

Language Used in Social Networks: Creativity and Self-Expression

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Abstract

This theoretical article aims to discuss the language used in social networks as an instrument of creativity and self-expression. Internet has permitted an increase in interpersonal relations, as never before, increasing communication mediated by computer technologies. As a result, computers and mobile media have occupied a large place in people's daily lives causing changes in habits, and by the way users' interact. Images, sounds and videos are some of the resources that enrich the linguistic code, forming the basis of an interaction that enables the exchange of ideas, mainly demands of esteem, acceptance and affection.

Keywords

Internet, Communication, Self-Expression, Creativity

1. Introduction

This theoretical article examines the use of language in the social networks considering it as an instrument that favors self-expression, in other words, the users use the linguistic code, writing, for communication and creation of an original form of disseminating subjectivity. People who communicate over the Internet use multimedia resources such as writing, video, sound and images, which allow them to quickly share personal information, thus making them better known and increasing their insertion in the social networks. The structure of this text is based on a reflection on the use of internet as an environment of relationship, followed by the network approach as a channel of communication that enables people to construct an image they conceive about themselves based on their messages and the feedback received from their counterparts.

2. A New Space for Relationship

Cyber space has its own characteristics, common of communities in general (Matos-Silva, Abreu, & Nicolaci-

da-Costa, 2012). Social networks are created within this space, structuring a “matrix of multiple bonds” based on communication, gathering three aspects that form a cyberculture: information, communication and technology. According to Wellman and Boase (2004), Nicolaci-da-Costa (1998), Rheingold (1996) and Castells (2004), it is an immersive space, and environment that involves its users who feel sharing a different space from their own *offline* lives (Araújo, 2005). According to Lévy (1999): “Internet is, in its essence, a means of communication” (p. 32).

In cyberspace, the traditional face-to-face dialogue has been replaced by online conversation. Such change includes clinical activity in psychology, which recently, has incorporated, among others, online psychotherapy, E-setting in order to facilitate the development of psychotherapy, establishing a therapeutic relation whenever impossible for the client to see the psychologist in person, or when this form becomes the client’s option (Mendes, 2014).

Psychotherapy using internet technology has occupied a larger space in the work field of psychologists, however since it is a recent innovation, we have observed the importance in thinking the ethical questions concerning safety, convenience, efficiency etc, which must be discussed within the context of composition of the activity, although it is possible to observe such increasing tendency for psychology to adapt itself to a new era. According to Mendes (2014) there are several experiences from therapists who have used internet as an instrument to start and monitor psychological treatment, which, can be something new and experimental, demanding studies and researches to evaluate its benefits, effects and limitations.

We can observe that the social networks increasingly intermediated by internet is part of people’s life as far as communication is concerned, and that is not restricted to the Personal Computer (PC) only. The use cell phone has transformed the use of phone communication in an individual item. Under this perspective, new models of private telephones have been coveted in two ways: first, as an essential accessory (almost) to be used on a daily basis; and second, as means to provide more independence in distance communication, a function improved through the use of applicative as WhatsApp, among others, that have increasingly gained space of interaction which, as the PC, has the advantage of using the internet.

With all these tools, the social networks, the formation of groups, information sharing in different formats have increased sociability in the net to a level never achieved before. Owning such applicative adds to the cell-phone a meaning that goes beyond the possibility of making an easier and inexpensive phone. It also represents the possibility of being permanently connected, continuously online. Its use becomes an element of strong affection, which means obtaining the attention of his/her peers through message texting. Thus, we enter an era of mobile social networks. After all, it seems that WhatsApp gives a sensation of a never-ending call; or, that one does not even need start it to be in contact.

It seems to be necessary to be in contact. Even though, the information exchanges occurred in such environments are based on mutual identification, on common interest, on formation of affective bonds, communication itself seems to become the main purpose of interaction, improving the achievement of confluent contact, characterized by mixture of people’s psychological needs.

