions of different media settings or forms of communication. Research questions that will be addressed include: How does a given technological, multimodal media environment constrain or fuel certain kinds of participation? How can we account for the production/reception roles in classic mass media as well as all kinds of internet-based forms of communication, such as weblogs, social network sites, discussion fora, etc.? How are split audiences aligned to and how do speakers signal which partial audience they are addressing at any given time? How do audiences/users exploit the different potentials of bi- and unidirectionality? Can these technological environments be conceived as authors in this framework? Importantly, which linguistic or other means are used for these different purposes?

The Special Issue will open with a paper by Ruth Ayass, who considers the ways in which different types of media may act as shields, that is how books, mobile phones, ear plugs and other media devices can be used to signal a user’s readiness or reluctance to participate in communicative interaction. Drawing upon interactionist approaches to face-to-face contexts and Goffman’s notion of involvement shield, Ayass explores the concept

of (non-) accessibility in a variety of media settings by means of a photographic ethnography. She observes that the individual affordances of different media support users to a varying extent in displaying and/or modulating their (non-)availability for communicative interaction. In extending and refining Goffman's notion of involvement shield, Ayass models an approach to participation in media that gives weight to the reciprocal and discursive process of displaying (non-)accessibility.

The focus in Sabine Jautz' paper lies on a specific form of mass media communication, namely radio phone-in conversations. More specifically, Jautz presents a qualitative study of the linguistic means that reflect the format 'radio phone-in' by addressing its specific contextual and media-dependent configurations. Via the analysis of a large data sample taken from the British National Corpus, the author explores the ways interactional partners in different talk-back radio shows address the organizational and technical set-up, such as the program's timeframe, the different participants or more general technical particularities. With reference to Burger's notion of communicative circles and Bell's idea of audience design, Jautz deconstructs radio phone-ins as multilayered broadcasting formats that are characterized by multiple and/or shifting forms of address and that call for a modification/enhancement of Goffman's categories of participation in talk.

Marjut Johansson considers the consequences of the shift of print-newspapers to digital formats. Applying Goffman's notion of 'frame' to online newspapers, she explores how the interpretation schemes offered by the digital environment stimulate users to participate in the selection, perusal and sharing of editorial content. Her discussion is based on a small sample of major French and British online newspapers and investigates how different activities are framed for users on two different levels, namely the newspapers' opening pages and the newspapers' multimodal articles that frequently combine written texts with pictures and/or videos. Although Johansson focuses on a particular form of mass media communication, in fact, she explores a broader domain of media participation: online reading and the semiotic and interactional literacy practices involved.

Looking into a different online environment, the video-sharing website YouTube, Michael Boyd explores the creation of participatory roles in text commenting practices on online video content. Scrutinizing a small sample corpus of threaded comments on Barack Obama's Inaugural Address, Boyd gives quantitative and qualitative evidence concerning the different linguistic means that create participatory roles in text commenting practices. His detailed theoretical and empirical approach provides new insights into how commenters engage in constructive and/or disruptive discourses and how they identify addressees in multi-participant, asynchronous conversations. In suggesting a proposal for a YouTube participatory framework, Boyd stipulates the platform's multi-leveled production/reception format and sets it in relation to traditional participatory framework categories.

Like Boyd, Maximiliane Frobenius examines participation in YouTube, but puts the focus on a different genre, namely on video blogs, also called vlogs. Starting from the observation that talk in vlogs lacks an immediately present audience, the question is raised how vloggers involve their viewers. Her empirical study demonstrates that a speaker (vlogger) talking into a camera employs a variety of lexical and prosodic means as well as bodily resources to create an imaginary audience and thus assigns various participant roles to vlog recipients. Applying Clark and Carlson's (1995) role assignment model to a small sample of vlogs and the comments posted in response, Frobenius sketches a variety of

genre specific features, namely forms of address, directives, questions, and prosody, which designate user roles while aligning asynchronous, mediated monologues with lively and entertaining multi-participant conversations.

Participation in social media is also the key focus of Volker Eisenlauer, who investigates (semi-)automated text generation processes in social network sites. In this study, Eisenlauer demonstrates that the software service 'Facebook' enables users to engage in discourse patterns that are severely constrained by the particular environment of the medium, so much so that it can be characterized as a "third author". Applying the concepts of technological, functional and relational affordances, this research describes what kinds of standardized actions are available to users of this service, how these communicative properties enable and constrain social interaction, and how users adapt to them. The impact of the text automation processes of services like 'Facebook' on the interaction between profile owners is understood as part of a setting that calculates and standardizes human behavior. The Special Issue will close with a discussion piece by Ian Hutchby who highlights the findings of the articles collectively against the background of language use and participation in technologically mediated communication<sup>1</sup>.

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