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Book review

Discourse and Identity on Facebook, Mariza Georgalou. Bloomsbury Publishing, London/Oxford (2017). 363 pp., EUR 114,37, USD 128,00 (hardback), ISBN: 9781474289122, (e-Book: ISBN: 9781474289146).

Recent years have seen the continual rise of pragmatic research devoted to the study of (personal and collective) online identities. While there is no shortage of identity studies on Facebook (e.g. [Locher and Bolander 2017](#)) today, ethnographic investigations which focus on multimodal resources that allow Facebook users to perform, (co-)construct and negotiate their image on the Internet are still piecemeal. Mariza Georgalou's new monograph "Discourse and Identity on Facebook" aims to fill this gap in research. Based on grounded theory ([Glaser and Strauss, 1967](#)), the book closely investigates the identity-related acts (and effects) of five different Greek Facebook users in a three-year time period which spans from May 2010 to May 2013. Her textual Facebook data consists of largely 26–27,000 words (tokens) with her entire corpus also containing pictorial data sets on which she frequently draws in her analysis as well as a range of ethnographic field notes and interviews. In general, Facebook posts and comments are investigated with a view to four main aspects assumed to be central to the construction of identity in electronic discourse, i.e. the self-presentation of individual users, the co-presentation by other users, the multimodal resources and the verbal resources.

The book's nine chapters are neatly separated into self-contained, yet interrelated topical units covering all of the aforementioned core aspects of identity construction. Each section comes with its own easy-to-read topical introduction, exemplary analysis, lots of illustrations, overviews, chapter summaries, reference, links and activities. The clear and coherent build-up of the monograph make it a great read and useful study resource for students and scholars alike.

The first chapter shows how, over the years, Facebook has evolved into one of the world's leading communication hubs, constantly affecting our everyday practices and thereby shaping our social relations. Georgalou vividly presents how who we are (or have become) is partly based on how we stage our identities on Facebook. She explains how we perform and develop a range of community based online image(s) to be negotiated with those with whom we share our online space. The chapter also introduces the reader to [Androutsopoulos's](#) idea of a discourse-centred online ethnography which aims to validate discursive findings by closely observing (and interviewing) users on-and offline.

The second chapter provides conceptual background information on the key term of identity, dividing past and present identity research into an essentialist and constructionist paradigm. Drawing on the insights of constructionism, which the author characterizes as socially-constructed, granular and malleable, Georgalou explains that her own study is largely based on [Fairclough \(1989\)](#) and [Blommaert \(2005\)](#). Both of these frameworks act as a conceptual springboard for the author's own ethnographic study of verbal and pictorial resources in the construction of user identities on Facebook. The author chooses to preclude other constructionist approaches, e.g. positioning theory, multimodal discourse analysis, membership categorization analysis. So perhaps, scholars who buy this book in the hope of finding an introduction to different approaches to identity research might be surprised. To be fair, the book does not claim to offer such an overview. It is not a text book after all.

Chapter three describes the methodology of the study, i.e. discourse-centred online ethnography ([Androutsopoulos, 2008](#)), which tries to expand the top-down, deductive principles of classic discourse analysis, adopting ethnographic methods, native to data-driven, empirical investigations. This approach justifies the use of additional screenshots, field notes and interviews in the author's research data, tracking the semiotic moves and activities of the five Greek Facebook users over the course of three entire years.

Each of the following five consecutive chapters are devoted to different identity aspects through which Facebook users commonly generate their identities. This broad, analytical section starts off with an intriguing chapter four which deals with *spatial identity*, i.e. verbal and pictorial resources which trigger inferences on how users (dis-)affiliate with various locales, regions and nations. In the age of *glocalization* ([Robertson, 1995](#)), Facebook seems well-equipped to enable users to portray and comment on photographs, pictures, descriptions or hyperlinks to and on various places around the world; and Georgalou traces the consistent web of spatial identity clues Facebook communities leave behind over time, crystallizing the specific spatial identities of individual users as a result. Moreover, the author captures the socio-political function of spatial posts on Facebook when they are used as a critical comment on social life in Greece or when they are strategically applied to give expression to the political stance of Facebook users (e.g. open, liberal, tolerant, inclusive). The political value of what might be

