Discourse of Twitter and Social Media: How We Use Language to Create Affiliation on the Web
Edited by Michele Zappavigna

Reviewed by
OSMAN SOLMAZ
The University of Arizona


*Discourse of Twitter and Social Media*, published as part of the *Continuum Discourse* series, investigates the creation of affiliations through the use of language via Twitter where character limitations are imposed. Following the early chapters where the terminology and the corpora used throughout the book are introduced, Zappavigna demonstrates how people use microblogging services to join conversations and achieve relationships. Theoretically and methodologically guided by Social Semiotics, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and Corpus Linguistics, the author exemplifies her claims by displaying the ways memes, slangs, humor, and political discourses on microblogging platforms support interpersonal bonding among the users. Each of these studies also offers insights and strategies of replication in order to analyze how language is used in electronically mediated discourses.

The first chapter of the book defines a number of relevant key terms including three new concepts: “searchable talk,” “interpersonal search,” and “ambient affiliation.” *Searchable talk* refers to discourse tagging on the web and how people mark their discourse in order to be found by others which results in bonding around particular values. *Interpersonal search* is defined as the ability to find people in order to connect around shared values or argue against clashing ones. Lastly, *ambient affiliation* is how “virtual groupings afforded by features of electronic text, such as metadata, create alignments between people who have not necessarily directly interacted online” (p. 1). Later in the chapter, Zappavigna presents a variety of approaches to online social networks from various disciplines and discusses the role of linguistics in the analysis of the formation and maintenance of networks of interpersonal relationships. Finally, she explains the social semiotic approach and its theoretical basis, as this approach is adopted in the case studies.
presented in the middle chapters of the book. Chapter 2, Social media as corpora, reveals the practical challenges such as non-standard orthography, emoticons, hashtags, and abridged posts that researchers are likely to face while working with the data collected from social networking spaces. Next, the author informs readers about the HERMES corpus, which has over 100 million words and approximately 7 million tweets collected by the researcher. The chapter ends with the explanation of the methodology used in the book: corpus-based discourse analysis informed by SFL.

Chapter 3, The Language of Microblogging, consists of two sections. The first section considers microblogging as a semiotic activity and explores its various characteristics. Some of the features that have been addressed are the functions of ‘@’ sign on Twitter as well as “retweets” and “hashtags”. Retweeting is mainly a rebroadcast of a user’s tweet within one’s own account, however, it also “contributes to a conversational ecology in which conversations are composed of public interplay of voices that give rise to an emotional sense of shared conversational context” (boyd et al., 2011, p. 1). #Hashtags are convention markers for the annotation of the content of the tweet. The second section of the chapter quantitatively analyzes major linguistic patterns in the HERMES corpus and makes comparisons between the most frequent words and 3-gram (cluster) analysis for the collocates of “Thanks for the” in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the HERMES. The following chapter, Title, starts with the introduction of appraisal theory, which was developed by Martin and White (2005) for the linguistic analysis of evaluative features of a text and has three components: attitude (a positive or negative expression), judgment (the level of endorsement of the statements of others), and graduation (the adjustment of the first two components). Informed by these units, Zappavigna illustrates some patterns and the semantic systems involved in meaning-making processes of some examples from HERMES. The chapter also focuses on the emotional language and emoticons which are defined as “stylized textual representations, predominantly graphological realizations of facial expression” (p. 71). However, Zappavigna points out that emoticons in HERMES were mainly used in order to support both solidarity and interpersonal connection.

Chapter 5 analyzes hashtagging practice in microblogging and emphasizes the semiotic definition of community over an interactional one as it is claimed that ambient affiliations formed on Twitter are not necessarily the result of interactions but searchable talk. The affiliation is referred as ambient “in the sense that the users may not have interacted directly and likely do not know each other and may not interact again” (p. 96). The next chapter investigates the nature of the Internet memes and the ways they are propagated in social media to create social bonding rather than just sharing information. Although social media memes are realized in the forms of phrasal templates, catchphrases, image macros, and initialisms (e.g. TGIF standing for Thanks God It’s Friday), the chapter explores the interpersonal meanings made by the use of memetic phrasal templates (e.g. “X is the new Y” in the form of “Orange is the new black” and “reversal in syntactical features of Russian language” in the form of “The car drives you in Soviet Russia”). Chapter 7 focuses on the analysis of slang examples from the HERMES corpus and how they are used to invoke solidarity and involvement in the formation of an ambient affiliation. Zappavigna compares the slang of HERMES with a reference corpus with the exception of the slang terms that are specific to Twitter (e.g. tw-words such as Tweep, Twitterverse) and gives an overview of the affordances of social media corpora in studies of slang compared to offline slang corpora.

Chapter 8 focuses on the case study of the term fail and social media-based humor, which is referred as “ambient” due to the potentially nonexistent direct contact among the community of users who share certain values nevertheless. Taking humor as a “semantic resource”, the chapter provides examples of fail, a popular internet slang and meme, from both the HERMES corpus and the specialized corpus on fail hashtags to show that humor is used as a resource to maintain relationships among the other functions. Chapter 9 makes use of the Obama Win Corpus (OWC) which consists of tweets collected following the Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential election win by Zappavigna herself and aims to offer a better exploration of the sentiment in tweets. Informed by appraisal theory, the researcher
investigates patterns and hashtaging in the OWC and discusses the role of corpus linguistics and discourse analysis in the understanding of the language production and use within the political context in electronically mediated environments. The final chapter concludes with a summary of the arguments presented throughout the book, introduces future directions, and identifies remaining challenges to studies of social media corpora.

Overall, Discourse of Twitter and Social Media is a well-organized book with notes and index to provide readers an accessible reference guide. It is a comprehensive academic work on microblogging and the corpus-informed discourse analysis approach and methodology used throughout the book differentiates it from other works. Although Continuum Discourse series aim to address the needs of students, new and experienced teachers, and researchers, it seems that researchers of social media, applied linguistics, corpus linguistics, social semiotics, sociolinguistics, communication, and new media experts would benefit most as the readers of this book. Despite of the title, the focus of the book is on microblogging rather than on other social media platforms. Nevertheless, it is a useful book that contributes valuable concepts of "searchable talk" and "ambient affiliation" to the social media literature. Moreover, it not only exemplifies its claims by means of case studies on microblogging from an interdisciplinary point of view but also informs its readers about the issues to take into account while conducting similar research. In sum, it is a great resource for those interested in pursuing research in social media.

REFERENCES


REVIEWER BIODATA
Osman Solmaz is a PhD student in the Second Language Acquisition & Teaching (SLAT) interdisciplinary doctoral program at the University of Arizona. His main research interests include computer-mediated communication, pedagogical implementation of technology in language classrooms, language socialization, and language teacher education.

REVIEWER ADDRESS
osolmaz@email.arizona.edu