Castells (2006), Rheingold (1996) and Diniz (2008), state that in an online way of life people use the computer as a means to be in contact, and to communicate. The authors claim that some people do not aim to do business, but to be in contact with other people, dedicating a few hours of their day and, in some cases, many hours, to communicate with people far away or close to home to learn about their lives, share experiences, ask for advice or help to solve problems. From online interaction results the perception that people need to send messages to communicate among themselves, looking for someone who may consider them special, distinct, intensifying affectionate experiences by sending and receiving messages, images, videos etc. One observes on these people an emphasis on demonstration of affection that causes an “increase in self-esteem”, a feeling of well-being or wellness, and of being loved. According to Perez (2007: p. 20):

The virtual space has the power to bring people together, even when they are geographically distant from each other. Such bonding seems legitimated by conversations, where the internet users show their affinities, praise each other, dream about the ideal partner, fantasize, intermediate sex, sigh when thinking about the idealization constructed and also taking from this a pleasant and leisurable activity.

Being possible to consider a counterpoint in relation to the perspective of online mediation to the conception of contact from the gestalt point of view of health, or, when the individual builds a self-supporting system and makes the difference between company and gathering; he/she is able to discriminate his/her own needs and the

impositions of the social environment by adjusting to it in a creative way when he/she recognizes the limits of use of internet social networks (Pimentel, 2003).

3. Creativity and Self-Expression in the Net

With the advance of computer and information technologies, people may have access to multimedia resources such as texts, sound and video. According to Matos-Silva et al. (2012): “The possibility of posting texts, photos, videos, etc. has created an environment that favors people gathering” (p. 219). However, communication traditionally mediated by the computer has been based on writing which has led to the creation of a specific language: slangs, neologism etc. (Nicolaci-da Costa, 1998). According to Nicolaci-da-Costa (2002: p. 199):

The advent of personal computers, in special the internet, gave new meanings to old words including an enormous amount of new terms and expressions—such as www, web, cyberspace virtual reality, real time, e-mail, discussion lists, web surfers, search engines, chats, spam, windows, menus, delete, format, configure and many others—quickly swarmed modern parlance.

In general terms, communication to take effect among two (or more) parties may have different types of languages: verbal, written, graphic, iconographic, photographic, mimics, corporal, scientific, etc. In scientific language, for example, the experts create grammar particularities and techniques that configure variations within the scientific field, such as specific jargons in economics, psychology, sociology, etc. that act as private codes, sometimes hermetic and founders of a dialogue limited to the peers who master that specific linguistic code.

Likewise, language used in the internet maintains Portuguese as the common language, and variations that occur in writing and in elaboration of words with other languages, mainly English. In the social groups perspective new meanings are given for known words and by the creation of new signs. Thus, the use of internet has changed the style of the formal written language by abbreviating words to a single syllable, by omitting accents, punctuations, by the fusion of words and phrases, by the use of graphic symbols instead of words to form sentences etc. The invention of a form of communication used among internet surfers configures a special language.

One may say that one of the peculiarities of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is creativity in the language use. Indeed, the written language may be more ambivalent, because it does not have resources, such as gestures or facial expressions when transmitting messages, a fact that requires the writer to have certain skills to be understood. According to Zacharias (2005: p. 10):

When we have just one written text, it is more difficult to perceive which emotion the sender is expressing. If we do not have sufficient data, in the written message, capable of giving us some indication, it is possible that we interpret the phrase by giving it a “tone of voice” that we wish, or choose which does not necessarily correspond to the writer’s intention. The same phrase may be “said” (or “read”) in an way that can be aggressive, loving, desperate, cynic etc.

Creativity comes into play when different forms of expressing ideas and sentiments surge. According to Silva (2005) and Benedito (2003) among the innumerable ways of communicating are the *emoticons or smileys*, used to express emotions not always expressed by means of written words. The same happens with facial revelations not perceived by the other party.

The language that mix graphics, images, neologisms, abbreviations, etc. forms the “internet slang”, “netspeak” or “chatspeak”. According to Gonzales (2007) “internet slang”, with its new form of writing words, is more commonly used in electronic means of informal communication, such as chats, blogs and cell phone text messaging” (p. 14). According to Othelo (2005), this action may come from three factors: 1) a need to express your opinions quickly when the environment is shared by several other contacts; 2) the influence of oral communication on the online writing; 3) a wish to facilitate interaction and create affective bonds.

Thus, it is possible to express, for example, a thought, by pressing “like” on a comment showing the other party that his message has been pleasant. Therefore, people are approved or not and facts without any deep knowledge or academic background to discuss a subject. Similarly, superficiality and judgment are values that serve as the basis for composing innumerable speeches. One may “like” an opinion posted on Facebook without making any other comment. When the person clicks “like” he or she agrees with a certain point of view. As an example, one should mention cyberbullying, which provokes psychological violence, a constraint that strikes the self-esteem and self-image of the targeted person (Recuero & Soares, 2013; Pimentel, 2013).

