

Peter Wikström

#srynotfunny: Communicative Functions of Hashtags on Twitter

Abstract

This study investigates various communicative functions served by hashtags in written communication on Twitter from a linguistic pragmatic perspective. A tweet containing a hashtag links to, and is integrated into, a timeline of other tweets containing the same hashtag. Thus, hashtags are by default categorizing or organizing; a user of Twitter may add the tag *#food* to their tweet to integrate it into a general conversation about this topic. However, this study demonstrates that hashtags are also used creatively to perform other communicative functions. In the data presented, hashtags are employed as complexly multifunctional linguistic devices for, among other things, structuring information, playing games, and engaging in reflexive meta-commentary. Notably, while pragmatic methodology is typically applied to speech, this study indicates that a traditional speech acts framework may be profitably applied to written communication in new media.

1. Introduction

The present study investigates various communicative functions served by *hashtags* as a feature of written communication on the social network site (SNS) Twitter from a linguistic pragmatic perspective. SNSs have become an important part of the online social and linguistic domain, and Twitter is one of the dominant players at present. By 2012, the network had around 530 million registered users, posting around 175 million messages per day (Basch 2012; Honigman 2012). As a social network site (cf. boyd & Ellison 2008), Twitter permits users to post public or semi-public *tweets* – individual messages of 140 or fewer characters – and follow the postings of other users.

Twitter has as yet received relatively little attention from linguists, unlike other forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) such as

email, IM (instant messaging), blogging, and SMS text-messaging, and linguistically relevant work on Twitter to date tends toward approaches that can very roughly be described as sociological and toward a preference for large-scale computational methods. Other studies focus less on what is said and how, instead focusing on who is talking to whom. That is, the focus is often on mapping the topological structure of social networks as in terms of who “follows” or “mentions” whom, how communities of sorts arise around particular popular users, by which channels information is diffused, and so forth (see e.g. Weng, Lim, Jiang & He 2010; Wu, Hofman, Mason & Watts 2011; Murthy 2011; Murthy 2013). Other studies are of relevance to political science, economics, or journalism. For example, Jansen, Zhang, Sobel and Chowdury (2009) describe Twitter as a medium for consumer word of mouth, Kwak, Lee, Park and Moon (2010) analyze Twitter as a news medium and O’Connor, Balasubramanyan, Routledge and Smith (2010) study the correlation between public opinion polling and sentiment expressed contemporaneously on Twitter. Little CMC research on Twitter seems to be ‘purely’ linguistic in nature, in the sense of focusing mostly or exclusively on the linguistic structure of Twitter discourse. Studies that take linguistic structure into account are often sociolinguistic, using “linguistics as a lens on community” (Zappavigna 2012: 10; cf. also Seargeant & Tagg 2014). The present study contributes to linguistic work on Twitter by focusing on close qualitative analysis of language use at the utterance level.

More specifically, the present study focuses on Twitter’s hashtag feature. Hashtags are hyperlinks generated by the user prefixing a string of letters in a tweet with a hash symbol (#), for example *#food* or *#thatshowyoudoit*. A tweet containing a hashtag links to, and is integrated into, a timeline of other tweets containing the same hashtag. Thus, hashtags are by default categorizing or organizing: if a tweet treats the subject of food in some manner, it may include the hashtag *#food*, integrating it into an on-going communal conversation about the topic of food on Twitter.

However, many hashtags appear to have little to do with categorization, but rather seem to be used to perform a variety of other communicative functions. For instance, Huang, Thornton and Efthimiadis (2010) conclude that tagging is “conversational” as opposed to “organizational,” based on large-scale data analysis.¹ The authors are also

¹ Page (2012) argues that the “conversational” quality of hashtags may be quite limited e.g. in the discourse of celebrities or corporations on Twitter. See also Honeycutt &

concerned with the meaning of the tags in context, but because their qualitative analyses are limited only to the most common tags in their dataset, they tend not to find less commonly used tags with more situationally dependent pragmatic functions of the kind that the present study is primarily concerned with. They do, however, identify what the present study calls “hashtag games,” labeling them “micro-memes” (Huang et al. 2010: 3). Zappavigna (2011) uses a Systemic-Functional Linguistic approach to analyze community building by means of evaluative language in tweets. She finds that topic marking hashtags are often used to indicate the target of appraisal, as, for instance when tweets evaluating President Barack Obama contain the hashtag *#Obama* (Zappavigna 2011: 12). Zappavigna (2012, 2014) shows how hashtags serve to facilitate what she terms “searchable talk” and “ambient affiliation,” by permitting users to align their experiences or attitudes with those of other users on the same or similar topics, and how hashtags maybe used to mark various kinds of interpersonal bonds.²

1.1 Aims and data

The primary aim of the present study is to identify and analyze a broad range of communicative functions served by hashtags on Twitter using a linguistic pragmatic framework based on speech act theory. A secondary aim is to assess whether this analytical framework, typically employed for the analysis of spoken interaction, may profitably be applied to typewritten language data in a CMC environment. This secondary aim is motivated by a general scholarly discussion within the field of CMC about the supposed or actual spoken-likeness of various online platforms for typewritten communication (cf. e.g. Crystal 2006; Baron 2008, 2009; Dresner & Herring 2010; Jonsson 2013). The analytical framework is presented in section 2. For the analysis (section 3), 72 illustrative examples were selected from an initial sample of approximately 1200 tweets containing hashtags. The dataset was compiled in November 2010, via manual collection from the timelines of arbitrarily selected users and, in a few

Herring (2009), on uses of the @-addressivity device on Twitter, which may more readily afford conversation than do hashtags.

² There is also a meta-functional analysis of hashtags forthcoming from Zappavigna (personal communication), which provides further insight into the communicative complexity of hashtags from a Systemic-Functional perspective.

cases, via manual searches for specific hashtags.³ The sole criterion for inclusion was the presence within the body of the tweet of a hashtag that was not plainly a simple topic marker (with the exception of a few examples meant to illustrate the topic marker function). Neither the sampling procedure nor the selection of examples presented below were intended to yield a quantitatively representative picture of hashtag usage on Twitter as a whole, but rather to identify and exemplify a wide variety of functions that tagging can be used to perform.

