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INTRODUCING RELATIONAL WORK IN FACEBOOK AND DISCUSSION BOARDS

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Abstract

This paper functions as the introduction to the special issue on 'relational work in Facebook and discussion boards'. We position our research endeavors within interpersonal pragmatics (see Locher and Graham 2010), by reviewing literature on politeness, impoliteness and relational work in the context of computer-mediated communication. Foregrounding the relational aspect of language, we are particularly interested in establishing the connections between politeness, face and linguistic identity construction. We then position the four papers that form this special issue within this field of research. Two papers contribute to the study of relational work on discussion boards (Kleinke and Boes; Haugh, Chang and Kádár) and two deal with practices on Facebook (Theodoropoulou; Bolander and Locher).

Keywords: Computer-mediated communication; Interpersonal pragmatics; Relational work; Politeness; Impoliteness; Linguistic identity construction; Facebook; Discussion fora.

1. Setting the scene

This special issue focuses on the relational and interpersonal side of language use in computer-mediated contexts. This stance within pragmatics can be termed 'interpersonal pragmatics', although the term does not stand for a separate theory or a new set of methodologies (Locher & Graham 2010). Rather, since the aim is to explore "in what ways social actors use language to shape and form relationships in situ," researchers can draw on a variety of established and innovative theoretical and methodological positions in order to focus on the "interpersonal or relational side of *language in use*" (Locher & Graham 2010: 1, emphasis in original). The studies presented in this special issue are thus firmly rooted in the field of pragmatics¹ and, to various degrees, they draw on and make use of both theoretical work in politeness/impoliteness research and studies on identity construction. However, our curiosity is equally inspired by the question in what ways relational practices are conducted and formed specifically in computer-mediated

¹ We follow the European understanding of pragmatics as "a general cognitive, social, and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behaviour" (Verschuere 1999: 7, quoted in Jucker & Taavitsainen 2012: 293), rather than the "Anglo-American view of pragmatics [which] is largely restricted to topics such as implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and deixis" (Jucker & Taavitsainen 2012: 293).

environments. This special issue presents four articles on Facebook and discussion fora that give center stage to the negotiation of relational meaning online.

In the introduction to the 2010 special issue on "Politeness and impoliteness in computer-mediated communication" of the *Journal of Politeness Research*, the following research desiderata were listed:

- (a) to continue to develop the latest discussion on politeness with respect to the question of norms of appropriateness;
- (b) to further the current theoretical discussion on the interconnectedness of politeness, face and identity construction; and
- (c) to work with empirical data on computer-mediated communication and discuss politeness issues by paying attention to the specifics of the online context [...]. (Locher 2010: 4)

These same research goals also drove the authors of the present articles. In addition, this special issue contributes to the study of "the multilingual Internet" (Danet & Herring 2007), by working with data derived from different cultural contexts and different languages, including Standard Modern Greek, English, German (Swiss German and Standard German varieties), and Mandarin. In section 5 we position the contributions and describe which of the areas were addressed in what manner. Before doing so, we will first briefly introduce research on 'politeness, impoliteness and relational work' (section 2), the connection between 'politeness, face and identity construction' (section 3) and the 'online context in light of relational practices and im/politeness effects' (section 4).

2. Politeness, impoliteness and relational work

Research on politeness was inspired by the pragmatic turn which postulated that natural language is full of *variation* in need of explanation. For example, there are phonological features (accents), vocabulary and syntax that might index social and/or regional belonging and there are also different ways of expressing oneself depending on who addresses whom in what context and for what purpose (Hymes 1974). The study of the fact that the same speech act (for example a request) can be expressed in different linguistic ways (for example more or less directly, with or without mitigation) reveals that we use language to do more than simply impart information; we also shape our relationships by means of language use. The importance of the relational or interpersonal side of language use has long been recognized in linguistics (see, e.g., Halliday 1978; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson 1967). This research gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s through the seminal work of Lakoff (1973), Brown and Levinson (1978/1987), and Leech (1983) (see Locher 2012, for an introduction to the research history). Building on Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, this early work attempted to find pragmatic *rules* that explain language in use. 'Politeness' was seen as a technical concept that explains motivations for why people adapt linguistic expressions in different situations when addressing different interlocutors. Lakoff (1973: 298) proposed "rules of politeness" that affect language in use: (a) "Don't impose," (b) "Give options," and (c) "Make [alter] feel good—be friendly". Brown and Levinson (1987) identified the factors power, social distance and the ranking of an imposition within its

