Discursive norms in blogging

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DISCURSIVE NORMS IN BLOGGING

Abstract

The article proposes an empirical research of blogging practices associated with the negotiation of the community identity. The data are verbal exchanges on Victor Ciutacu's blog "Vorbe Grele" ["Harsh Words"]. The participants in blogging reveal their perceptions of behaviours that are or are not appropriate to their common endeavour.

According to first order approaches to verbal interaction (Watts and Locher, 2003), it is the participants' perceptions that are worth examining for uncovering the relational work within a community of practice.

Blogging interactivity is contrasted to related, but distinct media/genres of Computer-Mediated Discourse. Both technical and social norms are considered, relying on classic literature (Herring, 2007; Nardi, 2004). This theoretical framework provides the conceptual foundation that underlies the discourse analysis of the interaction between blogger and readers. The analysis extends over the context and the conditions in which the interactants produced their contributions.

Blogging norms regulated by "Netiquette" are discussed in the examples offered by the research. The prohibition of blatting, chatting, deviating from the post topic receives different interpretations. The way prohibitions are imposed by the author of the blog leads to verbal clashes. In spite of the conflicts, both the blogger and the commenters share a propensity to relativize the effects of the norms.

Consequently, the participant-oriented approach refers to a variety of points of view, contained by the numerous posts analysed (670). They are ideologically marked too, although the expression of loyalty is mainly implicit.

Keywords: blogging interactivity, community of practice, Netiquette, appropriateness, discourse analysis.

Résumé

L'article propose une recherche empirique des pratiques associées à la négociation de l' identité d'une commmunauté émergeante sur le blog. Le corpus de l'étude consiste en echanges verbaux extraits du blog de Victor Ciutacu "Vorbe Grele" [Mots Sévères]. Les participants à l'interaction sur le blog révèlent leur perception des comportements qui sont ou ne sont pas appropriés à leur entreprise commune.

Selon les approches de premier ordre à l'interaction verbale (Watts et Locher, 2003), ce sont les perceptions des participants qui méritent d'être examinés pour découvrir la composante relationnelle du discours au sein d'une communauté de pratique.

L'interactivité sur le blog est rapportée aux medias/genres proches, et pourtant distincts de la Communication Médiatisée par Ordinateur (CMO). Tant les normes techniques que les normes sociales sont examinées en s'appuyant sur la littérature classique (Herring, 2007; Nardi, 2004). Ce cadre théorique fournit les fondements conceptuels qui sous-tend l'analyse du discours de l'interaction entre le blogueur et les lecteurs. L'analyse s'étend sur le contexte et les conditions dans lesquelles les interactants produisent leurs contributions verbales.

Les normes de l'interaction sur le blog, régies par "Netiquette", sont discutées dans les exemples offerts par la recherche. L'interdiction de l'usage du "blatting", de la conversation du type "Chat", aussi bien que l'interdiction de s'écarter du sujet du billet reçoivent des interprétations différentes. La manière que l'auteur du blog emploie pour imposer ces règles aux co-participants mène à des affrontements verbaux. En dépit des conflits, tant le blogueur que les commentateurs partagent une propension à relativiser les effets des normes.

Par conséquent, l'approche axée sur les participants se réfère à une variété de points de vue, contenus par les nombreux billets et commentaries analysés (670). Ils sont idéologiquement marques, meme si l'expression de la loyauté est essentiellement implicite.

Mots clé : interactivité sur les blogs, communauté de pratique, Netiquette, approprié, l'analyse du discours

1. Introduction

The present empirical research proposes the examination of Computer Mediated Discourse (CMD) within the clearly defined technical and social situation of blogging. The technical conditions of the medium limit the interactive communication of the participants, mapping out alternative possibilities of communicating within and across CMD genres.

Blogs acquired public significance owing to events in which they impacted on the public sphere. One of the most notorious incidents involving blogging concerned former President G.W. Bush. In September 2004, during an edition of "60 Minutes", Dan Rather claimed to have uncovered the documents exposing the military record of the President. "Immediately after the program, blogs such as Powerline and Little Green Footballs posted analyses that discredited these documents as forgeries. These stories helped open up a dialogue between high profile blogs and journalists, and became symbolic of the potential credibility and significance of blogs" (Chesher, 2005: 8).

Besides unveiling the dark side of politics or business and forcing solutions to problems on the public agenda, political blogs have also proved efficient during political campaigns, in the countries where blogging was intense enough..