2. Analytical framework

The communicative functions performed by the hashtags in the dataset are treated in separate subsections throughout section 3, according to the following categories: 3.1 *topic tags*, 3.2 *hashtag games*, 3.3 *meta-comments*, 3.4 *parenthetical explanations/additions*, 3.5 *emotive usage*, 3.6 *emphatic usage*, 3.7 *humorous and playful usage*, and 3.8 *memes and popular culture references*. These categories were arrived at during the collection of the dataset, and then refined upon closer analysis. The categories are ad hoc and should primarily be considered as heuristic. That is, the sorting of examples of hashtag usage into distinct categories of communicative functions is primarily meant to organize the presentation of the findings and to emphasize the variety of uses to which hashtags are put, rather than to constitute a taxonomy in any proper sense. Further, the categories should not be understood as mutually exclusive. Multifunctionality may be the norm rather than the exception.

In the analyses presented in section 3, the communicative functions are explicated and discussed in terms of what may be called a “traditional” pragmatic speech act theory framework based in the work of John Austin, John Searle, and Paul Grice. The concluding discussion in section 4 presents, *inter alia*, a summary of how the communicative functions may be characterized in terms of the pragmatic concepts introduced here.

Below, the tweets presented are analyzed as speech acts or illocutionary acts intended by their authors to express one or multiple kinds

³ Twitter’s terms of service make it clear to its users that public tweets and profile information will be openly available (Twitter 2014). Accordingly, no data were collected that were not voluntarily made public. However, the user names of anyone other than celebrities, public figures, and institutions have been anonymized as @user. Beyond anonymization, the contents of the presented tweets have not been altered in any way.

of specific *illocutionary force* (Searle 1969; Austin 1976). A more generalized and abstract construal of such force is what Searle terms *illocutionary point*. The illocutionary force of the speech act “What is your name?” is that the speaker wishes to learn from the hearer what the hearer’s name is, and its illocutionary point is a request for information. An utterance can have several illocutionary points, as we often do several things at once in the same utterance (Searle 1979: 29).

Grice argues that we generally infer an interlocutor’s intention by implicitly assuming the observance of a cooperative principle, which he states as follows (Grice 1975: 45):

Make your conversational contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

The principle is an unspoken rule which seems to be taken for granted by the participants in most conversational interactions. Grice’s cooperative maxims, which further explicate what constitutes cooperation, can be summarized as follows (Grice 1975: 45–46):

1. *Quantity*: The speaker is expected to be sufficiently informative, saying neither too much nor too little to be properly understood.
2. *Quality*: The speaker is expected to be truthful to the best of his/her ability.
3. *Relation*: The speaker is expected to keep his contribution relevant to the present interaction
4. *Manner*: The speaker is expected to strive for lucidity and orderliness in expression.

Grice discusses several ways in which speakers might fail to observe a maxim (Grice 1975: 49), one of which is *flouting*. Flouting occurs when the speaker blatantly and purposefully fails to observe a maxim, thereby exploiting it to generate additional meaning. Throughout interactions, hearers use contextual cues or background knowledge to facilitate the process of inferring the point and force of utterances.

It should be noted that the framework employed in this study is what may be termed traditional pragmatics or speech act theory, and that the field has seen substantial developments since the time of Grice, Austin, and Searle. The employment of a traditional framework should not to be considered a dismissal of later perspectives on speech act theory and cooperation (e.g. Leech 1983), “neo-Gricean” ventures (e.g. Levinson

1983), cognitive approaches to relevance (Sperber & Wilson 1995), or, indeed, the application of pragmatics to CMC (e.g. Yus 2011).

3. Analysis and results

The following subsections address the communicative functions outlined above. Each section comprises several sets of examples chosen partly to illustrate the identified functions, but partly, also, to illustrate overlaps between functions and other complexities. As mentioned, the organizing or categorizing function seems to be the default or ‘expected’ mode of usage given how hashtags work technically on Twitter; that is, as hyperlinks to a timeline of tweets containing the same tag. Therefore, the functions Topic tags (3.1) and Hashtag games (3.2), which are most in line with this expected mode of use, are presented first, so that they may serve as a form of baseline for the presentation of the arguably more functionally complex uses in the following subsections.

3.1 Topic tags

“Topic tags” is the label suggested in this study for the more or less straight-forward use of hashtags to integrate a tweet into a conversation on a given topic, as in examples (1–4).

- (1) #Golf Tiger Woods’ new home has practice facility. <http://bit.ly/i4ciY2>
- (2) @user hmmn. Yes, the right amount of quaint & old-fashioned. If one has lemon juice & sugar, of course. #pancakes
- (3) Charles #Darwin published Origin of Species on this day in 1859. <http://bit.ly/i8BilW> #evolution #science
- (4) Today’s #TED talk, from #TEDxDU: Mind your matter! Kim Gorgens on brain injury <http://on.ted.com/8ia6>

Examples (1) and (2) are relatively simple: the tweet treats a topic designated by the hashtag. Example (3) is from a user account that posts links to articles and blog posts on the *Encyclopædia Britannica* website, and uses tags relevant to the topic of the linked webpage. In (4), the hashtags #TED and #TEDxDU tie the tweet to the topic of the TED (Technology Entertainment and Design) set of conferences and the University of Denver sub-conference. Examples (5) and (6) function similarly, but are slightly more complex.

(5) This is the worst thing I have ever heard. #amas #blackeyedpeas

(6) Good game, #Chiefs

In (5), the hashtag usage can be unpacked pragmatically as follows: 1. The poster makes deictic reference to something being “the worst thing I have ever heard.” 2. The reader presumes that the cooperative principle is being adhered to. 3. For the maxim of quantity to be observed, there must be some additional information clarifying what is being referred to deictically, and for the maxim of relation to be observed, the tacked on hashtags at the end must be relevant to the utterance. 4. The reader thus supposes that “this” refers to “#amas” and “#blackeyedpeas.” 5. Given the requisite background knowledge that “the AMAs” is a common way to refer to the American Music Awards and that there is a popular band called the Black Eyed Peas, the reader concludes that the poster is commenting on the performance of the band at the awards show. The tags supply the reader with information regarding what is being referred to in the main text of the tweet, which makes them similar to many of the hashtags discussed in section 3.4 on parenthetical additions or explanations. However, it seems that the primary communicative function of the hashtags in this tweet is to integrate the tweet into an ongoing public conversation about the AMAs and the Black Eyed Peas (cf. Zappavigna 2012). Example (6) is felicitously interpreted along the same lines, with the tag making the tweet part of a conversation about the sports team called Chiefs.

Example (7) below differs from the previous examples in that it was intended to coordinate multiple tweets by one user rather than to coordinate multi-user interaction.

