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Participation framework revisited: (new) media and their audiences/users

Participation and Accessibility

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Social situations can be defined and distinguished by the relations participants have in terms of their presence - they can be bodily present, or they may not share the same physical space. We usually only talk about full reciprocity when participants have direct and mutual accessibility. This is prototypically given in face-to-face situations.

The most salient characteristic of (old and new) media is their ability to (re)produce a compensation for the lack of direct and mutual accessibility, especially in those cases where participants do not share time and place. With the help of media, participants transcend the limits of time and space. The ranges of accessibility vary with-different media. Especially with regards to new (or social) media, the classical distinction between absence and presence becomes obsolete as they allow for varying degrees of accessibility which can be described as a continuum of copresence. The various media thereby have varying (technical) resources for participants to claim presence and/or accessibility.

At the same time, contrarily, media can also be used to hide presence or to claim non-accessibility. Books, mobile phones or i-pods can be used (in privacy and in public) as an involvement shield (Goffman 1963). Some media have technical means to claim non-availability (e.g. status bars in skype, “away-from-keyboard”-announcements in IRC, “out of office”- notifications in mail programs etc).

The presentation will (1) systematically discuss the various features of accessibility and non-accessibility that can be found in different media and in the uses they are put to by different participants. My analyses will further show (2) that participation in and with media cannot be described in the dichotomous terms of presence or absence. Rather media allow various degrees of accessibility that are better described as a continuum.

Audience participation via communications technology

Yasemin Bayyurt

TV talk shows have become an interactive entertainment system that allows members of large TV audiences to influence programs via modern communications technology, including faxes, e-mails, and phone-ins. These media enable the audience to participate in a program cooperatively, by agreeing with the hosts and guests in the studio, or competitively, by advancing their own ideas for the edification of the audience. In this presentation, I focus on the changing nature of audience participation in two morning talk shows, both broadcast on private channels in Turkey, one in 1994 and the other in the years 2008-2010. Both shows have the same host, a famous singer, and both have studio audiences. Since both shows accepted phone-in participation from the TV audience, it is interesting to see how participation has changed. The major difference is that the TV audience in the more recent show is as active as the studio audience. They make their voices heard through text messages (SMS), mobile telephones (even while driving), e-mails, and faxes. In this paper, I compare face-to-face interaction and electronic interaction among the host, her guests, the studio audience, and the TV audience. I analyze face-to-face interactions and electronic interactions in light of politeness theory, focusing on the nature of participation via various communications media.

Participatory Practices in YouTube Political Videos: Commenter interaction in US Political Speeches

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Although YouTube is often associated with the more playful aspects of new media due to its focus on amateur videos and its slogan “Broadcast Yourself”, recently it has become a powerful medium for (re)broadcasting institutional texts and genres. An example of the successful exploitation of the medium for political means is clearly represented by Barack Obama, whose election team immediately grasped the importance of new media and successfully exploited technologies such as YouTube during the 2008 US Presidential Campaign. This strategy was particularly useful in reaching a voting public that no longer relied on traditional sources, such as television and radio, for news and information (Nagourney, 2008). Wide use of new technologies has continued since Obama’s election and the White House continues to employ YouTube to propagate various institutional texts and genres.

As most new media, YouTube offers a number of affordances that users can exploit to interact with the medium as well as with each other. Thus, logged in YouTube users can flag videos, vote them ‘up’ or ‘down’, embed them on other sites and post comments, which help to create a strong sense of community among YouTubers (Hess 2009). In the case of political videos, commenting can be used to legitimize or delegitimize a politician and his/her message through various forms of mediated participation and self-mediation (Chouliaraki 2010). Thus, on the one hand, supporters use comments to praise politicians and their messages, while, on the other, detractors to criticize them, thereby creating distinct participatory roles. This study is particularly interested in how users define their roles and delimit their (political) positions by linguistic and non-linguistic means. Furthermore, it aims to demonstrate how participants interact with the medium and political discourse or avoid interaction altogether. It is claimed that political positions are defined not only by linguistic means but also through participatory practices of commenters.

