牛津社会语言学丛书

Digital Discourse

Language in the New Media

数字话语：

新媒体中的语言

Crispin Thurlow & Kristine Mroczek 编

上海外语教育出版社
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出版说明

社会语言学是研究语言与社会多方面关系的学科，它从社会科学的不同角度，诸如社会学、人类学、民族学、心理学、地理学和历史学等去考察语言。自20世纪60年代发端以来，社会语言学已经逐渐发展成为语言学研究中的一门重要学科，引发众多学者的关注和探究。

“牛津社会语言学丛书”由国际社会语言学研究的两位领军人物——英国卡迪夫大学语言与交际研究中心的教授 Nicolas Coupland 和 Adam Jaworski（现在中国香港大学英语学院任教）——担任主编。丛书自2004年由牛津大学出版社陆续出版以来，推出了一系列社会语言学研究的专著，可以说是汇集了这一学科研究的最新成果，代表了当今国际社会语言学研究的最高水平。

我们从中精选出九种，引进出版。所选的这些专著内容广泛，又较贴近我国学者研究的需求，涵盖了当今社会语言学的许多重要课题，如语言变体与语言变化、语言权力与文化认同、语言多元化与语言边缘化、语言与族裔、语言与立场（界位）、语言与新媒体、语用学与礼貌、语言与法律以及社会语言学视角下的话语研究等等。其中既有理论研究，又有方法创新；既有框架分析建构，又有实地考察报告；既体现本学科的前沿和纵深，又展现跨学科的交叉和互补。

相信丛书的引进出版能为从事社会语言学研究的读者带来新的启示，进一步推动我国语言学研究的发展。

DIGITAL DISCOURSE

Language in the New Media

Edited by

CRISPIN THURLOW

KRISTINE MROCZEK

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For Sally Johnson

Foreword

Naomi S. Baron

PREDICTING THE FUTURE of the written word is a tricky business. Just ask Johannes Trithemius, the Abbot of Spondheim, whose book *De Laude Scriptorum* (*In Praise of Scribes*) appeared in 1492. Trithemius railed against a modern invention of his time—the printing press—arguing that hand-copied manuscripts were superior to printed ones. Among the Abbot's complaints were that parchment would last longer than paper, that not all printed books were easily accessible or inexpensive, and that the scribe could be more accurate than the printer. At the time Trithemius was writing, he was perhaps correct. He noted, for example, that printed books were often deficient in spelling and appearance. But he also maintained that "Printed books will never be the equivalent of handwritten codices," a prediction that thankfully proved untrue.

New technologies can understandably be unnerving. Decades back, people were sometimes terrorized upon seeing their first automobile or airplane. In the 1970s and 80s, telephone answering machines produced similar fears. Many users hung up when they reached an answering machine, too tongue-tied to know what to say.

Today, it is new technologies such as computers and mobile phones that are commonly depicted as threats to both the social and the linguistic fabric. Regarding social issues, the concern has been that face-to-face encounters will diminish because we replace physical meetings with e-mail or text messages. Work by Barry Wellman, Anabel Quan-Haase, and others (e.g., Quan-Haase et al., 2002; Wang & Wellman, 2010) has challenged the contention that new media are reducing social capital.

The question of whether new media will compromise language standards is particularly vital in light of how much *Sturm und Drang* the issue has generated. Crispin Thurlow (2006) has provided an array of examples of the "moral panic" expressed in the popular press over lexical shortenings, random punctuation, and nonstandard spelling assumed to typify the text messaging of young people. These linguistic transgressions are seen as spelling doom for the English language. My own favorite from Thurlow's collection is this one from the *Observer*: "The English language is being beaten up, civilization is in danger of crumbling" (March 7, 2004). This rhetoric, as Thurlow (2011) has noted most recently, is surprisingly persistent and sometimes even more sweeping: "Text messaging corrupts all languages" (*Economist*, May 2008).

But is English actually being beaten up (much less civilization in danger of a swift demise)? The simple answer is "no", but the story behind that verdict illustrates how important it is to substantiate off-the-cuff claims about new media language with both empirical research and awareness of the larger social context in which new media and language are used.