cultural context that together influence the 'weightiness' of a particular face-threatening act (FTA). The argument is that a speaker will take into account this weightiness and will then choose a linguistic strategy that corresponds to the level of the perceived face threat. The more face-threatening the act is considered to be, the more indirect the linguistic rendition of the act (up to refraining from speaking at all) will be. When choosing the appropriate strategy, the speakers will attend to the addressee's need for distance or involvement or both. Leech (1983), who added a Politeness Principle with six maxims (tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy) to his pragmatics framework, also emphasized indirectness in particular. He claimed an association between indirectness and politeness by saying that "indirect illocutions tend to be more polite (a) because they increase the degree of optionality, and (b) because the more indirect an illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be" (Leech 1983: 108). All three approaches by Lakoff, Brown and Levinson, and Leech can be characterized by the attempt at establishing generally valid rules for linguistic use that might ultimately explain the observed linguistic variation.

Since then, these early approaches have been refined as well as criticized (for overviews, see, e.g., Eelen 2001; Okamoto 2010; Sifianou 2010; Watts 2010). While Brown and Levinson's approach especially is still widely used, more recent work highlights the dynamics of interaction and the variability of social norms in different communities of practice. For example, many have noted that equating indirectness with politeness is a non-tenable generalisation since there is no linguistic form that is exclusively tied to politeness in all contexts at all times (e.g., Fraser 1990: 233). The search for general, all-encompassing 'rules of politeness' has thus moved to the background. Today scholars tend to focus on the emergence of norms of appropriateness against which interactants make judgments on politeness and to explore the link between these norms and relational effects. This shift goes hand in hand with a move from a theoretical, etic understanding of the concept of politeness (second order) to an interest in understanding what the interactants themselves consider polite (first order, emic).

In addition, the research field has broadened its scope to include impoliteness and rudeness phenomena as well. While early studies on impoliteness (e.g., Culpeper 1996; Kienpointner 1997; Lachenicht 1980) worked within the Brown and Levinson paradigm by mirroring politeness strategies with general impoliteness strategies, the more recent work contributes to and furthers the same theoretical and methodological discussions as outlined for politeness research (cf. Bousfield 2008, 2010; Bousfield & Locher 2008; Culpeper 2010, 2011). Ultimately this means that many researchers are now interested in relational work more generally, i.e., "all aspects of the work invested by individuals in the construction, maintenance, reproduction and transformation of interpersonal relationships among those engaged in social practice" (Locher & Watts 2008: 96); a domain which can be studied with a multitude of methodologies, as argued above in relation to the concept of 'interpersonal pragmatics'.

Returning to research desideratum (1) listed above, it should now be clear that, if one wishes to understand politeness phenomena in a particular context, this also involves the study of the norms of appropriate interaction in that particular, situated environment. Since many of the new computer-mediated communication (CMC) forms are novel to the interactants themselves, researchers can thus often witness the negotiation of norms and see discussions about appropriate behavior on a meta-level

(see, e.g., Graham 2007, 2008; Jones, Schieffelin & Smith 2011; Locher 2006, 2011; and the discussion in section 4).

3. Connecting politeness, face and identity construction

We propose that, when adopting a stance as a starting point that allows us to study all aspects of interpersonal communication, we can draw on traditional politeness research, but we are also free to connect concerns about politeness (or impoliteness for that matter) with related research fields. These are primarily the negotiation of face wants more generally and the study of identity construction.

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) introduced a definition of 'face' and 'face-threatening act' to the politeness field. The concept of 'face' was taken from Goffman (1955), who defined it as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for [himself/herself] by the line others assume [he/she] has taken during a particular contact" (1967: 5). Face is a social phenomenon in that it needs uptake: "[W]hile [his/her] social face can be [his/her] most personal possession and the center of [his/her] security and pleasure, it is only on loan to [him/her] from society; it will be withdrawn unless [he/she] conducts [himself/herself] in a way that is worthy of it" (Goffman 1967: 10). Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) developed this idea and distinguished between a positive (involvement) and negative (independence) aspect. According to them, negative face is "the want of every 'competent adult member' that [his/her] actions be unimpeded by others," while positive face is "the want of every member that [his/her] wants be desirable to at least some others" (Brown & Levinson 1987: 62). In the meantime, there is extensive literature that discusses the different sides of the concept of face (see Sifianou 2010). While there is no general agreement on a definition of the term as such, it is nevertheless considered a crucial part of the different approaches within interpersonal pragmatics. For example, Spencer-Oatey (2005), who uses the term "rapport management" and works on intercultural communication, differentiates among different types of face (situation-specific, pan-situational, individual face, group). Locher and Watts (2005, 2008), who write of the already mentioned "relational work", base their understanding on Goffman's original definition, and Arundale's (2010) "face constituting theory", part of his overall approach to the study of relating, highlights the idea that face is "conjointly co-constituted by interlocutors in interactions" (Sifianou 2010: 26). 'Face' is thus a central concept for all of these approaches. While politeness is still present as a concern, the negotiation, creation and maintenance of relations and the study of the interpersonal aspect of language use has attained center stage.

