JEZIKOSLOVLJE

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Addressing the notions of convention and context in social media research

The aim of this paper is to discuss two fundamental pragmatic notions, convention and context within the framework of communication on social media. By presenting an overview of theoretical perspectives on the two notions and analyzing concrete examples from Twitter we put forward the importance of the dynamic and constant synergy between convention and context in communication on social media, but also in communication in general. Examples of tweets (Twitter posts) will show that the core principles of traditional communication – conventionalization and contextualization – remain strong and are visible in concrete realizations through new 'communicative items' such as hashtags (i.e. *#onokad*) and handles (i.e. *@username*). The technology behind the media opens up new avenues of creativity for the participants (users, speakers), yet the creativity remains situated within 'contexts' (micro- and macro-level) and perpetuated (or dismissed) through mechanisms of 'conventionalization'. Pragmatics is shown to be a highly relevant and appropriate scholarly field for comprehensive research into language and communication on social media.

Key words: convention; conventionalization; context; hypertext; social media; Twitter.

1. Introduction

In this paper two notions will be discussed. The core notion is convention, while the notion of context will be discussed in relation to the notion of convention, that is, within the framework of the synergy of the two terms. This synergy is considered here as a core process not only within the discipline of pragmatics, but in the wider area of research into the multilayered phenomenon of communication as well. The realm of social media is the source for examples that will be analyzed in

this paper because of their widespread use and constant change of the technology of the media, which results in dynamic and constantly updated features. They therefore provide abundant material for studying language in interaction, among other within the framework of the two notions relevant in this paper

2. Convention and context

Context and convention may at times be difficult to delineate in the sense that it is not easy to precisely identify their key features. However, at the same time they can be viewed in their surface simplicity. Namely, both convention and context rely on social interaction, they emerge from it, they are developed and perpetuated in it, and they are dismantled in it (often only to be rebuilt a second later). The difficult part is how to fully identify and interpret these two notions in the sense of yielding multilayered analyses within the realm of social interaction.

Convention is a well-known and studied term across a range of scholarly disciplines. One interesting definition comes from the philosopher David Lewis (Lewis 1969: 42):

> A regularity R in the behavior of members of a population P when they are agenst in a recurrent situation S is a **CONVENTION** if and only if, in any instance of S among members of P,
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> (1) everyone conforms to R:
>
> (2) everyone expects everyone else to conform to R:
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> (3) everyone prefers to conform to R on condition that the others do, since S is acoordination problem and uniform conformity to R is a proper coordination equilibrium in S. (emphasis mine)

Lewis states (1969: 42) that this is a rough definition and then goes on to explore various examples of "sample conventions" such as two people meeting together, phone conversations, men in a rowing boat, driving on the left vs driving on the right, party dress code, etc. (1969: 43–51). These are all examples of social interactions or social behavior, or to be more precise, interactions and behavior molded by social norms/social code. Social interaction and social behavior do not exist in a vacuum: they are created by members of a community through language in use. Social code, or social norms, are structured through language and relayed through language. As elementary as the above definition may seem, it does have all the keywords that relate to language in interaction as well – 'regularity', 'members of a population', 'agents', 'recurrent situation', 'conform', 'expect', 'coordination'. No

matter whether the subject of our analysis is written language, spoken language or language used in various online platforms, the core of the convention remains the same – a frequently tacit mutual knowledge and understanding of the norms and expectations in a communicative situation among members of a population, who are also agents, active participants in the situation. Of course, we might argue that two persons engaged in a conversation might want to, for whatever reason, switch to a language or a variety that people around them do not speak or understand; still, the point remains that even these two persons will best understand the language they use among themselves to fulfill the purpose of their communication at that given moment.

Furthermore, Davidson (1979) discusses Lewis's definition and provides relevant interpretation, that is, he puts forth 'regularity' as the most important feature of Lewis's analysis of convention: "Regularity in this context must mean regularity over time, not mere agreement at a moment. If there is to be a convention in Lewis's sense (or in any sense, I would say), then something must be seen to repeat or recur over time." (Davidson, 1979: 14) We agree that conventions are established over time and that agreement in a moment may, with time, lead to a convention, but does not instantly equal convention.

But, let us now move from philosophy of language towards linguistics, and of course pragmatics. Vega Moreno (2007: 219) states that "although linguistic communication may involve a great deal of creativity it also involves a great deal of convention or standardisation", which she exemplifies by listing routine formulas we use such as similes, compounds, proverbs or idiom strings. Moreover, Vega Moreno claims that creativity and convention should be seen as forming a continuum (Vega Moreno 2007), rather than a dichotomy, which makes perfect sense as the two do form a synergy in human communication and social interaction. Furthermore, she goes on to discuss 'pragmatic routines' (2007: 221), which she sees as specific cognitive procedures that help the hearer speed up the inferential process (2007: 228). Vega Moreno directs us towards the cognitive perspective on convention, the roots of which lie in Langacker's observations of 'conventional imagery' (i.e. Langacker 1987: 39–40, 47, 51, 111; Langacker 1991: 294). Apart from naming grammar and lexicon "storehouses of conventional imagery, which differs substantially from language to language" (Langacker 1987: 47), Langacker highlights variability as inherent property of convention in the sense that speakers can construe any situation in different ways and in a way that cannot be predicted in absolute terms – those images that are chosen and conventionalized do not follow absolute regulations (Langacker 1987). He adds that "(...) we must recognize the role of conventionality per se, reflecting the vicissitudes of language use and

change." (Langacker 1987: 51).