(7) I’m going to post, now, a dozen or so Tweets that tell a happy story that really happened. #happystory

Example (7) was indeed followed by “a dozen or so” tweets that relayed the “happy story” in brief chunks. These chunks were all tagged #happystory, in order to mark that they belonged to this topic. Examples (8–11) below are posts taken from the timeline of the hashtag #MayTheForceBeWithKatie, which derives from the widely recognized *Star Wars* incantation “May the force be with you!” The posts refer to a news story about a young girl who was bullied for having a *Star Wars* themed water bottle.

(8) Unacceptable! RT: First grader bullied for having a Star Wars water bottle. <http://tinyurl.com/22w6fzz#MayTheForceBeWithKatie>

- (9) Don't let those boys get you down [#maytheforcebewithkatie](#)
- (10) This is sad...kids can be so mean
<http://bit.ly/cNT2Pa#starwars#MayTheForceBeWithKatie>
- (11) [#MayTheForceBeWithKatie](#)

Examples (8–10) contain links, summaries, and personal reflections pertinent to the story, while (11) comprises merely the topic tag *#MayTheForceBeWithKatie*. Examples (8–10) are easily understood as cooperative contributions to an ongoing conversation, but (11) fails to observe several maxims. It is terse (quantity), and obscure (manner), and consequently of questionable relevance to the conversation. However, a reader assuming the cooperative principle can infer that the repetition of the hashtag without comment is intended to function something like the chanting of a slogan. It has the illocutionary force of expressing support for a related idea or cause, and also brings the cause to the attention of others by making noise about it. Accordingly, it appears that *#MayTheForceBeWithKatie* performs an implicit emotive or emphatic function in addition to its topic tagging function.

3.2 Hashtag games

The use of hashtags which is here called hashtag games is not markedly different from topic tagging, as the basic function performed by the tags is still organizing or categorizing. Here, however, the purpose of the tag is not to mark a tweet as belonging to a certain conversation or relating to a certain topic, but rather to mark it as participating in an ongoing communal game (cf. Huang et al. 2010), often grounded in some kind of word play. One such game is exemplified by (12–14), which are contributions to the timeline of the hashtag *#BoringPrequels*.

- (12) [#boringprequels](#) The Empire Holds a Planning Meeting
- (13) Earth Trek [#BoringPrequels](#)
- (14) Some Like it Tepid [#BoringPrequels](#)

This is a common type of game played on Twitter, with a simple premise contained within a unique hashtag. The object of the game is to make up the title of a humorously boring prequel to an existing film. Examples (12–14) are all by different posters, but follow the same formula, whereby the imagined prequel title is closely reminiscent of the original title while

adding a new twist to it. Example (12) is based on *Star Wars episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*, (13) on *Star Trek*, and (14) on *Some Like It Hot*. Below, examples (15–17) show a variant of the same game-type.

- (15) Indifference Island [#DullRealityShows](#)
- (16) World's Quietest Libraries [#DullRealityShows](#)
- (17) America's Next Top Insurance Adjuster [#DullRealityShows](#)

As different games of this type tend to be formally and conceptually similar to each other, any experienced user of Twitter encountering such a tweet should be able to pick up on it and contribute if she so desires.

Examples such as (18–20) are more like conversational contributions to a specifically themed topic than like rule-bound wordplay, but do share the formulaic quality of the previously exemplified games.

- (18) [#rememberwhen](#) gas was a 1.50..a bottle of coke was 1.00 and a bag of chips was 25 cents
- (19) [#rememberwhen](#) Mtv was cool and just played music videos!!!!
- (20) [#RememberWhen](#) vampires used to explode in the sun, not sparkle like fairies?

The tag [#RememberWhen](#) serves the same purpose of establishing a simple but recognizable and unique premise, and being part of a template that must be adhered to for successful participation. The point of [#RememberWhen](#) is for the poster to “fill in the blank” with a nostalgic or mock-nostalgic memory. A reader who is assuming cooperation and is familiar with this conventional form of indirect speech act will infer that the illocutionary point of the utterances is not to request information (e.g. “Do you actually remember when MTV played mostly music videos?”) but rather to make a statement or express an opinion, specifically with the force of expressing preference for the past situation. Below, examples (21–23) illustrate a game similar to [#RememberWhen](#).

- (21) [#lemmeguess](#) You not who I think you are right?
- (22) [#lemmeguess](#) you love me but you can't be with me.?
- (23) [#lemmeguess](#) thats ah real polo shirt??then why instead of the man on the horse you got ah nigga walkin ah dog

This game appeared to primarily attract African American participants, judging by profile pictures and African American Vernacular English

(AAVE) linguistic features throughout the timeline. Indeed, the spelling of the organizing hashtag of the game might be seen as signaling that this game in some sense belongs to an AAVE community on Twitter. Accordingly, it seems that this tag performs an additional social function beyond organizing the game.

3.3 Meta-comments

Even though there is a slight difference between hashtags that relate a tweet to a topic of conversation and hashtags that mark a tweet as a contribution to a game centered on that tag, both types of usage have in common that the technical functioning of hashtags on Twitter (as hyperlinks) is relevant or even crucial to them. However, a lot of hashtag usage seems not to be as concerned with that functionality, as in the following:

(24) .@user You don't look a day more than 12 parsecs! #YesIKnow

For a reader lacking the requisite background knowledge, it might seem that the tag *#YesIKnow* is not relevant to the rest of the tweet, meaning that the poster is failing to observe the maxim of relation. However, a reader who recognizes the common mistake of using “parsecs” as if it were a measurement of time (when it is actually an astronomical unit of length) and notices that the poster is someone who is likely to be well aware of this common mistake (in this case, the astronomer and blogger Phil Plait, @BadAstronomer) will likely interpret *#YesIKnow* as a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement of the error. Thus, the illocutionary point of the hashtag is to make a meta-comment about the main content of the tweet, with the specific force that the apparent terminological mistake in the tweet is intended ironically.

The tags in examples (25) and (26) below are also meta-comments, but ones which seem to have the purpose of explicitly stating the illocutionary point of the tweet:

(25) Also think “Webcomics” should only be used to refer to a spec. biz model. It's an outdated descriptor for a genre or a community. #opinion

(26) #statement: I'm cooler than you

Example (25) is clearly expressing an opinion, so it seems reasonable to conclude that the tag is meant as an acknowledgement of this. Of course, since it is clear from the main text of the tweet that an opinion is being

expressed (signaled by the opening, “Also [I] think [that]...”), the tag is superfluous, in breach of the maxim of quantity. The tag may be interpreted as flouting the maxim of quantity in order to generate pragmatic force as a hedge. The tag functions as a disclaiming meta-comment suggesting that the utterance is not intended as a definitive statement of fact. Example (26) similarly comprises a declarative clause and a tag that superfluously describes what kind of utterance it is, but emphasizing that a statement as a statement is not likely to have the disclaiming effect that labeling an opinion as an opinion does. Rather, the intended effect seems to be the opposite: to enhance the force of the utterance as an affirmation of undeniable fact. However, given the triviality and subjectivity of the topic (someone’s relative “coolness”), and the lack of a specific addressee, the force of the tag as an affirmation of factuality is presumably intended ironically. The poster would thus be flouting the maxim of quality by claiming more than the poster has warrant for in order to perform a joke.