Other characteristics are the common use of abbreviations during online conversations: add (address), bco (because), Bg (be good) Plz (please), KK (kiss) SYS (see you later) and so on, aiming to speed writing messages. According to [Benedito \(2003: p. 13\)](#):

Needs of communication have been many, the rhythm of life is very fast, and man never stops inventing the material that makes his dreams go forward on a never ending perfection going much beyond, from discovery to discovery. Thus, *homo sapiens* becomes *homo digitalis* with the introduction, in our daily lives, of computers, Internet and mobile phones.

Such resources are extensively used, and form a set of expressions that the user needs to learn to facilitate communication. Thus, cyberspace forms a rich space to change the dynamics of the language, due to the plasticity and variety of resources that creativity and new word meanings offer to express the senses. For example, It may, for example, shout at someone using the symbol “!” or repeat it: “!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”; or using upper case letters, since writing does not have any sound. One may laugh using different forms, and each one of them shows the writer laughing differently exactly as if on a face-to-face basis using formats such as “Rsrrsrsrsrs” or “Kkkkkkkkkkkkkk”. In order to improve conversation, the partners make intensive use of use these resources in order to reproduce, as faithfully as possible, his/her emotions and thoughts, in an attempt to overcome the limitations of distance communication. Traditional *chats* rooms become the most common spaces used for conversation, spaces constructed “with the objective of gathering users around subjects of common interest” ([Maiorino, 2002: p. 29](#)).

4. The Self-Exposure Dilemma

Fast and practical communications mediated by computers has favored not only the change of information between people in chats or in relationship sites, but also the disproportionate self-exposure. Social network users frequently tend to expose themselves: thoughts, feelings, life experiences, a beautiful dish served at a restaurant, etc. The exposure may denote an unhealthy behavior that crosses the boundary of contact and self-preservation, giving rise to criticism from a jealous person, and in some cases to violent acts such as express kidnapping made it easier by personal routine exposure ([Pimentel, 2013](#)).

On each of these gestures one notices the “obligation” to make it public one’s personal experiences, even the most trivial ones, turning public his/her private matters, a manifestation of postmodern tendency where an individual might attain 15 minutes of fame, a simplified version of Big Brother. According to [Bauman \(2001\)](#): “It is no longer true, that the ‘public’ tends to colonize the ‘private’”. On the contrary, it is the private that colonizes the public space [...] the public space is where the confessions of private secrets and intimacies are made” (p. 49). It is also a need to elaborate internal contents, identifying and retouching the self-image, writing and looking afterwards, as in front of a mirror, to recognize oneself.

Posting are made to see people reaction, to “provoke” the other individual, to receive feedback and possible comments of affection, repulse, agreement or disagreement. Joining the social networks allows people to follow someone who is loved or feared, or anyone to whom affections are directed. The contacts are frequently posting comments that reveal his/her sense of humor, attitudes, activities as if writing a virtual public diary. In such scenario, self-expression becomes an exercise of identification where someone else takes a leading place, for that is the one that confirms us, making us see ourselves through different prisms, discovering and constructing nuances, setting forth ways of being, expressing, reacting, receiving or rejecting, attitudes that until then we had not been aware of. Our experience within the groups we participate, whatever they are, show us that social coexistence reinforces the self and contributes for the construction of our identity ([Castel, Minondo-Kaghad, & Lacassagne, 2013](#)).

As asserted by [Nicolaci-da-Costa \(1998\)](#): “By revealing ourselves to other people, we are also making a self-revelation. And, when observing the other party, their reactions to those things we reveal to be, we are informed on how valuable we are” (p. 223). Or, as stated by [Stuart Hall \(2006: p. 39\)](#), when discussing identity, not as a finished item, but an ongoing product: “The identity surges not so much from the identity plenitude which is already within us as individuals, but as a *lack* of wholeness that is “filled” from our exterior, by forms, through which, we imagine being seen by the others”. The expression might be one of the most striking points of the influences of computer and communication technology on the *self*. Internet offers several tools that permit the user face him/herself when looking from different angles. According to [Carvalho \(2000\)](#): “This interaction between

humans and computers results in a production of subjectivity, that is multiplicity by excellence, and emerges as an individual and as a group, and is expressed on both humans and machines” (p. 131). According to Nicolaci-da-Costa (2002: p. 193), there is a close relationship between technology and subjectivity: “[...] even though it is easy to detect that new technologies have the power to change our habits and ways of doing things, it is very difficult to register that some technologies can also radically alter our ways of being (how we think, perceive, and organize both external and internal world, how we relate to each other and to ourselves, how we feel, etc.)”.