Langacker's account of convention and conventionality takes into account the role and impact of context as well (Langacker 1987: 158):

> From the encyclopedic nature of contextual meaning, that of *conventional meaning follows fairly directly. The latter is simply contextual meaning that is schematized to some degree and established as conventional through repeated occurrence.* Whatever systems are invoked for the contextual understanding of an expression must be imputed as well to its conventionalized meaning, provided that they are constant in the series of usage events leading to its conventionalization. (emphasis mine)

Speakers of a language who are at the same time participants in the culture of that language have acquired and learned the grammar, the lexicon and the communicative contextual properties of the language and its respective culture. By using a language within various contextual frameworks they participate actively in conventionalizing a vast array of linguistic items. And it is not only linguistic items that are prominent in a certain context, it is a whole interplay of different layers of meaning, activity, behaviors, knowledges:

> Contextual meaning is clearly encyclopedic in scope and cannot be determined algorithmically as a compositional function of component lexical items. For one thing, it includes particulars of the speech situation that are not linguistically coded. More importantly, the contextual meaning of an expression is often an *emergent property:* though perfectly evident in context and *consistent* with the meanings of the lexical items employed, it goes beyond anything computable or predictable from their individual conventional values. (Langacker 1987: 157)

This inherent variability and non-predictability is frequently stressed, albeit not in the sense of making language use and interaction complicated and cumbersome, but rather as a strong claim for creativity and complexity of language and thought (Langacker 1987 and 1991).

Still in line with the cognitive perspective, Croft and Cruse (2004) stress the dynamic connection between convention and context which then reflects in the actual construal. They claim that there are certain construals with special default status that exist as such because of the strength of the constraints, which in turn means that additional cognitive effort is required to impose some other construal (Croft and Cruse 2004: 102). Furthermore, they highlight the context sensitivity of conventional constraints in the sense that conventional constraints may favor certain construals in particular contexts (Croft and Cruse 2004: 102).

The synergy of convention and context as used by speakers of a language who are participants in the culture of that language is a stable but at the same time dynamic phenomenon dependent on speakers and the "repeated occurrence" (Langacker 1987: 158) of linguistic items that they perform. Croft and Cruse (2004: 102–103) bring forward 'linguistic context' as one of several contextual constraints, which is then subdivided into previous discourse, immediate linguistic environment and type of discourse (genre, register, field of discourse), physical context, social context, and stored knowledge.

When discussing the synergy between convention and context, Clark's notion of common ground (Clark and Brennan 1991; Clark 1992, 1996) has to be mentioned as well. Simply put, common ground presents mutual understanding between speakers on the subject of any given interaction which relies on "a more general *reciprocity principle*" (Clark 1992: 345), meaning that the speaker believes that his addressees can understand what he means on any given occasion based on the common ground between them. Furthermore, "Common ground is important to any account of language use that appeals to "context." (Clark 1996: 92); Clark then goes on to explain and exemplify what makes common ground and how all elements included in common ground are perceived, shared and understood among speakers in a given event ('mutual' is a highly frequent attribute here) (Clark 1996). One thing that should be put forth is his description of "coordination devices" (Clark 1996: 99):

> The point holds for any coordination device – not only explicit agreements but ***conventions***, precedents, perceptual salience, and all the rest. The principle is this: Principle of shared bases. *For something to be a coordination device, it must be a shared basis for a piece of common ground.* (emphasis mine)

When analyzing and discussing context it is essential to clarify what context we are referring to. Context is a term that is found in a whole range of disciplines, from anthropology or sociology to linguistics, the meaning of which ranges from larger, societal levels to smaller, micro-levels of communities of speakers and individual speakers as well. If we look into the notion of context in various fields of linguistic research, we might not find convention mentioned or defined explicitly, but the key words and notions used in explaining what makes up the notion of context will be easily recognized; it would therefore be safe to say that the notion of convention entails from these explanations.

It is only natural to start with Bronislaw Malinowski's account of the 'context of situation', which offers both theoretical and methodological insight into the matter (Malinowski 1923; Malinowski 1935). Malinowski claims that: "the real linguistic

fact is the full utterance within its context of situation" (Malinowski 1935: 11), which at first sounds perfectly simple and clear. He then further elaborates his approach as a combination or a synergy of ethnographic descriptions and linguistic analyses, the goal of which is to provide language with its cultural context and culture with its linguistic context (Malinowski 1935). When J. R. Firth borrows the notion of 'context of situation' from Malinowski it is to describe or present it as "a suitable schematic construct to apply to language events" (Firth 1957: 182). Firth views this construct as different from grammatical categories, but similarly abstract in nature. M.A.K. Halliday views context as essential to linguistic study in the sense that the system of language cannot be viewed in isolation from context, that is, from social processes (Halliday 2003: 78):

> To exclude the social context from the study of language is, by implication, to exclude human interaction and the exchange of meanings from the scope of serious enquiry. ... The situation, interpreted as situation type, or "social context", is a representation of the semiotic environment in which interaction takes place. Such concepts — social context, environment, interaction — are of the same theoretical order as "knowledge" and "mind". Interaction explains knowledge no less than being explained by it.

Van Dijk's sociocognitive approach recognizes both dimensions, social and cognitive, as salient to creating, understanding and communicating context. What is more, the explications of the relationship between convention and context analyzed from a cognitive linguistic perspective earlier in this paper point out the 'encyclopedic nature of contextual meaning' – and that is 'knowledge'. The above quote from Halliday (2003: 78) also points to 'knowledge' in the sense that he gives value to social processes as influential processes in the use of language and in human interaction in general, just as fundamental as 'knowledge' and 'mind'. Van Dijk introduces the notion of context viewed as mental models. Furthermore, he explicitly recognizes 'knowledge' to be "one of the 'cognitive' properties of context, and hence in our approach they are part of context models." (2003: 95). Mental models are subjective inasmuch as they are interpreted by the speaker's own understanding of the discursive features and the situation itself. However, mental models are at the same time constrained in a purely objective sense, i.e. the actual physical setting of a communicative situation (Van Dijk 2008: 60). Furthermore, mental models are created and built upon from various experiences, out of which schematic models are then extracted – setting , participants and practice have thus become stable categories; abstract structure becomes common structure for all participants, but individual differences are still present (Van Dijk 2008: 61). One needs to point out the concept of subjectivity in mental models, meaning that there are differences

between individual experiences recognized and appreciated as a strong part of mental models, because these models are not just a list of facts, but also a web of emotions, stances, attitudes, beliefs (Van Dijk 2008: 61).