The English language has a far-reaching history of people being concerned that linguistic standards must be established—or maintained (Baron, 2000; Crystal, 2008). Around 1200, an Augustinian canon named Orm wrote a lengthy homiletic verse through which he illustrated his proposed new spelling system. (Medieval English spelling was chaotic, to say the least.) The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were the heyday of prescriptive grammars, in which self-appointed authorities set out normative rules, including the infamous "no prepositions at the ends of sentences." Among the consumers of these handbooks were members of the lower classes, for whom "proper" speech and writing were necessary steps to bettering one's station in life. The twentieth century brought a new generation of language mavens, ranging from Henry Fowler (in England) to John Simon or Edwin Newman (in the United States). By the early twenty-first century, we had Lynne Truss (*Eats, Shoots & Leaves*), along with the popular press.

However, this steady drumbeat of prescriptivism needs to be set in a broader linguistic and social context. As I argued in *Alphabet to E-mail* (Baron, 2000), the relationship between speech and writing has undergone major changes over the past 1200 years. From Old English times to the Elizabethan era, writing largely served to record the formal spoken word or, in many cases, to be re-presented as speech. Chaucer read his works aloud in court, and Shakespeare's plays were essentially created to be performed, not read in printed quartos. Then, for roughly three centuries, writing emerged as a medium distinct from speech. Writing became the platform for defining a standard language. However, by the latter half of the twentieth century, the role of writing began to shift again, commonly functioning as a medium for recording informal speech. As a result of these transformations, today's "off-line" writing (for instance, the writing of newspapers or magazines, as opposed to the language of e-mail or texting) is far more casual than writing of half a century ago. (If you doubt this generalization, simply compare a current front page of the *New York Times* with its counterpart around 1960.)

The most recent linguistic shift was the product of a cluster of social changes. And here I will speak principally of the USA as the context I know best. One such change was a growing sense of social informality, evidenced, for example, in forms of address (calling people you don't know by first name rather than by title and surname) or through wearing casual dress, regardless of the occasion (think of showing up in jeans at the opera). This informality was also reflected in American pedagogy. No longer was the teacher the center of many classrooms: The model of the "sage on the stage" was replaced by that of teacher as "guide on the side" (Baron, 2000, Chapter 5).

A second factor was the rise of American youth culture and the tendency among adults to emulate youthful behavior patterns (Baron, 2003). These days it is common to find baby boomers wearing trendy clothing designed for young people, and even saying "Awesome!", "What's up?", or "LOL."

Thirdly, there was multiculturalism. In the United States, struggles in the second half of the twentieth century to confront the evils of racism drew attention to the linguistic legitimacy of African-American Vernacular English. During this same period, America began actively promoting multiculturalism, entailing tolerance of people with nonmainstream identities or from different cultural (and linguistic) backgrounds. National rhetoric (and curricular design) reflects a legally and pedagogically structured acceptance of individual and group differences, including teaching children not to pass judgment on regional dialects or nonnative speakers. In the process, society loosens the grip of norms regarding linguistic correctness or consistency.

These social changes led, in turn, to relaxation of traditional notions concerning what students should be taught about English grammar. Today, grammar books are no longer part of many American schools' curricula. Students can hardly be expected to follow rules they have never learned—and that are not consistently evidenced in everyday speech (is it "between you and I" or "between you and me"?). In the world beyond the schoolroom, there is a growing sense that consistency of linguistic usage or knowledge of the rules being violated is not especially important. To use an American colloquialism, the attitude reflects a "Whatever!" approach toward language standards (Baron, 2008, Chapter 8). This attitude is evidenced in subtle but palpable ways: in the increasingly sloppy proofreading found in publications from respected presses or in costly print advertisements; in the laissez-faire attitude toward grammatical usage heard on mainstream television and radio broadcasting—and in the language used by university students. In my early years of teaching, students used to apologize for "incorrect" grammar. Today, they often don't know which usage is correct (is it *who* or *whom*? *he* or *him*?), and more significantly, commonly they don't believe the answer matters.

Combine together shifts in contemporary expectations regarding offline writing with current social attitudes about informality, youth culture, and multiculturalism. The result is a sociolinguistic milieu in which speakers and writers feel they have considerable latitude in the language they use. These attitudes predate the profusion of computers and mobile phones. To the extent that laissez-faire approaches toward traditional linguistic conventions appear in e-mail, IMs, text messages, and the like, digital media are not to blame. Rather, we use electronic devices to perpetrate language patterns that were already in play.