The empirical data are drawn from the comments of the YouTube version of Barack Obama’s “Inaugural Address” (January 2009). A previous study based on the text comments to three speeches by Obama (Boyd 2010) discovered a high incidence of recontextualization of the original speeches in addition to flippant, playful, and discriminatory behaviour. A quantitative key-word analysis of the present data as well as a fine-grained qualitative analysis indicate a number different strategies adopted by participants in their comments. These include restating (part of) the original text, posting negative and/or discriminatory comments, replying directly to a positive or negative comment, voting a comment ‘up’ or ‘down’, or ignoring a comment. It would appear that while participants appear to be eager to put forward their own positions in order to praise or criticize, often to the point of invoking racial slurs, in this ‘technologically-mediated public space’ (Wodak and Wright 2006), they are less prone to interact directly with each other. Moreover, they often exploit the affordances of the medium itself to react to other participants. Thus, it is argued that the comments to political text are representative of what Thompson (1995) calls ‘quasi-participation’.

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“Comment · Like · Share · Poke back”

A critical hypertext analysis of *Facebook’s* (semi-)automated participation frameworks

Volker Eisenlauer

Questioning the transparent construction of emerging Web 2.0 discourse communities, this study asks in what way structural options and restrictions of the *software service* ‘Facebook’ set up textual constraints and the conditions for participation frameworks. More specifically, it holds that the medium in use and the particular software service act as a kind of third author: The electronic environment and its functional properties facilitate and delimit a variety of discourse patterns and thus intervenes in the communication between profile owner and profile recipients. Following Goffman’s (1981) well-established framework deconstructing the concept of producing and receiving participants of a conversation, the “production role” (Levinson 1988) involves three different jobs, i.e. *animator*, *author* and *principal*. Applying this model to the participation structure of *Facebook* stresses how the roles of animator and author turn into a non-figurative concept: In *(semi-)automated text actions*, such as pressing the “like button” and thus generating the automatic text “member x likes xxx”, the immediate agent who scripts the lines as well as the one who animates them is not manifested in a human being, but through algorithm based software designed and coded by software engineers (see also Eisenlauer 2010).

To assess the impact of the electronic environment on the participation frameworks of Facebook discourse, my study discusses the software service from a Critical HyperText Analysis (CHTA) point of view. Departing from an integrative view of text and medium, I will introduce a variety of qualities and criteria that are prototypically assigned to electronically mediated texts. Drawing on the concept of *hypertext* I will then disclose complex interrelations between Facebook’s functional properties and user participation frameworks that surround and condition the creation/reception of user generated texts. I will finally discuss a sample of user generated texts chosen from the profiles of a distinct group of Facebook friends.

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Participation frameworks in monologues: the case of video blogs

Maximiliane Frobenius

This paper addresses the question how speakers in monologues involve their audiences. The data investigated is a set of video blogs that were uploaded to the video hosting website YouTube. Vlogs are a relatively new multimodal, monologic genre including spoken language, posted online for anyone to watch. This form of asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) involves a speaker shooting video footage of him- or herself, which s/he then uploads to the internet. Consequently, viewers are not present at the time of production, and thus, speakers do not know who will be watching. The website allows written interaction between the vlogger and the viewers in the form of comments that appear underneath the video frame once the video is uploaded.

Speakers in monologues have a range of ways of addressing and involving their non-present audience, such as terms of address, questions or imperatives, or even interaction-like sequences such as when they enact members of the audience. These elements contribute to the construction of participation frameworks (Goffman 1981) similar to those in face-to-face communication. The applicability of this concept to the vlog situation, however, is limited in that the negotiation of roles that is a joint process in face-to-face interaction, is undertaken by a single person in a vlog. Furthermore, some of the distinctions in Goffman's model, e.g. eavesdropper vs. bystander, are blurred due to the characteristics of the online genre.

In this paper I describe how vloggers align to (parts of) their audiences, and how that invokes different participation frameworks. My discussion of the data will include multimodal features such as gaze shifts or gestures and of course those features that are characteristic of the genre video blog, e.g. when vloggers refer to elements on the YouTube interface that are outside the video frame, such as written comments.

Consider the following example:

187 I definitely know I want some-
188 the fans have some kind of involvement in this video,
189 and once I work out the details,
190 I will come up with a v log or something,
191 with what I want you guys to do,
192 but uhm that's.. something I'm very excited about,
193 and I'm working towards and uhm,

In this excerpt, a man in his mid twenties talks about his regular viewers ("the fans", l. 188). In line 191, the same people are addressed directly, "you guys". This switch from third to second person triggers a switch in participation frames. Whereas in l. 188 "the fans" are only *bystanders*, they have turned into the *addressees* "you guys" in l. 191, eliminating the implicit distinction between the current viewers and the fans.

The systematic investigation of this kind of example will illuminate how participation frameworks are adapted to an asynchronous monologue setting, and what resources

speakers have to model them.