To sum up, the synergy of convention and context is both a stable and dynamic phenomenon, best observed and analyzed in the interaction between language and culture and the influence the two have on each other. It is not an easy task to clearly state who governs what or what governs who in this dynamic synergy of convention, context, language and culture. Nevertheless, this task is far from insurmountable; what it needs is careful observing and analyzing of patterns and models as well as the underlying mechanisms that make them stable, but at the same time help them transform into something new when the need arises or the right conditions are met.

3. Social media

'Social media' has become a household term, regardless of whether the person who uses the term knows what makes up social media, how they are used, and who uses them. In the simplest of terms, the reality of social media is a vast area of diverse users, for various purposes, employing textual, visual, and audio input to relay the message and respond to the reactions. Still in the simplest of terms, users are private and corporate, under their real name or anonymous, presenting their real identity or creating a whole new one, developing their own patterns of use of the various types of existing input. If we move from simple casual descriptions towards empirically based explications, Michael Mandiberg can give us a brief but insightful overview of what all makes the term as well as its possible definitions (Mandiberg 2012: 2):

> Despite the widespread participant engagement and scholarly interest in this phenomenon, it has no definitive name. It has been given many names, a selection of the most prevalent of which include the corporate media favorite "user-generated content," Henry Jenkins's media-industries-focused "convergence culture," Jay Rosen's "the people formerly known as the audience," the politically infused "participatory media," Yochai Benkler's process-oriented "peer production," and Tim O'Reilly's computer-programming-oriented "Web 2.0". Each of these terms defines one separate aspect of the phenomenon and does so from the specific point of view of the different actors in this system. *In order to understand the system as a whole, it is necessary to understand each of these separate terms and the perspective it comes from*." (emphasis mine)

This quote does not only present several perspectives among over 20 of them presented in the book *Social Media Reader* (2012), but it also shows how difficult it is to provide a succinct definition of what social media are. A simple search on Google Scholar will retrieve over 2 million results on 'social media', that is, of social media related articles and chapters from a whole array of research fields, thus showing the inherent complexity of this phenomenon. The various perspectives and analyses of social media include the diverse features that make up social media, the questions that arise from the development and the use of social media, all tackling the issue of reinventing or reconceptualizing the traditional mechanisms of human communication and activity (e.g. Kapidžić and Herring 2011; Schoen et al. 2013; Androutsopoulos 2014; Bou-Franch and Blitvich 2014; Bucher 2015; Carr and Hayes 2015; Dynel and Chovanec 2015; Herring and Androutsopoulos 2015; Gill 2017; Heyd and Puschmann 2017 and many more). Social media have become an inextricable part of the 21st century world; existing cultures and communities communicate and perform their daily lives and activities via social media, and in that way they are creating new cultures and communities.[1]

In this paper, we will focus on specific items in interaction on social media – the hashtag # and the symbol @ – and through examples from a popular social media platform Twitter we will show how conventionalization is the underlying process in communication.

Twitter is a multimodal online platform for creating and sharing information, ideas and opinions in textual and audiovisual format, with a distinct profile of its own. It was first launched in 2006 and has grown steadily since then. Its core contrast to the famous "predecessor" Facebook[2] is its short form – tweets (Twitter

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[1] Of course, whenever talking about, reading or studying not only social media but the overall phenomenon of the Internet, it is important to consider that the impact and the influence of the Internet depend on very technical foundations – (mobile) broadband and adequate devices, which are not equally available in the world. It is also important to check the year of the publication of concrete research and analyses – in Internet years, a three-year period can mean a world of change in technology, and then consequentially in user activity.

[2] Facebook was first launched in 2004, but with limited membership to Harvard students. The network has expanded over time, first across other higher education institutions, as it was primarily geared towards connecting university students, and then in 2006 it has opened its membership to anyone over 13 years of age. Facebook has since grown into a massive enterprise and a many-layered phenomenon that has had a lasting impact on a whole spectrum of issues and areas of human activity, from economy and corporate affairs, global and local community burning issues to everyday personal lives of its users. And, last but not least, the concept of communication among people.

posts) have until recently consisted of only 140 characters and now the character count is 280. Twitter supports textual and audiovisual input. Despite the smaller number of users in relation to Facebook, this social network has nevertheless gained great popularity and has made an invaluable impact in various social movements in the past years around the globe. When compared to Facebook's lay-out and features, Twitter is much simpler in some aspects, but primarily it is closer to a kind of an interactive dialogical form. Several changes have been made to the format; apart from the already mentioned change in the number of characters, the star symbol which was used to fav (mark as *favorite*) posts or users, was changed to the heart symbol, which is now called Like. The latter was not met with approv-al, but rather with harsh criticism from the users, more or less along the lines of Twitter losing its specific features and identity (the option Like had already been an established feature on Facebook).

4. The analysis

The aim of this paper is to discuss notions of convention and context in relation to communication on social media. Two items will be observed and analyzed, the hashtag # and the 'at' symbol (@).

The data for this study were manually collected over a period of one month (September 2017). Tweets with hashtags and @ symbols were selected randomly by browsing through various accounts. No data were collected from accounts that were made private, that is from accounts with restricted access (private profiles). The initial list of examples contained over 500 posts. The sample used in this paper consists of 100 posts.

4.1. *Hashtags*

Hashtags were first introduced as a means of making a post searchable and helping it gain more visibility with a wider audience of particular social media. A hashtag consists of a string of characters – the symbol # (hash character) followed by a word, phrase, acronym, i.e.: *#Brexit #EU #politikaHR #TGIF* (acronym stands for *Thank God Its Friday*) *#giveaway #knjiga #ljeto* and so on.