The study of identity and language, in contrast, has a longstanding research tradition that is not primarily linked to politeness studies. While there are many different ways of approaching the topic (see, e.g., De Fina 2010 or Mendoza-Denton 2002 for overviews), the one of interest to us here is the interactional approach that sees identity as emerging in interaction. Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 586) define identity as "the social positioning of self and other" and argue that this social positioning does not take place in a social vacuum, but is rather intersubjective and emergent. Thus, identity is "intersubjectively rather than individually produced and interactionally emergent rather than assigned in an a priori fashion" (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 587). This view is also shared by Thurlow and Mroczek (2011: xxxiv), who claim that "[n]o identity work happens outside of, or without a view to, relationships; acts of identity are also always

acts of comparison, social distinction, and othering". The two research strands on relational work and identity construction can be combined in a straightforward manner since identity is by definition relational and because both approaches emphasize negotiation and emergence. Indeed, the aspects of face and identity have been argued to be closely connected (Locher 2008; Spencer-Oatey 2007a/b). The need to explore this link in more detail was postulated as a research desideratum above: "to further the current theoretical discussion on the interconnectedness of politeness, face and identity construction" (Locher 2010: 4).

4. The online context in light of relational practices and im/politeness effects

We have come a long way from early work on language in CMC that, as Herring (2007) notes, treated CMC as "a single, homogeneous genre or communication type". Androutsopoulos (2006a: 421) identifies two further research strands since this first wave. The second gives more attention to "the interplay of technological, social and contextual factors in the shaping of computer-mediated language practices", and the third ongoing wave of research on language use in CMC highlights "the role of linguistic variability in the formation of social interaction and social identities on the Internet". Here we can draw a parallel between research on CMC and research on politeness, which has undergone a similar development as outlined above. Thus, rather than arguing that communication in computer-mediated settings is influenced by medium factors only, approaches that are critical of this computer-deterministic approach argue that social factors have an equally important impact on communication (Herring 2007). In addition, the dynamics of interaction are foregrounded and variability is embraced as a subject rather than considered to be noise. This latter perspective is also shared by Georgakopoulou (2006) and research presented in the collections by Thurlow and Mroczek (2011) and Tannen and Trester (2013).

In his discussion of sociolinguistic CMC literature, Androutsopoulos (2011: 278) highlights the importance of *variation* for sociolinguistics and argues that scholars have used established methodologies and expanded them in order to predominantly research variation in CMC data in the classic (variationist/sociolinguistic) sense, focusing on "written representations of phonological variation between standard and dialect or formal and casual style," grammatical variation, style-shifting, and the influence of gender, region, age, and genre on variation. While the points listed by Androutsopoulos refer to linguistic output/features, variation can also be studied from the perspective of the effects that the variation causes, i.e. from a pragmatic point of view. According to Jucker and Taavitsainen (2012), sociolinguistics has long neglected the study of pragmatic variables (see also Schneider & Barron 2008). Interactants play with different possibilities of expressing themselves in order to achieve interpersonal effects and to use language creatively in identity performance. It is this entry point to the study of variation that is of interest here. Androutsopoulos (2011: 280) points out that

some researchers [...] have used ideas from pragmatics, conversation analysis, stylistics, and interactional sociolinguistics in order to study new media not primarily as technological containers of speech, but as sites of users' social activities with language. In such approaches, the classification of language use on dimensions of variation is

complemented by an attention to the situated exploitation of linguistic difference, which doesn't shy away from the importance of singular, unrepeated instances of linguistic difference as used in a strategic yet nonquantifiable way. Likewise, the correlation with predefined social categories is replaced by a focus on identities as discursive constructions that claim and negotiate by drawing on a variety of semiotic means [...].