Participation frameworks in the reception situation: the television as ratified speaker

Cornelia Gerhardt

Despite the ubiquity of the television in most societies, the specific forms of talk that accompany watching television have hardly been described. In this paper I will trace the linguistic and other behavior of television viewers. We will see how the role of the television changes, or, more precisely, how the participants create different participation frameworks in their talk with respect to the television.

The ATTAC (Analysing The Television Audiences' Conversations) - Corpus on which the presentation is based consists of video recordings of friends and families watching the men's football World Cup live on television. The television in people's living room has often been assigned a function similar to wallpaper: "unanalysed and unattended background decoration" (Scollon 1998:151). However, in the ATTAC-Corpus, the participants gathered explicitly for the purpose of watching football, and the television holds a central place in their interactions. For this reason, the reception situation is characterized by an 'open state of talk' (Goffman 1981), i.e. the participants do not have to talk, but they can talk.

As far as the role of the television is concerned, different footings or frames are created: for instance in a story-telling frame, the talk by the viewers is not different to that in face-to-face talk-in-interaction in general. It is fully cohesive and there are no links to the media text. However, even during these passages, a number of 'view signs' (Scollon 1998) mark the participants' general attention to the television text. The 'watchers' (Scollon 1998) face the television and not each other signaling in that way that the television is part of their 'contextual configuration' (Goodwin 2000). Also, their gaze behavior differs fundamentally from conversation in general (Goodwin 1980), since the listener is not obliged to search for eye-contact with the speaker in this setting. These 'view signs' are 'embodiments' (Goodwin 2000) of the constant likelihood of a shifting footing to the 'watching football' frame. 'Contextualisation cues' (Gumperz 1982) such as interjections or rise in volume mark these shifts.

Within 'watching football', on the other hand, the viewers' talk is only coherent with reference to the media text which is understood here as encompassing both talk and pictures. A number of cohesive ties link the interpersonal interactions to the media text. For instance, third person pronouns or the definite article can be used both intertextually (by referring to a person already mentioned on TV) or multimodally (by referring to someone visible on the screen). Also, interlocutors may construct coherence interactionally through sequentiality (Schegloff 1990). They backchannel to utterances on television or they construct adjacency pairs together with the commentators, for instance when answering questions put forth on television. Also, the television is granted turn rights so that the viewers leave gaps in their interaction to accommodate the language from the television. In these intense moments, the television is turned into the ratified speaker in the participation framework of the viewers' talk.

Of eavesdroppers, informers and the format itself: Different kinds of influence on radio phone-in calls

Jautz Sabine

Conversations as part of radio phone-ins are at the same time one-to-one and one-to-many interactions: Hosts and callers talk to each other, but also to the overhearing audience. Callers are part of two communication circles (cf. Burger 2005): the inner one while they are talking to the hosts and the outer one before and after this conversation when they are 'just' part of the audience at large. Addressing the audience pertains especially to hosts. It is part of their job to take care of meeting the expectations of callers and audience alike. Hosts are assisted by editors or switchboard operators who are in charge of technical possibilities to allocate the floor. Furthermore, they provide – as an indirect source (cf. Levinson 1988) – hosts and callers with information which the latter two would negotiate directly if they had a different format of interaction.

This can be illustrated especially in conversational openings and closings, which are largely managed by the hosts of phone-ins. Callers are usually introduced by hosts with their names, their place of residence and the topic of their contribution. Such an introduction shows that the host has already been informed about these details by the switchboard staff and uses them not only to greet the caller and summon them to speak, but also to inform the overhearing audience of who is talking. The hosts themselves are not introduced anew in each conversation as they are 'known' to caller and audience alike. An asymmetrical relation as well as different rights (and obligations) in conversational management becomes also apparent at the end of conversations. It is hosts who bring the conversation to an end – for instance with a reference to the time frame available for the conversation within the phone-in, with a summary of the caller's point of view, an expression of gratitude for the contribution and a farewell. The caller is often not given the opportunity to respond to such closing remarks. This highlights once more the special status of conversations in phone-ins (compared to, for instance, face-to-face conversations of two people) as well as the presence of an overhearing audience: Especially a summary of the caller's point of view is addressed to them, as it is not necessary to remind callers of their own opinion.

In the paper examples from different phone-in shows comprised in the British National Corpus will be analyzed. The twofold focus is on linguistic means employed by the conversational partners mirroring these different kinds of influence: On the one hand, an awareness of the format 'phone-in' will be demonstrated (concerning technical peculiarities as well as information flow) and on the other hand, the presence of an overhearing audience will be shown to feature in the interlocutors' utterances even if they do not address the audience directly.