Moreover, there is a core property of hashtags that needs to be explained in more detail, and that is *hypertextuality*. As mentioned above, hashtags were first in-troduced as a means of making a post searchable and more visible. The medium it-self, or rather the technology behind it, enables these properties. Furthermore,

"Hashtags are used because they function to bring together multiple conversations and at the same time facilitate a multiplicity of conversations by being retweeted (i.e., forwarding a message to one's followers) by/to other users." (Albu & Etter 2016: 7). Albu and Etter provide this explanation in their account of organizational use of Twitter in which they aim "to illustrate how Twitter interactions (hashtags) become hypertexts that simultaneously coproduce an organizational actor and act as a pastiche of the organization" (2016: 5). Jucker (2002: 29) described hypertext as "a non-linear text that consists of nodes, that is to say textual units, and links between these nodes." Before Jucker, Fritz (1999) brought forth the issue of coherence in hypertexts. Fritz considered texts to be linear sequences of textual elements that perform linguistic acts and hypertexts to be networks of textual units, sometimes with hierarchical structures (Fritz 1999: 222). These hypertextual networks are not non-linear, but rather multi-linear in the sense that the user can more or less choose any direction (Fritz 1999: 222). While traveling through hypertext, through this network of textual units, the user can choose the "self-selected path" (i.e. browsing) or they can be provided with a "pre-defined path" (i.e. online teaching materials) (Fritz 1999: 223–224). In other words, the hypertextuality of hashtags means that a single hashtag can organize and mediate a particular conversation about a topic, which in turn means that a single hashtag can organize and mediate a community, however fleeting and heterogenous, but still a community. The technology behind the hashtag makes it possible to click through huge lists of related posts, separate threads, users who created, shared and liked those related posts – and not only click through, but respond to each if we wish to do so.

For the purpose of this study, the examples were classified into *topic-related* hashtags and *creative* hashtags. Topic-related hashtags are clear, informative and straightforward in relation to the rest of the post (both to its textual and audiovisual content). Creative hashtags are broader in scope in the sense that they cover a range of various hashtags used as a comment of sorts or an expression of feelings towards the topic of the post or as wordplay that is tagged in the post. This distribution in part follows the lines of Wikström's distribution (2014) of examples which he uses in order to prove the communicative function of hashtags. Wikström's distribution comprises 8 categories of hashtags (2014: 130): *topic tags*, *hashtag games*, *meta-comments*, *parenthetical explanations/additions*, *emotive usage*, *emphatic usage*, *humorous and playful usage*, and *memes and popular culture references*. Wikström further states (2014: 130) that his classification is heuristic since he does not intend to offer a taxonomy, but rather to make sense of his data. His distribution is more developed, while our distribution is, of course, adapted to the objective of the analysis in this paper, which is to make sense of the data in light of the synergy be-

tween convention and context. With this in view, we used a simpler classification of *topic-related* hashtags and *creative* hashtags. The underlying assumption is that the fundamental principles, or fundamental notions of convention and context, are at play and create a strong synergy for all human communication (in this case, communication via new communication technologies), and they do so regardless of the complexity of classification.

We will start with two examples of topic-related hashtags we found in our data:

(1) *#Zagreb is one of the best cities to visit during winter time, despite the cold!* http://ow.ly/HWJI30fnowT

(2) *#Zagreb će 30. rujna ponovno biti dio svjetske priče u sklopu projekta Bijela noć! #bijelanoc #VisitZagreb. Više na: bit.ly/2fSPU2S*
'On September 30, #Zagreb will again be the part of the White Night #NuitBlanche #WhiteNight #VisitZagreb More at: http://bit.ly/2yb99PZ'

Both examples were taken from 'specialized' accounts, the first one from a travel blog's Twitter account and the second one from the Zagreb Tourist Board Twitter account. The hashtag presents the actual physical setting (Zagreb) and the topic of the posts is the city of Zagreb. Both examples would work well without the hash character (or, in the second example, without the other two hashtags as well); the sentences are already clear and coherent, nothing is lacking. However, the hashtags are there for a reason – topic relatedness and searchability. The hashtags are straightforward, they do not provide any additional comment nor do they bring any affective dimension into the two posts. The exclamation points are the only element of the affective dimension; the superlative form in the first example can also be viewed as a marker of relaying emotion(s) about the topic.

The purpose of the two Twitter accounts in examples (1) and (2) is predominantly to inform their followers as well as gain visibility and attract new followers, hence the clarity and topic-relatedness of content and clear, straightforward hashtags. In private accounts (not specialized or institution-related), *#Zagreb* was also predominantly used as a topic-related hashtag. In the following examples the hashtag was used to situate the post, that is, to provide spatial reference to the content of the post. However, in example (3) *#zagreb* may be a topic-related hashtag, but it also gains an additional affective layer because of the surrounding creative hashtags and the overall context of the post:

(3) *#Fantastic #sky #abovemycity #zagreb! #lovezagreb #loveyourcity #inspireyoung*… https://www.instagram.com/p/BZlhm5vB18j/

(4) *#Zagreb morning from the 17-th floor - just before a new sunny day in capital* 🌱🌸*@Croatia_hr @zagreb_tourist #croatia* (followed by an embedded photo of the city)

Again, the hashtags are used for a reason, which can be discerned especially if we focus on the combination of hashtags as well as the extra visual input. If we were to focus only on the *#zagreb* hashtag, we could claim then that it is again basically a topic-related hashtag. However, the combination of hashtags, especially in the first example, brings to the front the affective dimension of the post – positive feelings towards the city, enhanced in this post by the combination of expressive, intense hashtags and a lovely photo of the sky above. In the second post, it would be safe to assume that the user is having a great morning and wishes to share the view of the sunny morning in the city as well as the overall positive disposition (flower emojis inserted in the post). If stripped of the hash characters, the two sentences would still be rather understandable, if perhaps a bit odd at first glance.