In Romania, blogging has not a long history. The first Romanian blogs were created and maintained in the dawn of the years 2000 and soon journalists and politicians among other public persons opened individual blogs too. The phenomenon is steadily expanding, covering various fields of interest and hosting numberless communicative activities. Likewise, established journalism makes constant reference to statements or photos posted on high profile blogs.

In this article, blogging is first contrasted with related media/genres of online communication, at the level of interactivity.

Secondly, emphasis is laid on the analytical framework that articulates concepts such as the norms of the blogging community of practice, the relational work emerging from the verbal interaction between bloggers and readers, as well as the derived notion of appropriate verbal behaviour of the participants in the blog under discussion. This

framework underlies the participant-oriented approach to the specific practices on the examined blog.

After presenting the contextual information about the blog as a whole, I will focus on the research data, consisting in several sets of verbal illustrations from Victor Ciutacu's blog "Vorbe Grele" ("Harsh Words").

2. Interactional norms in blogging.

Blogging is a form of online communication related to, yet distinct from, other online media such as instant messaging, chat, email, and newsgroups. Due to its considerable popularity, blogging has become a mainstream use of the Internet (Nardi et al. 2004:15).

Considered to be a distinct communication channel (Gumbrecht, 2004), medium (Nardi et al., 2004) or genre (Herring, 2007) blogging is constrained by various factors, both of technical and social nature.

It is the multi-faceted classification of CMD, devised by Herring, that places blogging communication between websites, interpreted as "static and formal" (Nardi et al. 2004: 7) and asynchronous computer-mediated communication of the email type. Since there is no time boundary, blog readers may leave their comments at any time, finding the blogger's posts in the blog archive.

In addition to limited one-to-many interactivity, Herring referred to "asymmetrical communication rights" between blogger and blog reader; bloggers have the rights to control the content of their blogs and to receive feedback from their audience.

Within the group of bloggers that Nardi et al. (2004: 7) interviewed in their ethnographic research, blogging was seen as less intrusive than email. "Readers go to the blog in a completely 'voluntary' manner, when they have time. […] What drew both writers and readers to blogs was the rhythm of frequent, usually brief posts, with the immediacy of reverse chronological order." Moreover, blogging enabled the participants to interact more than it would be possible to do on homepages, where they were distracted by too numerous materials.

Although more informal than homepages, blogs are expected to deal with serious issues. Most readers declared that they blogged to comment on topics they found relevant and important. A blog, said one, can be "a point of view, not just chatter" (Nardi et al., 2004: 7).

Generally speaking, bloggers have a regular audience reading their posts and anticipating new ones. Blogging could be, "solving one of the key problems of any writing, i.e., knowing who to write for" (Nardi et al., 2004: 10). Comments are inherent to communication in general and to blogging in particular, because they "enhance the sense of community that you get" (Gumbrecht, 2004: 4). Even if blogger and commenters do not all know one another face-to-face, they exchange opinions through the blog.

Other electronic genres supporting communities range from chat, group websites, listservs, to MOOs and MUDs. The latter, as synchronous media, encourage forums for textual interaction but they have no archives, while chatting, listservs and other highly interactive media may become too "adversarial". When conflict is generated among blogging community members and it grows too personal, it is channeled to email or chatting. "When discussion heats up, it may be removed to other media, leaving the blog a relatively peaceful forum, averting "flames" and open conflict and aggression among community members" (Nardi et al., 2004: 12).

3. Community of practice and norms

Blogger and readers share interests both in interacting on the Internet and in the content of their posts. In the process of developing their common project, the participants create and feel bound to observe explicit or implicit norms. A norm "is a standard to which we are expected to conform whether we actually do so or not. […] "All societies have rules or norms specifying appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and individuals are rewarded or punished as they conform to or deviate from the norms" (Gibbs, 1965). It is the very negotiation of norms that makes the interactants acquire the sense of belonging to the same community.

"A community of practice (CofP) is a group of people brought together by some mutual endeavor, some common enterprise in which they are engaged and to which they bring a shared repertoire of resources, including linguistic resources, and for which they are mutually accountable" (McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 71).

The CofP approach focuses on the practice that legitimates participants as group members. Within the fluid, dynamic and emergent computer-mediated community, it also indicates the degree to which they participate in the group activities. Wenger (1998: 73 *apud* Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 580) identifies three criterial features of a CofP: (1) mutual engagement, (2) a joint negotiated enterprise, and (3) a shared repertoire of negotiable resources accumulated over time.