In (27–29), the tags *#itsajoke* and *#justkidding* are explicitly clarifying utterance intention:

- (27) Has Rooney shagged Katie weasels nan ??#itsajoke
- (28) @user1 likes @user2 's cock :b LMFAO #justkidding #itsajoke #dntgetmad #imsrry #lmao
- (29) @user LOL WAY TO GO BILLIAM NOW I HAVE TO HATE U 4EVR. #justkidding #idontactuallytalkinallcaps

The tag *#justkidding* in particular is reminiscent of common online linguistic conventions of disambiguation, such as putting words or phrases within asterisks (e.g. *smiles*), or adding emoticons or abbreviations. In (28), this connection between hashtag usage on Twitter and general online paralanguage is further established by the tag *#lmao*, which is the abbreviation of the phrase “laughing my ass off” turned into a hashtag.

The tag *#idontactuallytalkinallcaps* (“I do not actually talk in all capitals”) in (29) is also interesting. Writing in capitals is often perceived online as a way of being loud and obnoxious. Consequently, the poster evidently feels compelled to clarify that she is not “actually” behaving in this manner, but is merely staging the behavior. Thus, a meta-comment tag can perform the function of maintaining one’s public self-image (*face* in pragmatic terminology) by directly cancelling undesired pragmatic force. Example (30) further illustrates this function:

(30) On 9/11 the world united in horror&despair. Let's not wait for tragedy to be united. #srynotfunny

Few readers would presumably expect a tweet about the event of 9/11, posted on the anniversary of the event, to be an attempt at humor. The implicit acknowledgment of such an expectation does make sense, however, given that the poster is the comedian Sarah Silverman (@SarahKSilverman). As a comedian, Silverman is writing for an audience with certain expectations. Thus, again, the meta-comment hashtag is utilized as a device for dealing with public self-image, clarifying utterance intention by the cancellation of undesired force.

3.4 Parenthetical explanations and additions

Examples (31–33) below have in common that the hashtags constitute additions that explain the utterance meaning of the main text of the tweets.

(31) I am being held hostage by this Q.#stillplayingscrabble

(32) This is why I've been offline today. <http://yfrog.com/n6v9ssj>
#ILoveHikingInColorado #ButNo3GInMountains

(33) Did you start November the 6th like this (holds up bandaged hand to camera and makes a sad face)?#oldfireworksafetyadvert

These tags do not disambiguate utterance intention, like the meta-comment tags described above do, but rather supply additional information to help readers lacking relevant background knowledge make sense of the tweet. Example (31) is about the poster's predicament with the difficult letter Q in an ongoing game of Scrabble. Without the tag, this would not be easy to infer for a reader who had missed any previous mention of the game, as the utterance "I am being held hostage by this Q" alone would constitute a failure to observe the maxim of quantity. In (32), the [yfrog.com](http://yfrog.com/n6v9ssj) link leads to a mobile phone photograph of mountains, and the two hashtags serve to facilitate the inference that the poster was offline while hiking in the mountains. Example (33) is meant to evoke an old public safety advertisement, and the tag is likely intended as a parenthetical explanation to clarify the meaning of the tweet to readers who do not immediately recognize the cliché. These tags thus serve as cooperative additions with the illocutionary point of providing information which helps satisfy the maxim of quantity. The tags are "parenthetical" in the sense that the information they provide is likely superfluous to any reader who already

knows the context (e.g. a reader who has followed the previous tweets about the scrabble game in (31)).

In (34), however, it is more difficult to argue that the hashtag is parenthetical:

(34) My doctor was shocked when I guessed he'd prescribe me Biaxin.#Biaxinpensbiaxincalendarbiaxinnotepad

The force carried by the hashtag, namely the suggestion that the doctor prescribes a certain medicine in exchange for what one might call sponsorship, appears to be the central component of the tweet. Without it, readers would probably feel that the utterance fails to observe the maxim of quantity, as a mere introduction to an anecdote that has no point or resolution. However, with the tag, the utterance becomes a wry observation about the pharmaceutical industry. A reply to (34) displays effectively the functional plasticity of hashtags:

(35) @SarahKSilverman#Biaxinpensbiaxincalendarbiaxinnotepad And they say it's the R&D (not the marketing) that inflates the cost of medications.

This tweet uses the same tag to indicate that it continues on the topic established in (34) (which was posted by @SarahKSilverman). Thus, a hashtag which could not reasonably be construed as a topic tag in its original tweet becomes one when another poster uses it as such.

Examples (36–38) contain parenthetical additions that give non-essential extra information:

(36) I saw two of these dogs today. They are so cute. <http://j.mp/3ypBrb>. #shibainu

(37) Check that sky: <http://twitpic.com/38b7gl> #kansas

(38) It's quite mild tonight. #walkingthedog

These hashtags are not central components of the force of their respective tweets, nor is the information conveyed in them necessary for explaining the text that precedes them. For instance, *#walkingthedog* in (38) is not necessary for enabling any reader to understand the utterance as a casual observation about the weather at the poster's location. Examples (36) and (37) contain links to images of a dog and a landscape, respectively. The hashtags give the breed of the dog and the location of the landscape, as additional information for interested readers.

Examples (39) and (40) show hashtags that add explanation or elaboration of the posters' attitude or feelings.

- (39) @user who yu tellin I got the price on the mnu say 4.99 then y I'm spending 7 dollars #Shitainright
- (40) Fo Realz, it is blizzarding. #AndiLikeIt

In (39), the poster is expressing dissatisfaction with paying \$7 instead of \$4.99, with the hashtag making explicit and strengthening this force. Example (40) comments on the weather, and the hashtag adds, perhaps as a parenthetical after-thought, that the poster likes it. These tags that make attitudinal additions lead into the emotive and emphatic functions of hashtags treated in the following two sections. This seems especially true of a hashtag such as #*shitainright*, as it is possible that the choice to turn the phrase into a tag was primarily intended to emphasize it as an emotional expression.