The particular perspective of this special issue is to merge this research interest in situated language practices with a theoretical perspective of politeness theories and identity construction. In our opinion, this research aim does not preclude any decisions about quantification. It is left to the researcher to find a methodological mix that suits the research question best, and that furthers both our understanding of the observed phenomenon and theoretical insights (see Georgakopoulou 2006; Thurlow & Mroczek 2011: xxi-xxii; Bolander & Locher 2014).

It goes beyond the scope of this introduction to review all the work on computer-mediated interaction that can be related to interpersonal issues. Instead, we will briefly discuss themes and developments in the field that can be linked to our special focus: The importance of social relationships online; the notion of community and community building; the negotiation of norms online; and work that has either a pronounced politeness or identity construction focus. According to Baym (1998: 35),

[e]arly scholarship on [CMC] was oriented toward organizational uses of computing. The primary questions asked were how CMC could enhance work processes such as group decision-making. Conducted primarily in organizations and laboratories, this research generally argued that computers are inherently inhospitable to social relationships. Scholarship has finally caught up with what many users of CMC had long known: Social relationships thrive on-line and have since the beginning of interactive computing.

Such early scholarship, as exemplified, for example, by 'social presence theory', 'the lack of social context cues hypothesis' and 'media richness theory', argued that CMC is lacking in social context cues, i.e., in para- and extra-linguistic features, and took this apparent lack as a prime reason for the predominance of information transfer over the development of personal relationships (Walther 1992; see, for example, Kiesler, Siegel & McGuire 1984 for a description of the 'cues filtered out' theory). Later approaches, however, have repeatedly demonstrated that the construction and maintenance of interpersonal relationships is central to computer-mediated interaction (see, for example, Walther 1992, 1996 for a description of the 'hyperpersonal' approach). Relational work can even take precedence over the transfer of information, as exemplified for example in Goutsos' (2005) research on two-party chats between Greek and English speakers, and by the advent of Social Network Sites, which explicitly cater to the interpersonal (see, Bolander & Locher 2010; boyd & Ellison 2007; Jones, Schieffelin & Smith 2011; Lee 2011; Locher & Bolander 2014, 2015; Page 2011).

The recognition that relationships online are no less real than relationships offline has inspired research on interpersonal issues in CMC in a number of areas. One of these is 'community'. Often under-defined in the literature, differences between offline and online communities, for example with regard to the relative presence or lack of physical proximity, have triggered debate as to whether the term is applicable to the virtual world (Androutsopoulos 2006a: 422). Some claim that virtual communities do not "qualify as communities in the sociological sense", while for others, differences

should rather caution us to conceptualise "online communities [...] in their own terms as 'communities of some sort'" (Androutsopoulos 2006a: 422).

In attempts to define virtual community, interpersonal concerns play an important role. They surfaced as early as 1993, in Rheingold's (1993: 5, emphasis added) influential definition of community as "*social aggregations* that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient *human feeling*, to form *webs of personal relationships* in cyberspace". Interpersonal concerns also appear in taxonomies which list characteristics designed to help scholars determine whether a social aggregation can be labelled a community. Thus in Baym's (1998: 62) discussion of community, for example, she draws attention to the importance of "group-specific meanings", "group-specific identities", "relationships" and "norms", all of which are constructed by participants and emergent in social practice. Interpersonal elements are also highlighted in Herring's (2004) framework, in which relationships (past and present), norms, roles, common practice and "self-awareness of group as an entity distinct from other groups" (Herring 2004: 352) are fundamental to the operationalisation of the concept of community.

In addition to literature which discusses definitions of community and community building on a metalevel, there is also research which works with conceptually related notions, such as 'community of practice' (Wenger 1998; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992). Thus Clarke (2009), for example, explores how interpersonal relations are discursively constructed in an online community of practice. Working predominantly with critical discourse analysis, and using data from online discussion fora, Clarke studies the co-construction of "community and communication" (Clarke 2009: Abstract) on the part of young Emirati women in the United Arab Emirates. Luchjenbroers and Aldridge-Waddon (2011), and Stommel (2008) also use the concept of community of practice in their study of online settings, yet whereas the former article explores politeness and face-threats in email interactions, the latter has a more methodological aim, namely to assess how conversation analysis and community of practice can be used for the study of online communities. Furthermore, a review of the literature shows that scholars are exploring a variety of interpersonal behaviours in connection with virtual communities (see also Kollock & Smith's 1999 edited volume *Communities in Cyberspace*), for example, issues of identity (e.g., Cotrău 2005), language choice and intertextuality (e.g., Ifukor 2011), power and social control (e.g., Reid 1999), membership and norms (e.g., Stommel & Koole 2010), and humour (e.g., Hübler & Bell 2003). Moreover, these issues are being researched in a variety of different computer-mediated settings, for example, emails (Hübler & Bell 2003), fora (e.g., Cotrău 2005; Clarke 2009; Ifukor 2011), online support groups (Stommel & Koole 2010) and mailing lists (Hübler & Bell 2003).