The community members strive for differentiating themselves as a group from other more or less similar social formations. Negotiating their shared norms, they negotiate the identity of their community.

The intrinsic relation between community norms and community identity is suggestively rendered by Bousfield (2007: 2188): "Indeed, a 'norm' must surely be considered one of the necessary constituent components for an activity type 'X' to be an activity type 'X', or for a community of practice 'Y' to be a community of practice 'Y'". Giving the example of an English pub, Bousfield demonstrates that, even if pubs prohibit smoking inside the place (observing the anti-smoking legislation), pubs will still be pubs. Smoking is just a pub practice. With or without it, pubs preserve their identity. In exchange, if alcoholic drinks are prohibited in pubs, they will certainly lose their identity as serving alcohol is inherent to pub keeping. Bousfield (2007: 2189) concludes: "The discussion here centres on our understanding within activity types/communities of practice of what constitutes a 'norm' and what a 'probable/possible occurrence' within such settings. 'Norms' and 'probable/possible occurrences' are not the same animal at all."

In the case of blogging, some norms derive from the constraints of the technical medium, others are negotiable within the social framework.

From a different perspective, the former could be assimilated to descriptive norms, while the latter could be considered prescriptive, as they depend on the

individuals' will and desire to join a common endeavour. "Prescriptive norms are those values that people are expected to adhere to (or at least strive for)" (Kiesling, 2003: 511).

4. Relational norms within a community of practice

Besides exchanging opinions in a constrained interaction, bloggers and readers are committed to a relational activity in keeping with the norms of the respective practice. „Relational work refers to all aspects of the work invested by individuals in the construction, maintenance, reproduction and transformation of interpersonal relationships among those engaged in social practice" (Locher and Watts, 2008: 96).

Locher and Langlotz (2008) consider the concept of relational work to be equivalent to Spencer-Oatey's concept of 'rapport management' that is "based on behavioral conventions, norms and protocols" (Spencer-Oatey, 2005:99).

Relational work is adjusted to the interactants' expectations about the norms of their community of practice. The way the members behave in relation to one another may or may not be judged to be appropriate. It is the members who produce and share interpretations of appropriate interpersonal and intersubjective behaviour.
Following Watts and Locher's (inter alii) model of first order approach to interpersonal relationship, the present study stands for a participant-oriented examination of the process through which the norms are negotiated. It focuses on the perceptions of the interactants. It is their meta-comments on practices and norms that reveal expectations about „rights and obligations pertaining to their person" (Locher and Langlotz, 2008: 170).

Conforming to the Internet technology is not sufficient for complete integration of the users into one of the computer-mediated communities. They are expected to comply with Netiquette [or e-politeness] that is meant to govern their behaviour. For instance, writers are told to keep their posts "on topic" and relevant […] so that readers do not waste time reading messages that are not about what they expect" (Graham, 2007: 745).
Likewise, it is considered inappropriate to "blat" (re-post private messages publicly) without the original author's permission and thereby violate the original writer's privacy. "Unlike reporting speech in spoken interaction, blatting, since it involves a written (and

therefore accurate) record, may expose the writer to greater risk than a spoken, third-party report and is therefore negatively marked in CMC" (Graham, 2007: 745).

Relational work more than (im)politeness researchers recommend empirical research for the examination of "the intricacies of perceptions" in various contexts of verbal interaction. A complex communicative situation such as blogging has the premises of a fertile domain to explore. The present analysis reveals how conflicts originate in the participants' disagreement on interpretations of appropriate behavior in the blogging community of practice. It also exposes the way these conflicts lead to extended interactions, as well as the community members' assessments of conflicts.

5. Ciutacu's blog

In 2009, the year under analysis in this study, Ciuacu's blog was the sixth most commented blog in the ZeList, while in July 2009, it was on the first position.

Victor Ciutacu's blog is entitled "Harsh Words" ("Vorbe Grele"). He gave the same name to the TV show he hosts at Antena 3. There are more than one suggestions triggered by the blog title. The name of the TV show might echo Tim Sebastian's "Hard Talk" for the BBC World Service, announcing an ambitious project of assertive and even hostile interviewing. But the way Ciutacu actually hosts the show does not seem to confirm this similarity.