3.5 Emotive usage

Example (41) below is from the same poster as (39) (#*shitainright*). The tag here performs a similar function, in that it has clear emotionally expressive force:

- (41) Dont feel like walking...but ill make it #sigh

However, unlike the tag in (39), it seems that this tag is meant to represent a face-to-face paralinguistic cue. In speech, an utterance like that in (41) might be accompanied by a sigh, strengthening the force of the utterance as an expression of weariness at the thought of having to undertake a hard or tiresome task. Example (42) below features a similar tag:

- (42) "We could split the cinnabon!" #HowIMetYourMother #laughs

Here, #*HowIMetYourMother* is a topic tag and a clarification that the quote is from the television show of that name, while #*laughs* is most reasonably construed as a representation of the poster's reaction to what is being quoted. Accordingly, the hashtags here are used to perform expressive functions that might otherwise be performed by writing e.g. <@*user* sighs> or *laugh* (cf. Crystal 2006: 38). Many Twitter posters do use the common online typographic markers for this purpose, but apparently some

posters use tagging to the same end. It should be noted that *#laughs* or *#sigh* are not exactly like the paralinguistic cues that they seem to be representing: laughter is often an involuntary reaction, whereas typing *#laughs* requires deliberate intention (cf. Crystal 2006: 37, fn.15). This difference is even more notable when it comes to example (43):

- (43) @user RESPOND TO MY TWEET GODDAMN YOU! ARE YOU DEAD?!
#Worry #Fret #ShutUpUser

Non-verbal or paralinguistic expressions of worrying and fretting are unlikely to be intentional communicative acts. Accordingly, a tag such as *#Worry*, in addition to being an expression of the poster's emotional state, also carries the illocutionary force that the poster is self-conscious about being worried. The final tag makes this self-consciousness explicit, as the poster is telling himself to "shut up", perhaps reprimanding himself for failing to observe the maxim of quantity by being repetitious, or for failing to observe the maxim of manner by being too loud.⁴

Example (44) also features a tag expressing emotional state, but in a somewhat different manner formally:

- (44) @DesertBus I just sat down at my computer and instinctively typed in the DesertBus url... only to remember it's over. #sadwharrgarbl

Online, "wharrgarbl" originated as the caption of a widely circulated image of a dog trying to drink water from a lawn sprinkler, and is often used to represent ranting or raging incoherence or babbling.⁵ In conjunction with the word "sad," as in (44), it is presumably meant to represent some type of gargling throat sound of frustrated dismay. The illocutionary force of the tag seems to be partly emotionally expressive and partly joking.

Other hashtags represent emotionally loaded vocal sounds in a more conventional way:

- (45) Thanks for the retweet @user! For some reason Twitter dropped you off my follow list. That's been fixed! #Grrr
- (46) I woke up to a left leg and knee in horrible pain. I torqued something playing ping-pong yesterday. #ouch

⁴ The tag contained the first name of the poster, which has here been anonymized.

⁵ See <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=WHARRGARBL> (accessed 26 September, 2014).

“Grrr” and “ouch” are conventional ways of rendering in writing vocal sounds associated with emotional states. There is also a playful element to the usage. For instance, a growling “grrr” as an expression of anger has something of a cartoonish quality to it, which is enhanced by putting it in a hashtag; a genuinely angry person would presumably not be inclined to engage in such hashtag onomatopoeia.

Examples (47) and (48) below feature yet another way of expressing emotion by means of representation of sound (in this case, manner of pronunciation):

- (47) Omg I can't come down from this praise and worship high from this morning. God's Word is such a healing balm! My spirit needed it! #Jeeesus
- (48) das coold ! i wont get to listen to @user 's cover song til waaaay later . #maaaan /:

If the intention of (47) was to integrate the tweet into a general conversation on the topic or theme of Jesus, it is likely that the tag would have been spelled *#Jesus*. As it stands, a reader assuming that the cooperative principle is being observed, i.e. assuming that the blatant misspelling is purposeful, has to interpret *#Jeeesus* in some other way. Considering the theme of religious ecstasy in the tweet, the tag is most reasonably construed as intended to express an emotional state of fervor. The orthography is likely meant to represent the way in which a vowel might be lengthened in the pronunciation of the name when it is called out in an excited state. Similarly with (48): there is a common way of lengthening the vowel in and giving a falling intonation to the word “man” when it is used in speech to express disappointment, and presumably *#maaaan* is intended to represent this manner of pronunciation. Examples such as these show that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the emotive communicative function and the emphatic function treated next.

3.6 Emphatic usage

This section deals with tweets using hashtags as an alternative to other forms of emphasis in writing, sometimes in a manner that appears to represent (or at least to be intended to function similarly to) vocal emphasis in speech. Examples (49–52) illustrate this.

- (49) I Bring it on, On my #Own!

- (50) ugh Avis won't rent me a real car because I'm 24 #seriously
- (51) @user Elric only has ONE sword. #Check #Mate.
- (52) @user Lol studyin on a Friday night?It's the weekend #BEFREE lol. & I'm doin nothin:(everyone has work so I had to come home early

In (49), it is difficult to think of reasons compatible with the cooperative principle why the poster chose to turn “own” into a tag. It seems most plausible that the purpose is simply to use the hashtag to set the word apart from the rest of the sentence typographically in order to emphasize it. It is common in writing to mark emphasis by typographically marking letters, for instance by bolding, italicizing, or using upper-case. On Twitter, only the last of these emphatic devices is available. Thus, it is conceivable that many users seize upon the typographic marking created by hashtagging a word or phrase as an alternative. If (49) were spoken, it is easy to imagine how the final word might be given vocal emphasis to strengthen the force of the expression of independence. Similarly, it seems likely that the word “seriously” in a spoken version of (50) would be stressed to express disappointment or incredulity. With (51), it is possible that “check” and “mate” were split up into two separate tags to emulate the way in which one might use stress and rhythm in speech to emphasize the finality of the winning chess move: “*Check...mate.*” In example (52), the poster has also emphasized #BEFREE by putting it in upper-case, presumably to strengthen the force of the imperative.

Example (53) shows particularly expressive use of hashtags for emphasis:

- (53) #why oh why is this guy #kissing a #fucking #RACOON !!!! #nooooooooooooo

Taking into account elements of (53) such as the distraught “why oh why” and the intensifier “fucking,” it seems clear that the main intent with the tweet is to express intense emotion. The tagging is accordingly most reasonably construed as emphatic, thus enhancing the expressive force of the utterance. Of course, there is also a note of playfulness in the tweet, as the horror expressed is so overstated, from the theatrically melodramatic quality of “why oh why” to the excess of hashtags. This flouts the maxims of quantity and quality – overstating the horror such that it cannot reasonably be taken as genuine – presumably for comic effect.