A hashtag that was very widely used in September 2017 was #HurricaneRelief. The hashtag was used as a straightforward topic-related hashtag in order to situate the post within the wider framework of concise informative posts on hurricane relief efforts. However, the same hashtag was also used to organize and include the topic of hurricane relief activities within the wider conversation and exchange of opinion or feelings on the matter and perhaps even within the wider political framework:

(5) *On #PuertoRico: Call NOW to tell #Congress extend #JonesAct waiver & lift ALL restrictions on #hurricanerelief shipping.*

(6) *Every #NYPD Precinct, Transit & Housing command will accept #HurricaneRelief donations. Disasters affect us all but together we can help.*

(7) *And THIS is the ignorance & lack of education our country suffers. I seriously have no words! #PuertoRico #PuertoRicoRelief #HurricaneRelief #HurricaneMaria #facepalm #Friday*

Example (7) is interesting because of its intensity, that is, its strong affective dimension. The user expresses intense opinion within a lengthy exchange on the topic of the status of Puerto Rico – use of upper case letters, exclamation mark after the comment, first person use in the comment (personal stance), expression of being left with no words to react to a given situation. What is also important to highlight in this example is the use of the hashtag *#facepalm*. *Facepalm* is a hugely popular word among avid Internet users, it instigated numerous popular Internet

memes,[3] and is often used in spoken discourse as well. It denotes a very strong feeling of disagreement, disbelief, or even contempt, at what has been said and done. We are interpreting a combination of hashtags here, topic-related and creative ones *(#facepalm)*, that function well together and help interpret the post or rather, situate it in a particular context, both on the micro-level (current exchange with other users) and macro-level (current political situation with focus on education). This follows Wikström's emphasis (2014: 130) that the hashtags are not mutually exclusive. Combinations of hashtags are endless. The medium itself is a constraint, but the imagination and the creativity of the users are vast.

Here are several other examples to reinforce the claim that hashtags are not mutually exclusive. Besides, these also display how the original technical property of searchability and the communicative property of hashtags go hand in hand in actual posts:

(8) *Razveselite se ovaj #vikend. :) #Ekonomija, #poduzetništvo, #menadžment, #marketing, #psihologija, #PR: http://www.knjizaraum.hr . #knjizaraum*

(9) *#ootdmagazine #runway #fashionphotography #fitgirl #art #layout #beautiful #happiness #incredible #picture*

(10) *How Did One Man #Calculate The #Circumference Of #Earth #Centuries Ago? : https://www.scienceabc.com/nature/eratosthene-calculate-circumference-earth-240-bc.html ... #science*

Example (8) is a post taken from a bookstore's Twitter account, and it primarily promotes buying books and reading as a nice weekend activity. It is hard to pinpoint only one hashtag as topic-related, it is rather the whole combination that is topic-related and helps the follower understand the point. Example (9) is taken from a website account, and it is accompanied by a lovely photo of Venice. The post promotes a magazine, but the combination of hashtags seems particularly random – runway, fitgirl, art, happiness… words listed, or tagged, to be more precise, in a seemingly random manner, communicating everything and nothing? We would claim here that the combination of hashtags is not random at all; it is intentionally diverse and creative. The hashtags are carefully selected from a large array of topics so as to raise the visibility of the user account and help obtain new followers (and consequently, earn money). The words used in hashtags can all be placed under the very general topic of 'lifestyle', a prominent topic of numerous social media

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[3] "The Internet meme is a form of visual entertainment, which can manifest in many different formats, such as a still image (for example an image macro), an animated GIF, or even a video." (Börzsei 2013: 5).

accounts. Example (10) displays a very peculiar and creative combination of hashtags – separate words in a question are tagged, not only words in initial or end position in the post. The hashtag #science in the end position in the post could be considered to be the "traditional" type of a topic-related hashtag. The rest of the tags might fall under our category of creative hashtags, or if we wish to be more precise, under Wikström's category of "emphatic usage"(2014: 143). The hashtags are both creative and emphatic in the sense that they display a specific type of use and the post easily draws attention while browsing, as the unusual form of the question is highly noticeable in the actual physical layout. Besides, the post in example (10) promotes a website that communicates science, and by using creative hashtags the authors of the post very actively seek attention from the audience (again, raising visibility raises website traffic which then raises earnings).

The following example is a post with another seemingly random, but nonetheless creative hashtag.

(11) *seems like kylie is getting ready for an event #lifeofkylieonmute*

If we click on the hashtag, the search will show only one result – this particular post. However, this does not mean that the post is completely unintelligible. The hashtag does call for specific knowledge about a reality show and its main star, but it is still situated within the wider realm of popular culture, or, to be more precise, celebrity culture. The whole post and not only the hashtag can be considered as random, but if viewed as a whole, situated within proper context and realized through existing conventions of both the linguistic and the communicative structure, the post has accomplished its communicative objective. The user is currently watching the TV show on mute, has caught a glimpse of whatever was going on and "reported" it on her account. The post would work just fine without the hashtag, albeit it would not be very informative (on the other hand, it is not informative either if one has not heard of the show in question, Life of Kylie).