As far as harshness is concerned, the name seems more appropriate to his blogging practices. According to his own declaration: "Da, a scrie la mine pe blog e un privilegiu. Daca vreau, las mesajele injurioase la adresa mea, daca nu, nu. Asa e, sunt discretionar, chiar dictator. Da' sunt pe banii mei, fiindca – stimati anonimi ai Net-ului – aceasta este o proprietate privata. Proprietatea lu' Ciutacu, daca tineti la rigoare…" [Yes, writing on my blog is a privilege. If I want to, I let pass the injurious messages addressed to me, if I don't want, I don't. It's true, I'm discretionary, even a dictator. But I am so on my own money, because – dear anonymous people on the Net – this is a private property. Ciutacu's property if you like rigour.]

When the author declares to be a dictator, he may refer to his policy of message filtering. Every post is preceded by the following warning: "Comentariile trebuie

aprobate înaintea publicării. Vă mulțumesc!" [Comments must be approved before publication. Thank you!]

There are more dictatorial posts in the data selected for examination in this study. For example, they concern the way "my rules" are imposed or the membership of the filtering commission: "It [the commission] is made up by me, me and me".

"Harsh Words" was created in 2007. Its creation was accompanied by the following self-presentation: "Sunt Victor si nu sunt alcoolic; workaholic, insa, da. Dimineata prestez pentru mogulu' Felix (Jurnalul National), iar seara, surpriza, tot pentru oligarhul cu pricina (Antena 2)." [I'm Victor and I'm not alcoholic; but I am workaholic indeed. In the morning I work for Felix, the mogul (Jurnalul National), and in the evening, surprise, I work for the same above-mentioned oligarch (Antena 2).]

Introducing himself in these terms, the blogger indicated to the potential blog commenters how to identify him as an important employee of the "Intact" trust, as a journalist and political analyst, given the content and orientation of his media products. E-users who were familiar with his journalistic activity were prepared to find the ideological bias of the "Intact" trust on Ciutacu's blog too. Actually, the implicit prerequisite for the redears who intend to leave comments on it is to be readers of Jurnalul National and mainly TV viewers of the authors' work for Antena 3. Moreover, commenters are encouraged to watch the Antena 3 shows hosted by Ciutacu's friends, Mihai Gadea and Mircea Badea.

The blog audience is thus narrowed to the public that meets these requirements, sharing the information supplied and interpreted by the trust. The blog readers expect the same type of journalism and political analysis that they find in Ciutacu's offline professional practices.

Across the 22 topic categories of the blog, posts are not thematically distinct, in spite of the category names. For instance, there is no great difference between the blogger's posts under "Ce-i place geniului" [What the genius likes] and his posts under "Ce-mi provoaca scarba" [What makes me sick]. Concerning the number of posts, the category for which the author shows a clear preference is the latter, within which Ciutacu has accumulated the greatest number of posts.

6. Data and methodology

The research data consist of the blogger's posts and the readers' comments under the topic category entitled "Replicile zilei" [The Day's Replies]. This study is focused on 9 posts written by Victor Ciutacu and on the 661 posts commenting on them, throughout the year 2009 .

Generally speaking, original posts are short interpretations of excerpts from mainstream media, and they usually contain the writer's reaction to them. As far as comments are concerned, they express various points of view, although most of them are accumulations of explicit or implicit agreements to the original posts. When they do not expose personal experience or appreciation of the Antena 3 above-mentioned shows, they consist in jokes, original rhymes, classic poetry or famous quotations.

There is little "hard core" of the community of practice. Actually, there are no more than 10 commenters who post with a relative regularity and who participate in interaction under several of the author's posts. Only 5 to 7 of them leave comments across time and across topic categories. This seems paradoxical for the most commented blog in July 2009. It is also paradoxical that some of the participants in "The Day's Replies" post only once or twice but, when they do that, they confess they share the others' sense of community.

Methodologically, I made the content analysis of all the posts (670), in order to classify them into types of norms. The relational norms between the blogger and the commenters and among the latter were emphasized to the extent to which they emerged during the negotiation of the other norms. Within this discourse analysis, a special concern for me was to provide the context within which one post becomes significant. Consequently, I only selected the norms that received at least one comment either from the blogger or from the readers. I omitted the interactions that aimed at Victor Ciutacu's persona and Ciutacu's posts addressing personal attacks or "callous" remarks to some of the readers.