Example (54) shows how emphatic tagging may also be used for distancing, arguably in a manner similar to how scare quotes are used in standard writing.

(54) I hate when hoes be callin me #sir or #mister... stop dat shit
 The force of (54) is that the poster does not consider “sir” and “mister” to be appropriate terms of respect, at least when applied to him by people he considers “hoes”. Thus, it seems that the poster is marking the words by tagging them in a manner similar to how one might in speech utter the words with a dismissive tone of voice (or, again, mark them with scare quotes in writing).

3.7 Humorous and playful usage

In what follows, there are several examples of hashtags being employed to fulfill some humorous or playful function, including some examples where hashtags and the practice of tagging itself becomes the subject of playful commentary.

(55) Once again everyone. I do not dye my hair. Not on my head anyway.
#scarydayglopubes.

Excluding the hashtag, this tweet follows a common joke structure, with a set-up and a punch line. If the cooperative principle were not in force, “Not on my head anyway” would constitute a failure to observe the maxims quantity, relation, and manner. In fact, the poster is flouting these conversational maxims in order to imply, humorously, that he does dye other hair on his body. The hashtag *#scarydayglopubes* adds an additional level of humorous absurdity by suggesting that he dyes his pubic hair with “Day-Glo” color (i.e. pigment that is fluorescent in daylight). The hashtag is thus used to expand the joke with a second punch line.

Similarly, in (56), the illocutionary force of the utterance is generated by flouting maxims.

(56) Having an Alan Partridge moment. Had a protein bar after my shower and got chocolate on my towel. What’ll housekeeping think? #dirtyprotest.

It is suggested that housekeeping staff might mistake some chocolate on a towel for excrement. The tag *#dirtyprotest* furthers the joke, for readers possessing the requisite background knowledge, with a reference to the

1978 “dirty protest” by paramilitary prisoners held in Northern Irish prison facilities, who protested their treatment by smearing excrement on the walls. The tag comically juxtaposes the bit of chocolate on a towel with the conditions of the dirty protest, perhaps suggesting that housekeeping might construe the chocolate on the towel as an act of dirty protest by the poster.

In (57), humor is similarly accomplished by a hashtag that prompts an unexpected inference:

(57) I typed DONG and I meant it. #ownyourtypos

Here, the poster is acknowledging a typo in a previous tweet (*dong* for *don't*), but is making a joke out of it by insisting that it was really what he or she meant. The hashtag *#ownyourtypos* is making a meta-joke: the tag describes what the poster does in the main text of the tweet – he is “owning” the typo (i.e. running with it owning up to it rather than disclaiming it) – but does so in the form of an imperative that sounds like it could be the slogan or catchphrase of a movement. The addition of the hashtag thus prompts the bizarre inference that owning one’s typos is something that one should strive for. Conceivably, the typo “meant” is intentional and meant to add to humorous effect of the tweet.

In (58) and (59), humor arises from how strings of hashtags have been combined:

(58) Because, @user, I don't want them to think I've taken them for granite. #OhYeahIWentThere #NoQuartzWillConvictMe #Rock

(59) Accidentally got the wrong kind of Trader Joe's frozen pizza. #Emergency #Horrors #AbandonHope #BookOfRevelation #NotEnoughCheese

In example (58), the tag *#OhYeahIWentThere* presumably refers to the immediately preceding pun (which plays on the approximate homophony of *granite* and *granted*), with the illocutionary force that the poster is unapologetic for his cringe-worthy geology pun. The second tag, *#NoQuartzWillConvictMe*, continues in this vein, with the poster proclaiming that there will be no legal come-uppance for his punning (even while adding another geology pun to his list of offences). The third tag, *#Rock*, reiterates the geology theme, but looks more like a common topic tag. However, the terseness and sheer matter-of-factness of the hashtag becomes something of a joke itself, in the context of the two preceding tags. The humorous force of the tag *#Rock* is perhaps strengthened by how it flouts the maxims of quantity and relation: Otherwise, since the tweet is

not a productive contribution to the topic of “rock,” the tag is superfluous and irrelevant. Example (59) also features a humorous string of hashtags. The main text of the tweet is a trivial anecdote about the poster getting the wrong kind of frozen pizza. Given the triviality of the problem, the force of the first tag is clearly hyperbolic, and the subsequent tags ramp up the hyperbole with absurd references to Dante’s *Inferno* and the biblical Apocalypse of John. The poster is thus flouting maxims, dramatically overstating his concern, for comic effect. The final tag emphasizes the discrepancy between the tags and the main text of the tweet by apparently noting an especial concern that the frozen pizza he bought might not have enough cheese.

The final examples in this section are comments on excessive hashtag usage, themselves featuring self-consciously excessive hashtag usage:

- (60) Ever perplexed by the particularly Welsh business fixation of #bizarrely #excessive and #obscure #twitter #hashtagging #Flibble
- (61) #HowToGetBlocked #Put #Hash #Marks #On #Random #Words. #Booty #Legs #Hamburgers #Chicken #Sofas #Pillows #ESPN #Grease #Twizzlers
- (62) #i #want #my #own #hash #tag

These examples express stances taken regarding excessive hashtag usage, while themselves demonstrating such excess. Presumably, the self-conscious irony of engaging hyperbolically in the very linguistic behavior that one is condemning is intended to be humorous. Example (61) is perhaps especially noteworthy, since it even uses a mock topic tag, *#HowToGetBlocked*, to summarize its message: “this is how to behave if you want people to block your tweets.” Finally, in example (62), the poster might be using excessive hashtagging to strengthen the force of his expression of desire for a personal hashtag (whatever that might mean), but presumably the poster is simply fooling around with hashtags in a way that is not necessarily meant to signify anything but playfulness (cf. the notion of performing a “ludic self” on social media in Deumert 2014).

3.8 Memes and popular culture references

This section deals with a convention that was found among some posters of using Internet memes or other popular culture references (quotes or paraphrases) as hashtags in their tweets. After being coined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins as a cultural analogue for the biological concept

gene (Dawkins 2006: 189–201), the term *meme* has come to be used online to refer to phenomena such particular phrases or genres of images or videos that start replicating rapidly throughout an online population.