The moral of this tale is that in thinking about language used with new technologies, the relationship between surface phenomena and root causes may be less than obvious. As with any scientific venture, the study of new media language demands both creative sleuthing and hard work.

It is just this kind of creativity and focus that characterizes *Digital Discourse*. Crispin Thurlow and Kristine Mroczek's welcome volume offers up a collection of fascinating—and methodologically rigorous—studies of the intersection between new media and the social use of language. Such research enables us to speak with authority (rather than from fear or bravado) about how new media may—or may not—be transforming the ways in which we use language with one another. The editors are also to applauded for following in the tradition of Brenda Danet and Susan Herrring (2007), whose book *The Multilingual Internet* offered a linguistically and culturally diverse perspective on how to think about "mediated" language. What is more, *Digital Discourse* casts a broad net regarding what constitutes "discourse," including not only the anticipated fare of texting, blogs, social networking sites, or online gaming, but also other social contexts that entail exchange of ideas or information, such as tourism or performance.

Thurlow and Mroczek have produced a collection that is at once timely but grounded in earlier research, theoretically driven but highly readable. While it's tricky business to predict the future, it's a safe bet that *Digital Discourse* will become part of the emerging cannon of trusted voices regarding communication in a digital world.

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Introduction

FRESH PERSPECTIVES ON NEW MEDIA SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Crispin Thurlow and Kristine Mroczek

OUR PRIORITY IN editing a collection such as *Digital Discourse* is to give precedence (and space) to the work of our contributors. Instead of providing a lengthy and probably tedious literature review, therefore, we offer only a brief meta-review of *some* of the most comprehensive, sociolinguistically relevant publications to have appeared in English. (See our comment below about language politics.) The kinds of sociolinguistic topics, trends, and directions that others in the field have already pinpointed, enable us to locate *Digital Discourse* in the field. They also help us to identify the four most important concepts or organizing principles that we think delineate (or should delineate) the field of new media sociolinguistics: *discourse, technology, multimodality, ideology.*

Since 1996, there have been only three edited volumes in English dedicated, at least in part, to providing an orchestrated perspective on new media language. Following Susan Herring's groundbreaking *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross-Cultural Perspectives* in 1996, came Brenda Danet and Susan Herring's *The Multilingual Internet: Language, Culture, and Communication Online* (2007) and then, in 2009, Charley Rowe and Eva Wyss's *Language and New Media: Linguistic, Cultural, and Technological Evolutions.* Of course, Naomi Baron's highly regarded and much-cited book *From Alphabet to E-mail* (2000) was another key moment for new media sociolinguistics; her *Always on: Language in an Online and Mobile World* (2008) is already proving to be similarly influential. Although less grounded in first-hand empirical research, David Crystal's *Language and the Internet* (2001) and *Txting: The Gr8 Db8* (2008) have been hugely popular and undoubtedly raised public awareness about the role of language in new media.

In this time, there have also been three journal special issues offering coordinated accounts of language/discourse and the new media. Two of these appeared in the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*: Brenda Danet and Susan Herring's (2003) issue on new media multilingualism, a precursor to their edited volume; and our own issue on young people's new media discourse (Thurlow, 2009). Arguably the most significant special issue was Jannis Androutsopoulos' (2006a) on computer-mediated communication for the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*.

Without a doubt, the work presented by our contributors (and our selection of their work for the volume) is heavily informed by these various scholarly "distillations" in the English-language literature and, of course, by a wealth of research published in other languages. We can tease things out a little further, however, by listing some of the specific topics, trends, and directions identified by scholars like those just mentioned.

Arguably the best known—internationally speaking—scholar of new media language, Susan Herring (e.g., 1996, 2001a, 2004) characterizes her own work as *computer-mediated discourse analysis*, which she organizes around a series of analytic priorities that continue to direct a lot of research in the field; these are

- *technological variables* such as synchronicity, size of message buffer, anonymous messaging, persistence of transcript, channels of communication (e.g., text, audio, video), automatic filtering;
- *situational variables* such as participation structure (e.g., public/private, number of participants), demographics, setting, purpose, topic, tone, norms of participation, linguistic code; and
- *linguistic variables* (or discourse features) such as structure (e.g., typography, spelling, word choice, sentence structure), meaning (i.e., of symbols, words, utterances, exchanges), interaction (e.g., turn taking, topic development, back-channels, repairs), and social function (e.g., identity markers, humor and play, face management, conflict).