7. Discourse analysis of the data

a) Netiquette norms

- Blatting

>(1) @*Costin Tanasescu: te rog mult sa te opresti cu **copy/paste-urile***
>
>[Please, I do ask you to stop **copy/pasting**]
>
>By Victor Ciutacu on 29 October 2009 at 9:45 pm

As Costin Tanasescu reproduced/quoted a paragraph from E. Udrea's blog, V.C. imperatively asks Costin Tanasescu not to infringe the rules of CMC. In fact, Netiquette prohibits quoting from private correspondence on the Net (e.g. on email) so Ciutacu is wrong, as Udreas's blog is public.

>(2) *Victore, **copy-paste-urile mele**, sunt informatii interesante luate de pe*
>
>*internet.Vreau sa scapam de Tiran si asta poate m-a inversunat. Faptul ca*
>
>*portocalii **ne** injura la drumul mare, ma irita. Am inteles mesajul tau.*
>
>[Victor, **my copy-pasting** is interesting information taken from the internet. I
>
>wish we would rid the country of the Tyrant and maybe that has infuriated me.
>
>The fact that the orange are swearing **at us** out and loud irritates me. I've got your
>
>point.]
>
>By Costin Tanasescu on 29 October 2009 at 10:41 pm

At a certain distance, Costin Tanasescu's answer is more than clarifying. Starting with "Victore", the direct and informal address implied in the use of V.C.' first name, s/he defends her/himself and tries to ingratiate with V.C., revealing the relevance of this information for their common goal (emphasized by the use of the personal pronoun in the first person plural) of chasing the Tyrant and of his orange followers.

By "I've got your message", the commenter assures the blog owner of her/his obedience. On the one hand, obedience refers to acceptance of the blogging rule. On the other hand, I consider that s/he agrees not to use the orange sources any more, so that the blog should not be discredited for unfair treatment of the political adversary.

- Chatting

> (3) @ *Dan — CE GRAD AI , AMICE ???? SPER CA NU MAI MULT DE SUBLOCOTENENT !!!!* [What is your rank, buddy??? I hope it's not higher than under lieutenant!!!]
> De lupi pe 21 January 2009 la 4:05 pm
> (4) *Imi cer scuze Lupi dar nu sunt la curent cu gradele dar poate ma ajuti tu ca pari un fin cunoscator.* [I am sorry Lupi but I am not familiar with officer ranks, but maybe you could help me, 'cause you seem to be a connoisseur.]
> By Dan on 21 January 2009 at 4:21 pm

Although placed at a certain distance one from the other, the two comments posted by one constant participant, Dan, and lupi, who only participated under one original post, opened a one-to-one verbal exchange. Before (3), Dan has given a more critical approach to the "official" stance. lupi challenges Dan's point of view, attacking his social and professional identity (his/her officer rank). The insinuation concerns Dan's belonging not to the army, but to the Romanian Intelligence Service that has the reputation of a repressive institution before 1989.

Dan reacts in a peaceful but insinuating way too. S/he intends to throw suspicion onto her/his direct interlocutor, calling him "connoisseur" in officer ranking (a hint at lupi's belonging to the Romanian Intelligence Service).

After 3 posts by each of them, lupi sending 3 more on the main topic, Ciutacu interferes:

> **(5)@Dan & Lupi: va rog (deocamdata) sa nu transformati blogul asta in chat**
> [I **do ask you (for the time being) not to turn this blog into a chat**]
> By Victor Ciutacu on 21 January 2009 at 6:24 pm

V.C. interrupts the controversial exchanges, without explaining what he means by chatting, but he gives the term a negative connotation. Apparently, he defends the purity of the blogging genre against one-to-one conversation. At the same time, he seems to be

annoyed by the fact that Dan and lupi escalate their conflict on a topic differing from the main one. His annoyance is signaled by the warning within brackets.

(6) ***Aveti dreptate*** *domnule Ciutacu.*

[**You are right** Mr Ciutacu]

By Dan on 21 January 2009 at 6:29 pm

Very soon after C.V.'s intervention, Dan respectfully admits her/his mistake.

(7) *Foarte bine, Victore,*

Fă ordine. ***Aici se discută probleme serioase****.* ***Mă mir că Lupi, pe care îl apreciez*** *de când tot citesc tot ce scrieţi voi pe acest blog, intră* ***în asemenea discuţii sterile.***

SALUTĂRI TUTUROR!

[Well done, Victor, Impose order. **Serious issues are being talked about here. I am surprised that Lupi whom I appreciate** since I have been reading what you have written on this blog, gets into such **sterile discussions**. My regards to all of you!]