Another dilemma determined by excessive self-exposure has been the practice of rude attitudes pseudo named “sincerity”. Considering that web surfers do not experience pressure of face-to-face interaction, because the written language on the social networks waives eye-to-eye interaction, to some of them a perspective is open to address offensive words and make statements that promote violence (Pimentel, 2013). During the interface exchange, answers must be given in such way that makes emotions more susceptible to be controlled, which is reduced when communication is made in written form in the social networks. The transmitters of messages select and express communication behaviors considered the most recommendable to achieve social goals, and this may be useful when displaying both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This convenience may encourage the individual to express his/her opinions on those who belong to his/her circle of friends, unfortunately, on the other hand, it may give further encouragement to disregard the ethics and respect to the other side.

According to Diniz (2008), anonymity has implications such as a feeling of freedom in relation to self-expression. Far from the other party’s eyes, one may display show nuances that would not show as easily on a personal basis. Nicolaci-da-Costa (1998) wrote that in the virtual world “we may be anonymous and move quickly and easily from one side to the next, looking for people who we may get in contact with, everything becomes so easy” (p. 229). According to Dias and De La Taille (2004): “Protection by anonymity, offered by this type of communication, also permits experimentations of roles and the ‘virtual’ achievement of phantasies which would not be acceptable or possible for most people in real life [...]” (p. 191). An architect may act as a high school student, an old man as a boy scout, a teenager as a 40-year-old man.

Involved by the virtual environment, the web surfer may give wings to imagination, create avatars, fake profiles, characters that may seem interesting and live them in such way that it may look authentic to people outside. In some cases, such experiences affect processes of subjectivation and change the contact with reality because some users start living a private parallel world dominated by phantasy (Diniz, 2008). Anyway, whether done in the open or in anonymity, computer and communication technologies have intensified the emergence of new modes of interaction a relationship with the written form occupying a central place. To a certain extent, using WhatsApp as an example, it is observed a tendency to write, rather than making a telephone conversation. According to Benedito (2003: p. 13) in cell phones “the functions for written messages have been a major advance with unlimited possibilities. The benefits: No waste of time talking, messages can be sent anytime from any place”.

5. Final Considerations

Our concern here is to think about the dynamics of subjective insertion in the social networks, the form and intentions that permeate the contents posted, to the extent that they favor proximity or distance among users. We ponder the use of the language in the social networks as an instrument that benefits self-expression and the creation of original forms of disseminating subjectivity. Therefore, we consider, as an example, a common scene showing friends in a bar where each one of them is holding a cellphone. They alternate their attention between those in the group and with those outside, but connected by the internet. To the observer it is obvious that technology helps to bring together people who are distant, but at the same time it helps to separate people who are within the same physical space. That effect depends on how the technology is used.

Mobile technology affect the sociability and quality of bond formation, the cellphone connected to the internet intermediates the production of dialogues, even while, at the same time, the person is also engaged in another conversation with someone else close to him/her, not to mention the invention of languages, as seen before, and the effects that it may have on the subjectivity, either creative, or low productive.

There are many relations between behavior and internet that need to be investigated in order to build a valid knowledge about this reality, especially matters concerning the impacts of intimate use of the net. As an example, we mention the study of Moreno, Jelenchick, Koff and Eickhoff (2012) from the University of Wisconsin in the USA where they point out the positive correlation between depression and teenagers who are heavy internet us-

ers, or another study by Reda, Rabie, Mohsen and Hassan (2012) from the University of Ain Shams, in Egypt, who detect correlation between the problematic use of the net and psychiatric morbidity among Egyptian teenagers, and also the study of researchers from the University of Wuhan, in China, about mental health and quality of life of heavy users (Tong, Zou, Gong, & Tong, 2010).

Finally, it is important to stress that psychologists need to develop researches that make it possible the building of an ethics position on the impacts of new technologies on intimacy, thus contributing to the development of a work capable of redirecting interpersonal relations in order to set limits between comfort and discomfort within the context of the social networks mediated by the internet.

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