

Power in Blogs

Brook Bolander
University of Berne
Wuhrgasse 1, 4900 Langenthal, Switzerland
brookbolander@ens.unibe.ch

This study addresses “power in blogs”. Both the topic of power in computer-mediated discourse (CMD) and the subject of blogs are relatively new in linguistics. Yet, this is only partly due to the novelty of the Internet. For a fairly long time CMD was hailed as democratizing, since everyone with Internet access was felt to have the opportunity to voice her/his opinions, irrespective of age, gender, social class and cultural background (Herring 2004). Many researchers thus postulated a connection between equal participation and equal opportunity within CMD (Baym 1995). As Baym (1995: 140) points out “[r]esearchers often equate this balancing of participation with egalitarianism ... and go on to claim that computer mediation makes it difficult for people to dominate and impose their views on others”. In relation to blogs, Herring (2004) argues that not much empirical evidence supports the claim that blogs are egalitarian.

The aim of this study is to begin to fill this gap by exploring the negotiation of power at the level of interaction in nine medium-sized personal/ diary blogs. A quantitative study, conducted with young adults, as representatives of blog readers, has been designed to elucidate evaluations of powerful and powerless social actors. The subsequent application of text linguistics and discourse analysis will address whether certain linguistic and paralinguistic features tend to be associated with powerful versus powerless social actors; that is, whether certain linguistic features are more or less salient relative to the social actors’ perceived power ranking. This is interesting in light of the fact that mechanisms associated with gaining influence in conversational interaction, such as speakership and turn-taking (Ng & Bradac 1993) cannot directly be applied to blogs, since their general nature is pre-determined at the structural level of the blogs.

The data for analysis consists of posts and comments in which conflicts are salient and in which social actors attempt to restrict one another’s action-environments (Wartenberg 1990). It is in such situations that the exercise of power can be detected (Locher 2004).

References

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