By HAPAX on 21 January 2009 at 6:52 pm

As for HAPAX, although not a regular participant, as s/he explains, s/he is the only commenter who expresses an opinion on the incident in (3), (4) and (5). S/he ironically agrees to V.C.'s authoritative imposition. S/he interprets chatting as a medium/genre that is suitable for sterile discussions.

(8) *@ TUTUROR — Ini cer iertare pentru ca am abuzat in interventziile mele si in polemica mea cu un anume blogger !!* ***Totusi , datzi-mi voie sa cred ca se poate purta si un dialog , nu doar sa ne inshiruim si sa ne incolonam postarile , precum indienii „ in sir indian"!!!*** [...] [Everybody – I apologize for the abuse in my polemic against a certain blogger!! Yet, allow me to believe that we can

engage in a dialogue too, rather than standing in a file to post our comments one after another, like the Indians, "in an Indian file"!!!]

By lupi on 21 January 2009 at 10:05 pm

At a considerable distance from Ciutacu's warning and HAPAX's perception on chatting, lupi, the commenter who has started the dispute with Dan, apologizes for it, although in a sarcastic tone when he refers to "a certain blogger". Afterwards, s/he interprets the prohibition of chatting as an anti-dialogue norm. Blogging as preached by Ciutacu is compared with "the Indian file". Actually, s/he negotiates the significance of this norm.

(9) *Eu pun punct aici, in primul rand pentru ca **lui Ciutacu nu-i place chat-ul pe blogul sau**, iar in al doilea, nu vad de ce as mai continua.* [I'll put a full stop here, first of all because **Ciutacu doesn't like chatting on his blog**, and secondly I don't see why I should continue.]

By violet on 10 September 2009 at 6:57 pm

Violet does not refer to chatting as a deviation from blogging. S/he is willing to observe the anti-chatting norm because this is what Ciutacu likes. S/he associates chatting to quarrelling, as long as s/he invokes the norm observance in order to put an end to a previous dispute.

- Deviation from the post topic

(10) ***Sa stii ca nu sunt la subiect dar** am o "nedumerire" si nu stiu cui sa o "zic" ELENA UDREA poate sa fie ministru' turismului?*
*Eu acum ceva vreme vroiam sa deschid o agentie de turism, dar nu pot pt. ca nu sunt licentiat in turism. Nu mai dezvolt subiectul, dar **daca vreti voi il puteti dezvolta.***
[You should know **I won't stick to the subject** but "something is not clear" to me and I don't know to whom I can "speak" about it. Can Elena Udrea be the

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Minister of Tourism? Some time ago I wanted to open a tourism agency, but I couldn't do it because I don't have a diploma in tourism. I won't enlarge on this subject**, but if you wish you can enlarge on it.]**
By Ciutacu on 2 February 2009 at 9:37 pm

Ciutacu starts his comment by admitting he is going to break the blogging norm of conformity to the topic of the main post. He does that in order to signal an act of discrimination between ordinary people and the members of Parliament who are entitled to manage domains without having the necessary educational qualifications. He tries to compensate for the exception to the rule inviting the members to enlarge on his comment.
.

(11) *@relu: Voiculescu-si conserva profitul, Vantu-si mareste pierderile. e simplu.* ***da'ce lagatura are asta cu subiectul sub care postezi?*** *ca nu ma prind…*[Voiculescu preserves his profit while Vantu is increasing his losses. It's that simple but **what's the link between this and the subject under which you are posting?** 'cause I don't get it…]
By Victor Ciutacu on 22 January 2009 at 1:28 am

Ciutacu answers the question asked by relu, a not regular commenter. What he reveals to the group is flattering for his image; Voiculescu's trust for which he works is able to preserve its profit even in times of crisis. In spite of this favourable fact, he reprimands relu for not conforming to the topic of the main post.

- Injurious language (relational work marked by impoliteness)

(12) ***e bine sa tratam serios problema.*** *[...] nu-i totusi vinovat procurorul de la Craiova ca rusul a omorat 2 oameni,* ***sa fim seriosi***. [**We'd better treat the issue seriously**. [...] the public prosecutor in Craiova can't be blamed 'cause the Russian has killed two people, let's be serious.]
By A.M. on 2 February 2009 at 2:31 pm

A.M. speaks in favour of the state representative and the district police, disagreeing with the blogger's point of view on the Gordunov case. In addition to that, A.M. performs two directive speech acts, implying that s/he considers her/himself entitled to give lessons to the community who share Ciutacu's interpretation of facts. The acts express criticism for the commenters' lack of objectivity.