termed “spatial expressions” is also manifested in the way these views are discussed and co-constructed between different Facebook users of the same community. Chapter five focusses on the identity-value of verbal and visual resources which index *time*. While Facebook was arguably invented to stay in touch and communicate with other online users, it has, by now, likewise become a huge archive which has stored thousands of user activities over time. Needless to say such activities never occur in isolation but are rooted in Facebook groups and communities which talk about past, present and future events to shape their group's understanding of a shared past, collectively evaluating relevant experiences, activities, feelings and values. In this chapter, Georgalou reveals in much detail how the key concept of time informs the collective identities on Facebook, taking much care to provide rich illustrations of various verbal and pictorial means which are used to this effect.

In chapter six, the author turns to a different set of multimodal resources designed to represent the professional or educational identities of Facebook users. While *professional identities* are, by and large, marked by (inter)actional moves related to the professional work of Facebook users, *educational identities* are expressed by Facebook posts based on “intelligence and knowledge-ability”, “occupation and career” and “cosmopolitanism”. The choice of classification, however, is not always clear. For instance, the rubric of “occupation and career” partially overlaps with the category of “professional identity”, while the subordinate domain of “cosmopolitanism” is not necessarily part of the category of “educational identities”. Despite these categorial issues, the chapter has much to offer, exploring how Facebook communities use the Internet platform to formulate and define work-related experiences as problems, trying to resolve issues and nurture and reproduce collective values and ideas through the voicing of complaints and the sharing of knowledge.

Chapter seven explores the phenomenon of stance (in the more general sense of the word) on Facebook in its verbal and pictorial dimension. The strength of this chapter certainly lies on the author's in-depth description of monomodal and multimodal patterns of stance on Facebook accounts which serve to express users' attitudes, feelings and commitments towards what they are talking about as well as toward their projected audience. Georgalou shows convincingly that stance is still a highly understudied concept in Internet pragmatics. She excels at presenting stance not only as a symptom of speaker evaluation (emotive function) but also as a social lubricant, enforcing, reproducing and inviting shared beliefs and attitudes within and across communities of Facebook users online (interpersonal function). If anything, the author could have introduced readers to other compatible approaches to stance (Hunston and Thompson, 2000; Martin and White, 2005; Bednarek, 2006; Eggins and Slade, 2015), perhaps adding even more depth to the description of such a complex linguistic concept.

In chapter eight, Georgalou turns our attention to an often overlooked feature of Internet-based discourse, i.e. privacy restrictions. She describes the “privacy practices” Facebook users follow to restrict or widen their prospective (and actual) audience of posts and comments, drawing on technical restrictions, the choice and modification of communication channels or the textual and stylistic choices they employ (deletions, recontextualization, quotations, etc.). It is clear to see that identity management on the Internet can hardly be investigated without paying attention to privacy concerns (and their communicative effects). Chapter nine summarizes the main findings of her analysis in all core areas of identity construction. Georgalou again emphasizes the fact that Facebook identities usually take the shape of multimodal patchworks, including verbal text, photos, images or videos. She also acknowledges that the different shades of Facebook identities are subject to active negotiation between different Facebook users who delete, rewrite, link, copy-and-paste or share particular sets of ideas, beliefs, values and experiences.

In general, Georgalou has written an excellent book on the multimodal construction of personal and collective identity on social-networking sites. With great analytical rigor, it pushes classic text-based identity frameworks in new directions, making a compelling case for the application of ethnographic approaches to the study of identity on the Internet. More importantly, Georgalou provides a valuable tool kit composed of linguistic, pictorial and electronic features that linguists can effectively exploit to trace down the personal identities of Facebook users. The wealth of empirical examples and thoughtful analyses make this book essential reading for researchers working on the pragmatics of identity as well as those looking for new multimodal studies on social media.

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