As may be evident, this notion of memes maps well onto the hashtag games described above. Such games may be considered transient hashtag memes that trend as the game is going on and then fall out of use (cf. the “micro-memes” of Huang et al. 2010). The memes considered in this section, however, are less transient and do not form part of a particular communal game. The phrase “cool story, bro,” for example, is a meme that is quite widely used (across platforms and over time) as a sarcastic response to a story that is deemed pointless or boring.⁶ In (63–65), the posters have affixed this response as a hashtag to their own tweets:

- (63) I just found out my Uncle’s ex-wife is the niece of Doris Roberts. #coolstorybro
 (64) I woke up this morning in a panic because I thought it was Monday. #coolstorybro
 (65) when I was younger I actually had an imaginary friend called Ralph.
 #coolstorybro

The tag functions partly as a disclaiming meta-comment, acknowledging that the story related in the tweet is probably of little interest to anyone else and thus pre-empting a negative response from readers. Further, the tagging of the phrase “cool story, bro” can also be seen as way of recognizing its status and significance as an established cliché, i.e. meme, by marking it typographically.

Other memes are also treated in a similar manner, as in examples (66–68):

- (66) How is my Diet Pepsi flat inside the can? #idonteven
 (67) Finally have a few hours for writing. Here I go. #nano #nevergonnagiveyouup#nevergonnaletyoudown
 (68) Neighbors did not agree with our volume level. Denver PD was very cool about it though. #donttasemebro

These examples all have in common that the tagging functions to mark recognizable online memes typographically (in addition to other

⁶ See e.g. <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/cool-story-bro> (accessed 26 September, 2014).

communicative functions served by the tags in their respective contexts).⁷ For instance, the exclamation “don’t tase me, bro!” was widely circulated online in a variety of contexts following the utterance of the words in a popular video clip of a young man who had to be forcibly subdued due to disruptive behavior during a speech by Senator John Kerry at the University of Florida. The poster of (68) is apparently repeating the meme as a joking contrast to her own peaceful encounter with Denver police.

Further searching also revealed a similar mode of hashtag usage for widely recognized quotes from popular films:

- (69) @user I had a run in today... Like a pack of wolves when they all join in.#franklymydearidontgiveadamn
- (70) Dear Knoxville, we are picking up trash tomorrow. Please drive carefully. Note, we are all stocked up on pumpkins.#GoAheadMakeMyDay
- (71) Robert DeNiro to host SNL on December 4th. #YouTalkinToMe ?
- (72) Did I mention that our pardon system has a 96% success rate, i.e. former inmates rehabilitated and NOT reoffending.#youcanhandlethetruth

In sequence, the tagged quotes come from *Gone With the Wind* (1939), *Sudden Impact* (1983), *Taxi Driver* (1976), and *A Few Good Men* (1992). Again, it seems likely that part of the reason why the different posters all chose to turn the references into hashtags might be to mark them typographically as significant clichés. “You talkin’ to me?”, for instance, is such a recognizable quote, even among many who have not seen the film, that it is essentially a cultural object in its own right.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Hashtags on Twitter are used to perform a wide variety of communicative functions. For some uses, the linking feature of hashtags is directly relevant, but other times, it is clearly not. Some posters appear to be appropriating Twitter’s hashtag format as a substitute for features that Twitter lacks, e.g. tagging instead of bolding or italicizing. Other posters appear to be using tagging as an alternative to conventional options that Twitter does afford, e.g. marking emotive words and phrases with hashtags rather than with asterisks, or using hashtags instead of parentheses or

⁷ All the memes in these examples are described in the meme database *Know Your Meme*. See e.g. <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/dont-tase-me-bro> (accessed 26 September, 2014).

quotation marks. Many posters use hashtags in unpredictable ways, to mark punch lines or additional jokes in humorous tweets, or to mark Internet memes and pop culture references. In many cases, it is difficult to even speculate as to why the poster may have chosen to turn a word or phrase into a tag, but often the apparent arbitrariness of the tagging itself seems to carry playful force. Moreover, it seems plausible that even when hashtagging serves no other clearly discernible purpose, it can still serve some social purpose in establishing the poster's credentials as a member of the Twitter language community as opposed to other online communities.

Further, many instances of hashtag usage exemplified above seem notable for how they compress a lot of illocutionary force into short strings of letters, even if this happens at the expense of clarity. Previous CMC research has demonstrated an interest in the relation between affordances and constraints of new media and the forms of interaction and expression of language that take place in them (e.g. Thurlow & Brown 2003; Johnsen 2007; Spagnolli & Gamberini 2007; Crystal 2008; Tagg 2011). In a medium that imposes restrictions on utterance length, as Twitter does, it is possible that this is part of the reason why some posters put some content in a syntactically compressed hashtag form when it could otherwise have been typed out in full. However, it should also be noted that some of the tags analyzed above display playful excess and redundancy rather than compression.

As for the pragmatic approach taken here, David Crystal has suggested that a new approach to pragmatics might be necessary for dealing with CMC, since "classical" pragmatics is adapted to face-to-face speech situations (Crystal 2010: 234). However, the basic pragmatic approach of trying to unveil the logic by which intention is inferred from natural language utterances was definitely found to be applicable to the language situation of Twitter in this study. The meta-comment tags may be understood in terms of hedging, disclaiming and managing face, through the exploitation or flouting of maxims. The parenthetical explanations are analyzed as providing background information which is sometimes crucial to clarifying utterance force, but other times supplemental. The emotive and emphatic tags are analyzed mostly in terms of how they strengthen or change the illocutionary force of utterances, often in a manner reminiscent of the work done by non-verbal cues in face-to-face conversation. The humorous and playful uses of hashtags can be understood in terms of maxim-flouting and the exploitation of background knowledge. The addition of hashtags referencing memes and popular culture, of course, is

only made meaningful through inferences that the reader draws made on shared background knowledge of the origin of what is being referenced. While pragmatic methodology is typically applied to spoken interaction, this study demonstrates that even a traditional speech acts framework is eminently applicable to written communication in new media.

In sum, the findings reveal that users of Twitter have to a significant extent appropriated the hashtag organizing and categorizing device for other purposes, sometimes completely removed from the expected functionality. This may be a result of users actively extracting potential from a technology, but it is also possible to frame these new meanings and uses as affordances offered by the technology, or as functions emerging in the interface between user intentions and medium constraints and affordances (cf. Hutchby 2001; Mischaud 2007). The present study leaves this question open, but suggests it as an interesting avenue for further research into communication on Twitter. That being said, it can be concluded from the results presented above that users of Twitter have taken to the hashtag function, turning it into or tapping its potential as a multifunctional linguistic device for structuring information, playing games, and creating meaning in interaction.