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Changing genres and hybrid participation in online newspapers

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The emergence of new political media genres or the use of old ones has brought about the question of genre dynamics and changing participation activities in the public sphere. Even if genres are seen as conventionalized forms, they are situated in time and place. Any sociocultural changes there may be, such as the contemporary interconnectedness of private and public spheres (Koller & Wodak 2008), are reflected in genres. My objective is to see how communicative action is framed, and what type of participation practices and activities there are in online newspapers.

The notion of participation has received different interpretations, according to the communicative model it is based on. Although Goffman's participation framework invites one to dissect participant roles, these remain static and fixed, since they are based on an explanation of interpersonal and face-to-face communication. In the case of mediated genres, such as political interviews on TV, it is possible to distinguish two frames of interactions: first, that of the speakers engaged in discussion within a studio, and second, their relationship with the audience. This view not only reflects the role of receptive participation of overhearers in Goffmann's sense, but also a transmission model of mass communication. Recently, in media studies, participants are interpreted as users who are engaged in relational processes enhanced by interactivity, feature of media infrastructure connecting artifacts and practices (Liewrouw 2009).

In order to account for computer-mediated contexts, participation has to be examined as complex dialogical activities, as well as sociocultural practices of communicative action (cf. Goodwin & Goodwin 2004, Linell 2009). "Traditional" news article with journalistic stance can be combined with news video that can represent a familiar broadcast genre, such a news clip or an interview, but it can be something entirely different, originating from non-institutional source. These can provide an explicitly subjective stance towards a particular news event. Reacting in discussion forums allows for users self-mediation and engagement in an intersubjective negotiation of meanings and affective stances. In these processes genre boundaries are blurred and participation activities become hybrid.

My data will consist of online editions of national French newspapers and their discussion forums, as well as French TV interviews of a political nature from various times.

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The Question of Bystanders in Computer-Mediated Communication

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This paper proposes to deal with the question of bystanders in Computer-Mediated Communication.

First, we propose a typology of devices of Technologically-Mediated Communication from this question. The different tools of Computer-Mediated Communication can be distinguished according to the way they constrain or permit certain reception roles. The audience can be private when a message has an audience of one person (an SMS addressed to an individual). It can be a group, when a message has an audience whose membership is completely controlled by the sender. It can be also semi-public, when the message has an audience that is not entirely controlled by the sender (a message sent to a discussion forum can be at the same time addressed to a particular person and readable by anyone connected to the forum (Eckles, Ballages, Takayama 2009). This third case is in fact very frequent (in discussion forum, Chat, Facebook) and puts in the fore the role of bystander in CMC.

In a second step, through a functional and conversational analysis, this paper tries to categorize the different types of bystanders which can be in position of recipients of Computer-Mediated discussions. The main distinction is between the “visible bystanders” (for example, an active participant of an online discussion who is not ratified as recipient of a message, or a person in the background of a desktop videoconferencing discussion) and the “invisible bystanders” (for example, a lurker in a discussion forum). For the specific case of discussion forum, this paper shows that the distinction between visible/invisible bystanders does not cover the well-known goffmanian distinction between overhearers and eavesdroppers and that, more generally, discussion forum challenges the goffmanian model. In a discussion forum, it is impossible to know who belongs to the conversational group at any moment. As a result, the opposition between ratified participants and bystanders does not seem very well suited to discussion fora. Indeed, the role of the eavesdropper is a normal and paradoxical mode of participation in a forum: when a participant sends a message, he/she knows that there are eavesdroppers, but he/she is forced to include them as recipients.

In a third step, two interactional phenomena linked to the question of bystanders will be described in this paper.

Through the conversational analysis of messages sent to a French-speaking discussion forum, this paper proposes a description of the way the presence of bystanders is taken into account by the senders of messages. In other terms, which markers can be seen as reflecting that the sender of a message takes the bystanders into account?

The analysis of a desktop videoconferencing discussion permits to put the fore on another phenomena: the effect of the presence of a bystander on the ongoing discussion. When two persons are engaged in a videoconferencing discussion, the presence of a bystander in the site of one of these videoconferencers can have several effects on the discussion: constraining the thematic choice, competing with the ongoing discussion, etc. This paper shows the way these perturbations can be managed when the bystander is visible or invisible.

In conclusion, this paper tries to show how a given technological implies different types of bystanders and how this new reception roles (the “on-line bystanders”) oblige to rethink the traditional models of communication.