Much of this research points to the importance of norms, which emerge as communities are constructed. The role played by norms in connection with language use online began to be acknowledged parallel to the increasing recognition of the importance of social factors for language use, as mentioned above; for example, norms constitute one of eight social factors in Herring's (2007) faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse. When speaking about norms, one is addressing questions of appropriateness and acknowledging that what may be considered appropriate behaviour in one community may not within another. In addition, norms also raise questions of the meanings of practices and the negotiation of these meanings

through language use. Norms are negotiated over time and can be contested. This is, for example, demonstrated by Graham (2007, 2008), who explores the active negotiation of norms in connection with disagreement, politeness and group identity in an email community of practice. Other studies have addressed the emergence of norms in different online settings. Jones and Schieffelin (2009), for example, focus on young people's discussions of meanings of and preferences for styles of texting in YouTube commentaries; Haugh (2010) works on a meta-discussion found in New Zealand media on 'when is an email really offensive'; Angouri and Tesliga (2010) explore the discussion of different norms evident on two Greek discussion fora; Darics (2010) demonstrates how norms emerge in a workplace community of practice that meets only by means of CMC (from telephone, video conferencing, email, message boards, to instant messaging interactions); Nishimura (2010) compares disagreements in two communities on Japanese bulletin board systems that reveal different implicit norms; Jones, Schieffelin and Smith (2011) explore instant messaging exchanges in which interlocutors discuss the emergence of norms in connection with the authoring of Facebook status updates; and Weber (2011) draws attention to the role played by conflict in the socialisation of newcomers into a Usenet newsgroup for survivors of sexual abuse.

Research on computer-mediated environments also explores how interlocutors construct identities, position themselves and perform styles when they communicate with one another (in virtual groups or communities), a key theme in this special issue. As outlined in Androutsopoulos' (2006a) introduction to a special issue on "Sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication", early research on identity was predominantly socio-psychological in its approach (see, e.g., Turkle 1995); "[v]iewed this way online text is a 'mask' (Danet 1998) that participants put on to assume multiple virtual identities that differ from their 'real-life' identities" (Androutsopoulos 2006a: 423). Moreover Androutsopoulos (2006a: 423) claims that "less attention has been paid to the processes by which people establish member identities in the frame of an online community", although there are some exceptions he draws our attention to, predominantly within the field of language and gender (see, e.g., Herring 1993, 2000, 2003). The last half a decade has, however, seen an increase in research which explores the performance of identity. Two of the articles published in the 2006 special issue, for example, focus on the emergence of identity through social practice: Androutsopoulos (2006b) explores code choices in connection with the portrayal and negotiation of identities in seven German-based diasporic websites, and Del-Teso-Craviatto (2006) uses conversation analysis to study how sexual desire is negotiated in Spanish and English dating chats. Other examples of research which prioritise processes of identity construction and the performance of style in CMC include Locher and Hoffmann (2006), who analyse the emergence of an expert identity in the context of advice-giving in an American Internet advice column; Androutsopoulos (2007), who addresses the performance of style, or "doing hip-hop" amongst users of German-speaking hip-hop websites and discussion boards; Aarsand (2008), who analyses how seventh-graders "deploy online (MSN Messenger) and offline activity frames in identity performances" (Abstract); Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008) and Bolander and Locher (2010), who focus on the construction of identity on Facebook personal profile pages, and Bolander and Locher (2010), who also look at the writing of status updates in Facebook; Rasulo (2008), who studies the notion of "identity formation" as a process involving both the construction of individual as well

as community identities in 1824 messages posted in two online professional communities; Georgakopoulou (2011), whose article explores positioning and stance taking in a corpus of Greek and English private emails; Papacharissi (2011), who examines social network sites from the vantage point of identity, culture and community; and Page (2011) who addresses the use of storytelling for the performance of identity in a wide range of computer-mediated settings, including social network sites, Twitter and wikis.