This basic framework—a shopping list of new media discourse variables—informs and grounds a great deal of sociolinguistic research in the field, and reference is made to them throughout *Digital Discourse*. Others have, however, wanted to push the field a little further and suggested a more refined and perhaps also up-to-date research agenda for sociolinguists interested in new media—or what is often referred to as computer-mediated communication (cf. Thurlow et al., 2004). In the introduction to his special issue of the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, for example, Jannis Androutsopoulos (2006b) offers some specific suggestions; for example:

- the need to challenge exaggerated assumptions about the distinctiveness of new media language;
- the need to move beyond early (i.e., 1990s) computer-mediated communication's simplistic characterization of—and concern for—asynchronous and synchronous technologies;
- the need to shift away from an undue emphasis on the linguistic (or orthographic) features of new media language and, related to this, the hybrid nature of new media genres;
- the need also to shift from "medium-related" to more ethnographically grounded "user-related" approaches.

In more recent work (e.g., 2010), Androutsopoulos has continued to promote the value of research shaped by this type of *discourse-ethnographic* rather than variationist approach, something he also addresses in his contribution to the current volume (Chapter 13). In this regard, Androutsopoulos' driving concern is that scholars move beyond a one-track interest in the formal features of new media language (e.g., spelling and orthography) and a preoccupation with delineating individual discourse genres; instead, greater attention should be paid to the *situated* practices of new media users (i.e., communicators) and the intertexuality and *heteroglossia* inherent in new media convergence (i.e., people's use of multiple media and often in the same new media format, as in social networking profiles).

Along much the same vein, and in both an earlier article for the journal *Pragmatics* and in a commentary for the Androutsopoulos special issue, Alexandra Georgakopoulou (2003, 2006) summarizes and problematizes recurrent linguistic topics in the broader field of computer-mediated communication. She also offers her own recommendations for future research, which parallel many of Androutsopoulos's concerns and include:

- the need to accept as read the way new media blend spoken and written language (this is no longer news);
- the importance of attending less to the "informational" functions of computer-mediated communication and more to the playful identity performances for which it is used;
- ensuring that the study of language is grounded in a concern for the broader sociocultural practices and inequalities of communities (or social networks);
- always considering the connections between online and offline practices, and between different technologies;

- a general move toward emphasizing the contextual and particularistic nature of new media language;
- relying on the combination of *both* quantitative and qualitative (particularly ethnographic) research methods.

Once again, we see in Georgakopoulou's "manifesto" for new media language studies a call for research that is altogether more committed to the social meanings of technology and its particular (hence "particularistic") significance for specific users, groups, or communities.

One persistent problem in new media scholarship (sociolinguistic or otherwise) has been the apparent dominance of English—as both the medium of publication and, more importantly, as the subject of analysis. This has certainly been a central criticism in the reviews by European colleagues like Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou. In their groundbreaking collection *The Multilingual Internet*, Brenda Danet and Susan Herring (2007) made a concerted effort to rectify the situation, drawing together a wide range of work about the use of languages other than English on the internet, work that was written largely by scholars whose first/preferred language was not English. In the introduction to their book, Danet and Herring set out the following list of topics for organizing its chapters; this is a list that likewise helps set a more multilingual/multicultural agenda for new media sociolinguistics:

- language and culture (e.g., speech communities, context, and performance);
- writing systems (e.g., the restrictions of ASCII encoding, ad hoc improvisations by users;
- linguistic and discourse features (e.g., orthography and typography);
- gender and language (e.g., politeness, turn taking, social change);
- language choice and code switching (e.g., language use in diasporic online communities);
- linguistic diversity (e.g., small and endangered languages, the status of English).

In addition to elevating these topics for consideration by researchers, Danet and Herring's book also gave space to a world of non-English-language scholarship. The fact remains that, for all sorts of problematic institutional and geopolitical reasons, valuable research by scholars such as Michael Beißwenger, Chiaki Kishimoto, or Silvia Betti, to name only three, is still

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