(13) *@A.M: ti-am postat comentariul numai pentru a-ti confirma **ca esti un imbecil*** [I've posted your comment just for showing you that **you're an imbecil**]
By Victor Ciutacu on 2 February 2009 at 3:06 pm

Without any arguments to underlie his disagreement with A.M.'s interpretation of the public scandal, Ciutacu offends her/him by attacking him personally. It is not the unique example of the owner's brutal reaction against newcomers who disagree with his point of view.

(14) *Violet…nu stiu nici eu daca **esti prost (proasta)** sau te duce capul. M-as lamuri daca ai lega si tu cateva fraze consecutive.* [Violet ... I'm not very sure whether **you are stupid** or you have a good head for something. I would guess if you could link two sentences]
By Marius on 10 September 2009 at 3:20 pm

After a previous controversy concerning their difference on topic approach, in (14), Marius suddenly bursts out and offends Violet. The accusation of stupidity is aggravated by Violet's previous "confession" that she would be a mature lady, a university graduate. In his turn, Marius previously "unveiled" his private identity as a young man of 24 years old. The latter justifies her/his rudeness by addressing the insult in both grammatical genders which questions Violet's declared/pretended identity

(15) *@Marius: **la viitoarea jignire a oricui de aici, pleci oricunde altundeva***
[**the next time you insult anybody here you shall leave for wherever it may be**]

By Victor Ciutacu on 10 September 2009 at 3:23 pm

Violet has proved to be an active and obedient community member, while Marius, although an active commenter too, frequently criticizes the shared interpretation of the main post. Ciutacu threatens Marius with expulsion from the blog, in case s/he repeats the mistake. The owner defends the "peaceful atmosphere" of the blog and, pretending to do justice to everybody "here", he actually protects violet in exchange for her/his loyalty. Thus he isolates Marius who, anyhow, is perceived as "difficult".

(16) *Oricum am observat* **ca esti foarte sensibil la jigniri si cuvinte mai contondente. Din pacate doar cand iti sunt adresate…nu si cand le adresezi.** [Anyhow I noticed **you are very sensitive to insults and harsher words. Unfortunately, it is only when they are addressed to you …but not when you address them to the others**]
By Marius on 10 September 2009 at 3:44 pm

Unlike other conflictive exchanges placed at a certain distance one from the other, the responses in (14), (15) and (16) are close enough. Marius accuses Ciutacu of unequal behaviour in the way he treats injurious remarks: he uses them but he does not accept to be used against him.
Marius's comment remains without reaction.

b) Ideological norms

(17) *M-am hotarat. Fac ii fac blog colectiv Oficiosului! […]*
Doua reguluia:
1. Vor fi admisi sa posteze articole **numai unii dintre cei care au fost in prealabil admisi in calitate de comentatori pe blogul lui Ciutacu.**
2. **Nu vor fi admisi cei tolerati de Ciutacu si care put de la o posta a PORTOCALIU INCHIS.**
[I've made up my mind. I'll make a collective blog for the Officious!

17

There are two rules:

1. The people admitted to post articles will be **only some of those who have been previously admitted as commenters on Ciutacu's blog**

2. We won't admit people tolerated by Ciutacu and who stink of dark orange from far away]

By [FuXi](#) on 30 March 2009 at 5:55 pm

FuXi jokingly proposes to mock at Evenimentul Zilei ("the Officious Newspaper") for being humbly loyal to the Government. The commenter thinks of teaching the newspaper staff a lesson by devising a blog whose members would criticize the present political power (identified by "the orange"). The most suitable to do this practical joke would be the toughest commenters on Ciutacu's blog.

As a legitimate community member, FuXi summarizes the anti - orange ideology shared by Ciutacu's readers.