There are also many research papers on CMC which have relational practices such as conflict or solidarity building as their main topic (e.g., Baym 1995, 1996; Bolander 2012, 2013; DuVal Smith 1999; Hardaker 2010; Kollock & Smith 1996; Korenman & Wyatt 1996; Langlotz & Locher 2012; Smith, McLaughlin & Osborne 1997; Zappavigna 2012), and a growing body of research on CMC and politeness, and to a lesser extent impoliteness. Here it is worth mentioning both earlier research inspired by the Brown and Levinson paradigm (e.g., Harrison 2000; Herring 1994; Simmons 1994), as well as later research which explores politeness and impoliteness from a more discursive perspective (e.g., Fayard & DeSanctis 2005; Hongladorum & Hongladorum 2005; Graham 2007, 2008; Angouri & Tseliga 2010; Kouper 2010; Darics 2010; Haugh 2010; Nishimura 2010; Planchenault 2010; Upadhyay 2010; Yus 2011; Neurauter-Kessels 2013). Many of these studies also tackle interpersonal and relational issues; a subset in connection with identity (Fayard & DeSanctis 2005; Hongladorum & Hongladorum 2005; Upadhyay 2010; Planchenault 2010; Yus 2011). Thus Upadhyay (2010), for example, explores identity and impoliteness in online reader responses, and Planchenault (2010) analyses identity in relation to solidarity in an online community of transvestites.

Much of the later research on politeness and impoliteness (and identity) works with the assumption that what is considered polite and impolite can vary (pragmatic variation) from one type of communicative encounter to another, as evaluations are contingent upon expectations, which themselves are intricately tied to norms of appropriateness for the community and the activity in question. It is important to recognize that norm expectations derived from non-CMC contexts will influence interaction. Indeed, often we cannot clearly split the norms interactants bring to the keyboard with those that emerge in online interactions. However, in order to understand this emergence better, both social and medium factors are argued to have a vital influence on social practice in online settings. It is the attempt to combine an exploration of interpersonal and relational issues with identity and politeness, a relatively uncharted research area, while searching for salient patterns across and within different modes of CMC, which constitutes the central focus in this special issue.

5. Positioning the articles: Relational work in Facebook and discussion boards/fora

The four articles in this special issue take up issues relating to 1) politeness and norms of appropriateness, 2) connections between politeness, face and identity construction and 3) specificities and effects of the online context (cf. Herring's 2007 medium and social factors). They do so from a variety of different angles and by focusing on different computer-mediated contexts, notably, Facebook (Bolander & Locher; Theodoropoulou) and online discussion fora (Haugh, Chang & Kádár; Kleinke & Böös).

The data are drawn from different cultural contexts and different languages, including Standard Modern Greek (Theodoropoulou), English (Bolander & Locher; Kleinke & Bös), German – both Swiss German (Bolander & Locher) and Standard German (Bolander & Locher; Kleinke & Bös) varieties –, and Mandarin (Haugh, Chang & Kádár).

The issue starts with a study by Theodoropoulou, entitled "Politeness on Facebook: The case of Greek birthday wishes". Theodoropoulou uses data from the Facebook 'walls' of 400 native speakers of Greek, aged between 25–35; data from five informants is studied in more detail. Specifically, she focuses on the writing of and responses to the voicing of birthday wishes, a widely endorsed practice on Facebook. The motivation for this article is Theodoropoulou's long personal experience as a Facebook user, and the accompanying observation that the majority of her native Greek speaking Facebook friends do not only respond to a birthday wish by thanking their interlocutors, but by reciprocating the wish, either by writing a status update, or by responding individually to the wishes. Taking this observation as her point of departure, Theodoropoulou addresses two research questions. Firstly, she asks how speakers of Modern Greek respond to birthday wishes, and secondly, how these responses serve to construct politeness on Facebook. Although the practice of birthday wishes is predominantly text-based, Theodoropoulou takes other modalities into account; her exploration of "the ways birthday wishes are received semiotically" encompasses an analysis of text, but also a consideration of the use of emoticons, pictures and videos. Her research is based on two theoretical frameworks: Watts' (2003) distinction between 'politic behavior' and 'politeness', and the concepts of 'contextualization cues', 'frames' and 'footing', as drawn from the tradition of interactional sociolinguistics, particularly Schiffrin's (1994) approach. Theodoropoulou's study can be seen as contributing to the broader question of how norms of appropriateness are constructed in specific computer-mediated contexts, as she discusses which of the practices are expected, i.e., are 'politic', and which go beyond expectations, and hence contribute to the construction of 'politeness'. Working with the methodology of discourse-centered online ethnography, in the sense of Androutsopoulos (2008), Theodoropoulou couples participant observation with ethnographic interviews, a methodology which "foregrounds the reflectivity of both the researcher [...], and the participants", and allows her to take account of a wide range of background information about the participants and their relationships that would otherwise remain unknown.