Another interesting example is the hashtag *#onokad*[4] (Engl. *#thattimewhen* or *#thatmomentwhen*). It is a creative hashtag used to denote a flashback of or a

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[4] The Croatian hashtag *#onokad* consists of the hash character and the combination 'ono'+'kad' (Engl. 'that'+'when'). As stated in the brackets, the English translation would be *#thatmomentwhen* or *#thattimewhen*. Even a simple *#when* would make for an acceptable direct translation. However, the Croatian hashtag originates, or rather, is a translation of a very frequent "construction" in online communication, 'that moment when', used in social media posts and comments, as catchphrase in memes, in messages etc., so even if a simple 'when' makes for a better translation, 'that moment' is implied as an integral part of an internet culture meme. In turn, 'that moment when' could be traced back to 'that awkward moment', but this quest is outside of the scope of this paper and is not rele-

glimpse into an event or a situation, positive or negative, usually one that the person feels strongly about. The hashtag *#onokad* is often followed by hints of or just outright sarcasm. The primary function here is expressive, to convey feelings, i.e. it bears affective meaning for the user, and possibly for the audience as well if they relate to the user and the situation they have posted about. All three examples could be used without the hash character and make fully acceptable sentences, with or without 'ono'. However, it is exactly the hashtag #onokad that is used, and not #kad (#onokad has become a conventionalized item):

(12) *#onokad je petak, a ja radim za vikend*.
'#when it's Friday, and I'm working for the weekend'

(13) *#onokad moram čekat na red u kuhinji da uzmem kavu, jer si njih troje istovremeno radi doručke* 💀
'#thatmomentwhen I have to wait for my turn in the kitchen to get some coffee, because the three of them are separately making breakfast at the same time'

(14) *#onokad ljudi gledaju previse američkih filmova I serija, pa mi donesu sliku žnj rezolucije I traže da ju povećam u nebo. Nisam CSI*
'#when people watch too many US shows and movies, and they bring an image with shitty resolution and ask that I enlarge it. I'm no CSI'

We will end this list of examples with a funny example of a hashtag that can be said to be partially topic-related – if we are to be very generous in our interpretation. This hashtag does not exactly carry any specific informative input, or affective one for that matter, nor does it perform any communicative function in relation to the rest of the sentence in the post:

(15) *i have a cough and my #toe hurts*

If we click on the hashtag *#toe*, we will get hundreds of posts, but not all are related to the part of the human body (the user reports that the toe hurts); for example, many of the posts in the search are related to the Theory of Everything (acronym: TOE, hence the hashtag *#toe*). The hashtag is topic-related because the user did report about the toe, but there was no need for the hash character to stress this current state. The user could have used uppercase letters, exclamation marks, emojis, but the user chose the hashtag – which makes this a creative hashtag. Again, we sug-

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vant for the analysis; not to mention that tracing back the origins of various phenomena on the Internet, including certain linguistic structures, is not easy or straightforward and the question remains how and why tracing the actual source of an online phenomenon/variation is pertinent to the objective of the analysis.

gest here Wikström's emphatic usage as well because the user did make a deliberate choice to use it and single out that particular word.

What started as a feature to help search through tweets about a certain topic has developed into a prolific creative field for users to play with, create and manipulate words, events, trends and so on. Hashtags have entered everyday online communication, ranging from private posts or messages and advertising tools, to triggers for broader social movements. You can use a hashtag to make your post more searchable or you can use a hashtag to comment on whatever is going on in the post, text or picture/video. Hashtags have become a means of communication, not only online, but in face-to-face interaction as well, as a sarcastic or just a casual comment on a situation or event – of course, almost exclusively among those speakers who are familiar with the conventions of social media communication (i.e. Wikström 2014; Caleffi 2015; Zappavigna 2015). However, it should be stressed again that the focus of this paper remains on hashtags as used on social media.

As seen from the analysis so far, the convention of *searchability* has over time developed into another convention – a communicative convention. Users communicate topics, feelings, emotions, mood, make comments, or just play with words and tagging because the medium allows for it – and so does the communicative convention in the community of users. The communicative convention is realized as a new communicative item. For the time being, we refrain from calling tagging and hashtags a linguistic convention and linguistic items, although it can be argued that hashtags carry pragmatic properties. It is for this *pragmatic* reason that we prefer the names communicative convention and communicative item – as the use of hashtags pertains to the concrete use in context, depends heavily on the context of situation and on the context of the overall communicative culture on social media. The overall communicative culture on social media is highly dynamic and rules are almost made on the go. Even though the fundamental rules of communication are translated from traditional communication, the medium itself is ever-changing and as such greatly influences actual communication.

This is exactly why it is difficult to discuss conventional and contextual constraints in the analysis of hashtags as communicative items, if they are considered only within the framework of analyses and explications discussed earlier in this paper. The 'system' here is much more fluid and the factors that can be regarded as constraints are different – they can include technical properties (i.e. number of characters), editorial policy (safety teams monitor, review and block offensive posts or spam posts), and last but not least, the users themselves who can actively create and endorse, or obstruct and invalidate hashtags. However, *difficult* does not

mean *impossible.* The synergy of convention and context is also at play when using hashtags as well. But, let us turn to the next set of examples for the moment, after which we will try to bring forward the theoretical framework in relation to these new communicative items.

4.2. @ - *the 'at' sign*

The 'at' sign (@) is common in e-mail addresses and on social media. In email addresses the symbol reads *located at*. On social media, @*username* is usually called 'handle' and it denotes the user (and their account): "The @ sign is used to call out usernames in Tweets: "Hello @twitter!" People will use your @username to mention you in Tweets, send you a Direct Message or link to your profile."[5] When a user mentions you (@*yourusername*) in their tweet, you will be notified of the mention.[6] You can then respond to the post, but a response is not mandatory. The @ can also be used as a means to extend the text of the post when you wish to relay a longer text. The overall text then resembles a conversation with oneself, but is easily readable and understandable. The @ can also be used to reply to yourself at a later moment regarding whatever topic you wrote about in your previous tweet.