References

- Austin, John Langshawe; Urmson, James Opie (ed.) & Sbisà, Marina (ed.) (1976) *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, second edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baron, Naomi Susan (2008) *Always on: Language in an Online and Mobile World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2009) The myth of impoverished signal: Dispelling the spoken language fallacy for emoticons in online communication. In Jane Vincent & Leopoldina Fortunati (eds.), *Electronic Emotion: The Mediation of Emotion via Information and Communication Technologies*, pp. 107–131. London: Peter Lang.
- Basch, Diego (2012, July 31) Some fresh Twitter stats (as of July 2012, dataset included). <<http://diegobasch.com/some-fresh-twitter-stats-as-of-july-2012>> (26 September 2014).
- boyd, danah & Ellison, Nicole (2008) Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (1): 210–230.
- Crystal, David (2006) *Language and the Internet*, second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (2008) *Txtng: The gr8 deb8*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2010) Internet language. In Louise Cummings (ed.), *The Pragmatics Encyclopedia*, pp. 234–236. London: Routledge.

- Dawkins, Richard (2006) *The Selfish Gene*, thirtieth anniversary edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dresner, Eli & Herring, Susan (2010) Functions of the nonverbal in CMC: Emoticons and illocutionary force. *Communication Theory* 20 (3): 249–268.
- Deumert, Ana (2014) The performance of a ludic self on social network(ing) sites. In Philip Seargeant & Caroline Tagg (eds.), *The Language of Social Media: Identity and Community on the Internet*, pp. 23–45. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grice, Herbert Paul (1975) Logic and conversation. In Peter Cole & Jerry Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics: Vol. 3, Speech Acts*, pp. 41–58. New York: Seminar Press.
- Honeycutt, Courtenay & Herring, Susan C. (2009) Beyond microblogging: Conversation and collaboration via Twitter. In *Proceedings of the 42nd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, pp. 1–10. Los Alamitos, CA: IEEE Press.
- Honigman, Brian (2012, November 11) 100 fascinating social media statistics and figures from 2012. *The Huffington Post*. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brian-honigman/100-fascinating-social-me_b_2185281.html> (26 September 2014).
- Huang, Jeff; Thornton, Katherine & Efthimiadis, Efthimis (2010) Conversational tagging in Twitter. In *Proceedings of the 21st ACM Conference on Hypertext and Hypermedia*, pp. 173–178. Toronto: ACM.
- Hutchby, Ian (2001) *Conversation and Technology: From the Telephone to the Internet*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Jansen, Bernard; Zhang, Mimi; Sobel, Kate & Chowdury, Abdur (2009) Twitter power: Tweets as electronic word of mouth. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 60 (11): 2169–2188.
- Johnsen, Jan-Are (2007) Constraints on message size in quasi-synchronous computer mediated communication: Effect on self-concept accessibility. *Computers in Human Behavior* 23 (5): 2269–2284.
- Jonsson, Ewa (2013) *Conversational Writing: A Multidimensional Study of Synchronous and Supersynchronous Computer-Mediated Communication*. Uppsala University: Engelska institutionen.
- Kwak, Haewoon; Lee, Changhyun; Park, Hosung & Moon, Sue (2010) What is Twitter, a social network or a news media? In *Proceedings of the 19th International Conference on World Wide Web*, pp. 591–600. Raleigh, NC: ACM.
- Leech, Geoffrey (1983) *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Levinson, Stephen (1983) *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mischaud, Edward (2007) Twitter: Expressions of the whole self. An investigation into user appropriation of a web-based communications platform. London: Media@lse. <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/mediaWorkingPapers/MScDissertationSeries/Mishaud_Final.pdf> (26 September 2014).
- Murthy, Dhiraj (2011) Twitter: Microphone for the masses? *Media, Culture & Society* 33 (5): 779–789.
- (2013) *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age*. Cambridge: Polity.
- O'Connor, Brendan; Balasubramanian, Ramnath; Routledge, Bryan & Smith, Noah (2010) From tweets to polls: Linking text sentiment to public opinion time series.

- In *Proceedings of the Fourth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*. Washington, DC.
- Page, Ruth (2012) The linguistics of self-branding and micro-celebrity in Twitter: The role of hashtags. *Discourse & Communication* 6 (2): 181–201.
- Seargeant, Philip & Tagg, Caroline (2014) Introduction: The language of social media. In Philip Seargeant & Caroline Tagg (eds.), *The Language of Social Media: Identity and Community on the Internet*, pp. 1–20. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Searle, John (1969) *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1979) *Expressions and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spagnolli, Anna & Gamberini, Luciano (2007) Interacting via SMS: Practices of social closeness and reciprocation. *British Journal of Social Psychology* 46 (2): 343–364.
- Sperber, Dan & Wilson, Deirdre (1995) *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, second edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tagg, Caroline (2011) *The Discourse of Text Messaging: Analysis of Text Message Communication*. London: Continuum.
- Thurlow, Crispin & Brown, Alex (2003) Generation Txt? The sociolinguistics of young people's text-messaging. *Discourse Analysis Online* 1 (1): 30.
- Twitter (2014) Twitter terms of service. <<http://twitter.com/tos>> (26 September 2014).
- Weng, Jianshu; Lim, Ee-Peng; Jiang, Jing & He, Qi (2010) TwitterRank: Finding topic-sensitive influential twitterers. In *Proceedings of the Third ACM International Conference on Web Search and Data Mining*, pp. 261–270. New York: ACM.
- Wu, Shaomei; Hofman, Jake; Mason, Winter & Watts, Duncan (2011) Who says what to whom on Twitter. In *Proceedings of the 20th World Wide Web Conference (WWW'11)*, pp. 705–714. Hyderabad, India: ACM
- Yus, Francisco (2011) *Cyberpragmatics: Internet-Mediated Communication in Context*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Zappavigna, Michele (2011) Ambient affiliation: A linguistic perspective on Twitter. *New Media Society* 13 (5): 788–806.
- (2012) *Discourse of Twitter and Social Media: How we Use Language to Create Affiliation on the Web*. London: Continuum.
- (2014) Enacting identity in microblogging through ambient affiliation. *Discourse & Communication* 8 (2): 209–228.

Contact information:

Peter Wikström
 Karlstads universitet
 Institutionen för språk, litteratur och interkultur
 651 88 Karlstad, Sweden
 e-mail: peter(dot)wikstrom(at)kau(dot)se