- Admittance of ideological bias

(18) *@begone Lasati-ne in pace daca nu intelegeti ca dictatura este manifestata in mai multe feluri si daca va place asa n-aveti decat sa-l votati.**Sunteti mai rau decat sustinatorii pe fata aai lui Basescu. Atatia oameni de pe blog vad la fel problema,iar dvs sunteti mai intelept?*** [Leave us alone if you don't understand that dictatorship is manifest in several ways and if you like it you are free to vote for him. **You are worse than Basescu's declared supporters. There are so many people on the blog who see the problem in the same way, are you wiser than they are?**] By Asztalos Floare on 30 October 2009 at 2:55 am

Begone has suggested the difference between Hitler's dictatorship (main post topic) and Basescu's regime, to the latter's advantage. Asztalos Floare makes her/his only comment within the "The Day's Replies" category in order to firmly respond to begone's deviation from the anti – Basescu ideology. Begone is treated as an illegitimate participant, whose interpretation of the situation is contrary to the majority/main stance. Asztalos Floare admitts that the majority share biased opinions on Ciutacu's blog.

(19) *Gata domnul Ciutacu, nu mai postez. Ma scuzati.* ***Jos palaria si…jos Basescu****! Tschuss!* [O.K. Mr Ciutacu, I'll stop posting. Sorry. Hats off and…down with Basescu!]
By Seful on 31 October 2009 at 4:27 pm

Seful has critically commented several times under the same post. Being contradicted by several regular commenters, he accepts to withdraw from the blog, but not before showing his appreciation for Ciutacu ("Hats off!") and greeting the whole community with "down with Basescu!". Although Seful might be teasing her/his interlocutors, or be ironical, s/he perceives the greeting as the appropriate way of leaving in an amiable way.

- Disagreement to biased journalism

(20) *Am 24 de ani, n-am nici o legatura cu politica si vreau sa traiesc intr-o tara decenta. Dar* ***nu se poate, ba victore, sa faceti presa la modul asta. Gandeste-te la tine si la familia ta, [...]***
Sunt dispus sa stau de vorba cu oricare dintre voi pentru ca imi este greu daca nu ***imposibil de imaginat cum o persoana intreaga la minte poate sa se comporte asa cum o faceti voi in emisiunile de la antena3.*** [I am 24, I am not at all involved in politics and I want to live in a decent country. But **it's inadmissible, you Victor, that you do press in this way. Think of yourself and your family**, […] I am ready to speak to any of you because **it is difficult if not impossible to me to imagine how a sane person can behave the way you do at antena 3 shows.**]
By Marius pe on September 2009 at 2:43 pm

A constant participant across the blog categories, Marius protests against the biased journalism practiced at Antenna 3 shows. His comment (20) is more than aggressive, since Marius insinuates Ciutacu and his colleagues should be insane and

irresponsible to put their families to danger. From Marius's disagreement, one could infer that either Ciutacu's orientation is too daring or that his endeavour is wrong. In either case, Marius's comments are among the few elements of contrast against a quasi-monochromatic background.

8. Conclusions

Within the two main categories of norms analyzed, there is a vivid dialogue among the participants, a permanent negotiation of the significance of these norms. Although the observance of the blogging rules is expected to be the foundation on which the community of practice is to be built, there are more than one interpretations of the Netiquette. Chatting, for example, is invoked by Ciutacu, but perceived differently by some of the commenters. They hesitate between defining it as a one-to-one interaction or as a permissive genre for quarrelling and deviation from the main topic.

Concerning conformity with the main topic, it is the most infringed rule within the data and it often becomes an argument against inconvenient issues or persons.

On the other hand, quarrelling and insulting are prohibited in principle, while actually they are practised both by the blogger and the readers, in their disputes on rights and obligations. In relational terms, the solidarity among the interactants and the sense of community are manifest on the realm of ideology, but they are exceeded by the aggressiveness with which Ciutacu imposes his rules and the vulgar language that some readers use, even if jokingly.

My conclusion to this point is that, within "The Day's Replies", the norms are not created to be observed. They are strategically used for different purposes varying according to the situation, as I tried to demonstrate throughout the analysis.

Another observation that is worth considering is that when the commenters are accused for breaking the blogging rules, they feel their identities are at stake. They strive to be acknowledged as legitimate users of the Internet, conversant with the various genres of computer-mediated communication and aware of the differences among them.

Enjoying the Internet experience, they are motivated to contribute to the shaping of a community of practice, although, during the year 2009, the examples selected for the

research are among the few occasions when the participants related to one another. The few exchanges are mainly made up of two coupled turn-takings, but, certainly, the interactive practices are greatly dependent on the Internet technologies. The vast majority of posts are addressed to the blog owner, almost ignoring the other participants, they are mere accumulations of points of view that do not coagulate in a coherent whole without the intervention of a moderator.

This type of blogging is still far from offering alternative discourse to traditional journalism or forum practices.

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