Here are some examples of using Twitter handles:

(16) *#onokad u poluvremenu @RKZagreb vs @pickhandball sretneš ekipu iz srednje iz razreda...* #titus #gtb #8gimnazija #titusbrezovacki #zagreb
'#thatmomentwhen in half-time @RKZagreb vs @pickhandball you run into your highschool friends… #titus #gtb #8gimnazija #titusbrezovacki #zagreb'

(17) *Za 20 min u Pressingu @N1infoZG o izborima u Njemačkoj. Bacite oko ;) #N1inf*
'In 20 mins in Pressing @N1infoZg elections in Germany. Watch ;) #N1info'

(18) *We made #BadLipReading. #CareerGoals #Narcos #Netflix … https://youtu.be/0eKdNcP4xrM via @YouTube*

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[5] Twitter Glossary at https://support.twitter.com/articles/166337#.

[6] Interestingly enough, the word *mention* also bears specific meaning and conversion is visible in this context, but it is still completely transparent: "Mentioning other accounts in your Tweet by including the @ sign followed directly by their username is called a "mention". Also refers to Tweets in which your @username was included." Twitter Glossary at https://support.twitter.com/articles/166337#.

(19) *@FitVineWine is totally part of a balanced health/wellness journey, right?*
If Im gonna drink, I should drink w/ less guilt/ regret #fitlife

The above examples show how using Twitter handles is not only aimed at actual real persons, but at all user accounts on Twitter. The role of the @ is to call out, or call for, a specific user/account, however the response is not always expected nor is it mandatory.[7] Hence, the word *mention*. Users are *mentioned* and that is the gist of the handle. Of course, when the post is framed as a question or a request, an answer is expected, but it will not always appear.

The @ does provide an approximation of an actual conversation, or some type of dialogic event. The simple layout of Twitter also helps in visualizing, and then conceptualizing the exchange as a conversation.

The hypertextuality as the property of hashtags should be reintroduces at this point as a property of handles as well. Again, by clicking on the handle we enter a network of users and posts, that is a network of textual elements (Fritz 1999) or nodes (Jucker 2002). We the users create communities, transform them, bring them together into networks. We do the same thing with posts as we create posts, then dialogues, then conversations at micro- and macro-level as well. Besides, we choose the "self-selected path" (Fritz 1999), that is, we choose what to click next according to our current objective or intention – but not only click and browse, but also post, respond and directly communicate.

Now that we have mentioned 'conversation' as one of the goals of communication on Twitter, we need to mention a study by Huang et al. (2010), who showed that (hash)tagging is not only organizational, but it also displays conversational properties:

> Tagging practices in Twitter are an example of a new type of tagging, which we have chosen to call conversational tagging. In conversational tagging, the tag itself is an important piece of the message. The tag can either serve as a label in the traditional sense of a tag, or it can serve as a prompt for user comment.

So, what Huang et al. (2010) claim is that the hashtags themselves might call for or elicit a reaction or response from other users. These same users will then react to the hashtag or re-use it and perpetuate it further. Any hashtag can be used as an organizational tag or a conversational tag, or even both at the same time. Huang et al. (2010) discuss an interesting issue regarding hashtags – tagging was introduced by

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[7] Of course, it is good practice to react/reply to mentions, especially in the context of official accounts of public figures, various institutions, corporations, brands etc.

the members (Twitter users), not by administrators, and at first it may have seemed to be a weird choice considering the limited amount of characters and the more or less ephemeral nature of the medium itself. However, the practice slowly caught on and is still considered a distinct feature of Twitter (and social media in general). This goes to show that the users themselves saw the need to somehow not only organize or coordinate their tweets, but to also make them visible in order to prompt a response – to 'communicate with', not only 'communicate at'.

The combination of these two, 'communicating with' and 'communicating at' can be seen in the use of the @ as well – depending on the actual tweet and its context, the user might only be sending someone a particular message via his particular tweet or might be mentioning them because they are relevant in that context. However, the user may use the @ to really call out another user and demand a concrete reaction via a tweet.

5. Concluding remarks

Let us now bring together the theoretical insights with the findings in the analysis. Regarding the synergy of convention and context, we stated that we would still be careful in claiming that hashtags can be viewed as linguistic items or linguistic markers, and we offer instead the term communicative item. The reason for this is that we cannot view hashtags as linguistic items in the traditional sense (i.e. morphological unit, syntactic unit or structure). In turn, it then becomes difficult to consider conventional and contextual constraints if these constraints are (predominantly) viewed as part of the linguistic structure. However, hashtags and the @ can be said to pertain to language if language is viewed as a system of communication. And communication as such relies on convention and context; convention not only in the sense of linguistic convention, but of conventions of a community or a culture and context in the senses of both context of situation and context of culture. Hence, the constraints that are discussed in relation to the linguistic structure can be *translated* into the structure of communication. Here we would emphasize van Dijk's insistence for including 'knowledge' as a significant property of communication. Knowledge can then be related to the encyclopedic knowledge that Langacker puts forth. We do find Langacker's view of conventional meaning as "simply contextual meaning that is schematized to some degree" (Langacker 1987: 158) to be somewhat simplified, however we fully agree with the quality of "schematized" as the underlying principle. Furthermore, in his account on coherence in hypertexts, Fritz includes knowledge, that is, he lists "knowledge management" as one of the guiding principles of producing and using coherent texts and dialogues

(Fritz 1999: 221). In line with this, Fritz then claims in relation to managing hyper-texts (1999: 223) that "users make sense of a path or a segment of a path [...] by drawing inferences on the basis of their local and general knowledge." He then fur-ther mentions several instances of knowledge use and knowledge management, both at the level of particular situation or communication or at the macrolevel of knowledge as a comprehensive complex phenomenon (Fritz 1999). This recurrent mention of 'knowledge' is indicative of the cognitive, social and cultural layers that make up the dynamic interaction between language and communication.