Her results show that responding to birthday wishes was a common practice amongst the 400 informants, with 65% of all wishes (n=6,977) receiving a response. While the verb *ευχαριστώ* ('thanks') and its variants was the preferred means of response being used in 69% of all cases, the expression of well wishes, through the verbal phrase *να 'σαι καλά* ('may you be well'), was also widely used (31%). These responses were typically coupled with address terms, notably the use of first names and diminutives, and the particle *μου* ('my'); means through which intimacy is constructed between the interlocutors. As Theodoropoulou notes, such intimacy sets the stage for politeness. In the subsequent part of the response to the birthday wishes the respondents perform face-enhancing behavior, which tends to take the form of reciprocal wishes of health and happiness. While this practice is not unknown to Theodoropoulou, in her experience of Greek oral communication it generally only occurs amongst family or intimates. Since in Facebook it appears "regardless of the closeness of the people involved",

Theodoropoulou argues that the reciprocating of wishes goes beyond what is expected and thus constitutes politeness.

The second article in the special issue also takes up the topic of norms of appropriateness, but this time the focus is on intergroup rudeness. In their study titled "Intergroup rudeness and the metapragmatics of its negotiation in online discussion fora", Kleinke and Bös address two research issues: Firstly, they explore how intergroup rudeness constitutes a means of constructing in- and out-group identities, and secondly, how such rudeness is negotiated through metapragmatic means in the course of the discussion. Their research thus combines first- and second order approaches to politeness. These are operationalised in their study through the combined investigation of the use of rudeness tokens by participants (second-order) and metapragmatic utterances that contribute to the negotiation of norms (first-order). The data they use consist of two sample threads taken from a larger corpus of 40,000 postings. To enhance comparability, these sample threads both deal with the same topic: The pope's visit to the US in 2008. One is in English from the BBC message board entitled *Have your say* (HYS) (n=880 postings), and the second is in German from *Spiegel Online* (SPON) (n=754 postings). In their understanding of rudeness, the authors follow Culpeper (2010) and define rudeness as both referring to culturally influenced negative evaluations of particular situated behaviours and the specific behaviours themselves. Here, too, the role of expectations (norms) is inherent, as perceptions of impolite and rude are based on a clash between expectations and realisations of behaviour.

Kleinke and Bös' results from the analysis of rudeness₂ tokens, i.e., "conventionalised impoliteness formulae" (Culpeper 2010, 2011), and metapragmatic utterances show the need to extend Kienpointner's (1997) argument that two major hierarchical constellations exist for inter-group rudeness (Type I: Rudeness strategies used by majority groups as a means to degrade members of certain outgroups; Type II: Rudeness strategies used by minority groups as a means of social self-defence and political criticism). Kleinke and Bös find that their data indicate the presence of two forms of non-hierarchical intergroup rudeness: 1) the construction of an in-group and out-group within the forum, i.e., among participants, and 2) the construction of an in-group versus out-group outside the forum, i.e., between forum participants and individuals external to the forum. In addition, while they show that both communities of practice are characterised by a contentious tone, which they relate to a variety of social (e.g., controversial topic) and medium (e.g., anonymity) factors, they also highlight central differences. Whereas interlocutors in the English thread, for example, negotiate rudeness on a group level, and tend to "avoid [...] personal attacks and metapragmatic comments", interlocutors in the German thread engage in interpersonal metadiscourse. In their interpretation of the differences, the authors point to relevant social factors. The higher degree of interactivity in the German thread, for example, can be associated with the greater number of metapragmatic comments. The authors also wonder to what extent these differences are indicative of variations in the different cultural models about cooperative interaction that the interactants draw on (Kleinke 2010; Maricic 2005; Sweetser 1987), arguing that more research is needed on this point.

The third article in the collection, authored by Haugh, Chang and Kádár and titled "Doing deference: Identities and relational practices in Chinese online discussion boards", nicely ties in with the second. It, too, explores the online environment of discussion fora, yet the linguistic and cultural context is different. Their approach can be

characterized as discursive and interactional and positioned within the tradition of 'interactional pragmatics'. They use this approach to study online discussion fora in Chinese. They focus on the 'relational practice' of 'doing deference', where relational practice is understood as a patterned, or recurrent, form of joint meaning making, i.e., evaluations and interpretations of social practice. Within pragmatic research, 'doing deference' has been associated with the exercise of politeness, yet as the authors maintain, responses to the performance of deference and its tie with identity have largely been neglected. Through their study, the authors highlight how linguistic pragmatic and conversation analytic approaches can be combined for the analysis of relational work in CMC. They also contribute to existing theory through their argument and subsequent illustration that relational practices and identity, while overlapping in practice, should be treated as distinct analytical issues.

The data used in their study are drawn from the discussion forum *Dongman tieba* ('animation notice bar') from Mainland China. Focusing on one thread with 16 messages, the authors examine 'doing deference' with regard to both relational practices and identity. The authors discuss the example of an interlocutor who transgresses an implicit norm by re-posting pictures posted by others in the past. She does deference as a means to counteract her affront to the group, and in this sense, her actions can be evaluated as polite. At the same time, however, both she and other members of the group co-construct her identity as that of a newbie, an identity which is cast in opposition to that of an expert. This identity is emergent and surfaces in the course of her apologies for the transgression of the norm and the uptake of these apologies by others.

This topic of identity construction is also taken up in the final study of the special issue. Bolander and Locher's article "'Peter is a dumb nut': Status updates and reactions to them as 'acts of positioning' in Facebook" explores a further social practice that occurs on Facebook walls: The writing of and reactions to status updates (SUs). As a theoretical framework, they apply Davis and Harré's (1990: 46) concept of 'positioning', in which positioning is understood as a "discursive process" that is emergent in interaction and thus contingent upon intersubjectivity (see also Bucholtz & Hall 2005). Their methodology is both qualitative and quantitative and consists of a content analysis of 474 status updates (SUs) taken from the walls of 10 individuals living in Switzerland and 10 individuals living in the UK, and 228 reactions to these status updates (RSUs). In their study, the authors are guided by the question of how creative (i.e., unprompted) language use in the SUs and RSUs contributes to identity construction. They thus position their research within an interpersonal pragmatic framework (Locher & Graham 2010) that focuses on the relational dimensions of language practice and its links to identity construction.

On the basis of their qualitative content analysis of the 474 SUs, Bolander and Locher demonstrate that individuals position themselves in five key ways, labeled as 'personality', 'pastime', 'humor', 'work' and 'relationship', where the categories refer to the aspects of identity that are emphasized in a particular SU. While there were overall similarities between the groups, the authors also point to the need to take idiosyncratic differences into account. They connect this with the emergence of identity over time, in accordance with a post-structuralist understanding of the term, and argue that the more an individual makes similar types of positioning claims during a certain time period, the more central this type of positioning becomes to his/her identity projection during that time. Since Facebook walls are a computer-mediated environment where the transcript

is persistent (Herring 2007), this construction of identity is a public process visible to both the researchers and to the interlocutor's friends (possibly to others, too, depending on the poster's privacy settings). Through their quantification of the results, the authors show that, while identity needs to be explored qualitatively, tendencies regarding acts of positioning for particular communities of practice can be interpreted in light of frequencies of individual and group patterns. Finally, through their subsequent analysis of 228 RSUs, they highlight that individuals mainly confirm the identity claims voiced in the original SUs, although there were also instances of challenges and other types of identity work that went beyond the immediate context – for example, friendship claims that were not prompted by the original SU. This result leads Bolander and Locher to conclude that interlocutors in these two groups predominantly perform supportive relational work, a factor they connect with the inherent participant relationships.

6. Outlook

As this discussion has shown, the four studies take up the research desiderata discussed at the beginning of the introduction, and they do so in innovative and original ways. In their exploration of Facebook and discussion boards/fora, they cover a wide range of subject matters related to the broader topic of relational work, notably, politeness, impoliteness, politic behavior, identity (both interpersonal and intergroup), relational practices and acts of positioning. The articles can thus be seen to address the need for more research on relational work online and, through the manifold languages researched by the authors, at the same time to contribute to the growing body of research on "the multilingual Internet" (Danet & Herring 2007).

Many challenges for research remain at the interface of the relational aspect of language, identity construction and politeness. Clearly there is a need to know more about the impact of the dynamic and interactive character of the negotiation of norms as well as identities. In particular, it would be fruitful to follow communities of practice over longer periods of time to document the dynamics, negotiations and developments of interpersonal practices. A further avenue to explore is to see how rapidly changing medium factors shape the language use of interactants who are faced with the challenges of adapting on a continuing basis – often in multi-modal environments. Finally, there is a need to work on a greater variety of languages and to work with standard and non-standard forms of language use.

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