As already stated, it is the synergy of the two notions that is important, not re-solving the issue of what comes first, convention or context. And if we can ob-serve, analyze and discuss the synergy of convention and context and the con-straints that influence them in relation to the linguistic structure, the structure of communication, or more broadly, the structure of culture, then perhaps this synergy can be viewed at a more abstract level, as a dynamic guiding principle of all or most of human behavior and activity – including language, of course, as the pre-dominantly human behavior and activity. We would underscore convention and conventionalization in this synergy as the stronger principle because it is connected with finding patterns and models and then repeating them in proper contexts, and then in ever new contexts, reshaping them or dismissing them altogether when nec-essary or when the repeated occurrences lead towards such resolution.
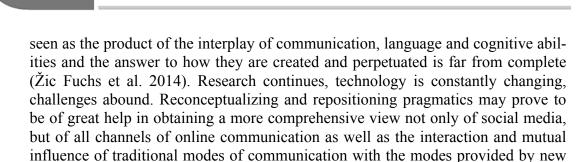
By naming hashtags and handles communicative items, we emphasize the im-portance of actual use, concrete real-life examples of communication. The fact that in this paper we do not yet call them linguistic items does not in any way hinder the very explicit need for further elaborating the pragmatic perspective of social media. As seen from the examples above, the posts contain sentences that would work just fine not only in a casual conversation or a written text, but even in more formal conditions (examples (1), (2) (6), and (10) with additional slight adjustments). The examples we selected follow the linguistic conventions of the languages involved (English and Croatian) as well as the communicative conventions of the media they are created in. Apart from the already established conventions of the now "prehis-toric" text messages (short forms, minimal or no punctuation, emoticons), the de-velopment of technology has enabled these conventions not only to subsist, but to be further developed with new generations of users, especially young users who abundantly employ their creativity of expression and everyday immersion in the online world (emojis, stickers, gifs, audiovisual input; *lol* that can now be consid-

ered as a pragmatic particle[8]). In addition, the hypertextual nature of the hashtags and the handles also contributes to developing, transforming and expanding traditional communicative conventions in this vast new area and community. Hypertextuality opens up not only new modes of actual communication, but it also brings forward new avenues of conceptualizing communicative contexts and underlying conventions. Technical developments that had already been known and used (the # and the @) were appropriated by the users and the medium itself to serve a particular function in communication. Yes, the posts could work just fine without the hash character or without the 'at' symbol, but the users still deliberately choose to use them for whatever purpose – to relay straightforward information, show intense feelings, provide a brief comment within the limited 280-character post, or even link the post to a larger conversation about the topic. The various studies mentioned in this paper show a range of views which share pragmatics as the key notion or key framework. Even if they do not explicitly use the term 'pragmatic', the relevant pragmatic notions and discussions are still recognizable in the texts. The theoretical framework laid out in Section 2 is a dynamic succession of scholarly thought on the two notions that seems to bring forward similar keywords – 'expect(ation)', 'recurrent', 'repeated occurences', 'variability', 'schematic construct', 'social processes', 'culture', 'knowledge' and so on. All these keywords are easily translated into the field of pragmatic research on social media as well. Participants in traditional communication engage in these new forms of communication made available by new communication technologies. The fundamental principles remain the same: we expect mutual, shared knowledge in a communicative situation, we communicate our intentions, we use linguistic and communicative conventions, that is, conventionalized structures and conventionalized norms and rituals in a particular context of situation within a particular context of culture. Communication via social media does not need a completely new pragmatic framework, but rather a reconceptualization of the existing theoretical and methodological approaches within this field. This tendency has been consistently pointed out in the papers by the Croatian authors as well (see Žic Fuchs 2002; Žic Fuchs & Broz 2004; Žic Fuchs & Tuđman Vuković 2008; Žic Fuchs et al. 2013). In these four papers different realizations of the newly developed conventions in communication technologies were analyzed and explained both as the property of the technology itself, but also of the pragmatic/discourse influence. Furthermore, these new conventions are

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[8] As argued in Professor McWhorter's TED Talk, based on a corpus of messages, *lol* has become a pragmatic particle, a marker in the text, a reaction, but not one of Laughing Out Loud, more of a smile, or a casual nod of approval. (https://www.ted.com/talks/john_mcwhorter_txtng_is_ killing _language_jk/transcript).

seen as the product of the interplay of communication, language and cognitive abilities and the answer to how they are created and perpetuated is far from complete (Žic Fuchs et al. 2014). Research continues, technology is constantly changing, challenges abound. Reconceptualizing and repositioning pragmatics may prove to be of great help in obtaining a more comprehensive view not only of social media, but of all channels of online communication as well as the interaction and mutual influence of traditional modes of communication with the modes provided by new communication technologies.

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O POJMOVIMA KONVENCIJE I KONTEKSTA
U ISTRAŽIVANJIMA DRUŠTVENIH MEDIJA

Cilj je ovoga rada raspraviti dva temeljna pragmatička pojma, konvenciju i kontekst, u okviru istraživanja jezika i komunikacije u društvenim medijima. Pregledom teorijskih promišljanja pojmova konteksta i konvencije te analizom konkretnih primjera s Twittera ističemo važnost stalne dinamične sinergije između pojmova konvencije i konteksta u komunikaciji putem društvenih medija. Primjeri postova s Twittera pokazuju snagu tradicionalnih ključnih principa u jeziku i komunikaciji – konvencionalizacije i kontekstualizacije, koji se ogledaju u novim 'komunikacijskim jedinicama' kao što su *hashtag* (npr. *#onokad*) i *handle* (npr. *@korisnickoime*). Pritom tehnologija medija sudionicima (korisnicima, govornicima) pruža pregršt novih kreativnih mogućnosti koje se realiziraju unutar kontekstualnih okvira, i na mikrorazini i na makrorazini, te se odvijaju (ili ih se rješavamo) upravo uz pomoć ili na temelju konvencionalizacije. Najzad, u radu se ističu snaga i nužnost pragmatike i pragmatičkih istraživanja jezika i komunikacije u društvenim medijima.

Ključne riječi: konvencija; konvencionalizacija; kontekst; hipertekst; društveni mediji; Twitter.