Lukas Eibensteiner, Robert Hesselbach (eds.)

Social Media

Current Issues in Romance Linguistics and Foreign Language Education

AVM.edition

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Lukas Eibensteiner & Robert Hesselbach

Introduction

1 Relevance of Social Media for Linguistics and Foreign Language Education

Due to the ongoing digitalization of society, social media have become an integral part of everyday private and public communication. In this changing society, where even traditional print media like newspapers are increasingly being digitized,[1] platforms such as *Twitter*,[2] *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, and *TikTok* are driving the flow of information. Users can receive and disseminate the latest status updates from their friends, video clips and news reports on their smartphones in a matter of seconds. Activities associated with these platforms have already been integrated into the lexicon as internationalisms, whether as a direct loanword from English, as in *to like*, *to post*, *follower* > German *liken*, *posten*, *Followerin/Follower*, or with some modification: the same English words are translated as *me gusta*, *seguidor/a* in Spanish. In addition, platforms like *YouTube* facilitate the emergence of completely new professions such as *YouTuber*, which have already been the focus of recent linguistic research (Prohl 2019a; 2019b).

The way in which members of modern societies communicate and debate has now largely moved to the digital space. As Marx, Lobin and Schmidt (2020, XI) point out, '[t]he focus has thus shifted away from the fascination that devices and their affordances exert on language users towards the use of language on platforms, which have now become a constitutive element of our communication' ("Der Fokus hat sich also

[1] For example, in many cases, news media use social media to link a short news report to the actual story on their homepage (sometimes for a fee), thereby creating a kind of digital intertextuality (Hesselbach 2020a).

[2] *Twitter* changed its name to *X* during the publication process. As it was not clear at the time of publication whether this change would be permanent, we decided to keep the name (*Twitter*), which was used until mid-2023.

verschoben weg von der Faszination, die Geräte und deren Affordanzen auf Sprachbenutzer/innen ausüben, hin zum Sprachgebrauch auf Plattformen, die inzwischen ein konstitutives Element unserer Kommunikation geworden sind").

The technical aspect of communication on platforms, which the authors implicitly refer to, is a central theme echoed in most definitions of *social media*: For instance, Reinhardt (2019, 3) describes social media as "any application of technology through which users participate in, create, and share media resources and practices with other users by means of digital networking". Kaplan and Hänlein (2010, 61) further elaborate on this, defining social media as "Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content". Finally, Schmidt and Taddicken (2017, 9) define social media as 'offerings built upon digitally networked technologies, facilitating access to diverse information and the establishment and maintenance of social relationships' ("Angebote auf Grundlage digital vernetzter Technologien, die es Menschen ermöglichen, Informationen aller Art zugänglich zu machen und davon ausgehend soziale Beziehungen zu knüpfen und/oder zu pflegen").

In addition to maintaining digital social contacts, one of the key features of the definition of social media is the possibility for users to participate in a creative way. Users are not only passive recipients of a wide variety of content, but are also empowered to generate multimodal content themselves, comprising images, videos, texts, memes, and more, for direct dissemination. This aspect forms the central interest of this publication: how is linguistic content created in social media and how can social media be used in foreign language education? The eight contributions within this volume focus on Romance languages, examining different regions where these languages are spoken and various social media platforms.

2 Social Media as a Research Topic in Linguistics

Based on computer-mediated communication (CMC), social media offer people the opportunity to interact and communicate digitally with friends, relatives, acquaintances, colleagues and even complete strangers synchronously, quasi-synchronously or asynchronously. Digital platforms such as *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, *TikTok*, and *Telegram* provide an opportunity for fast, direct, multimodal and multilingual communication. These opportunities are further enhanced by simple, intuitive software applications on devices which have become an integral part of everyday life: computers, tablets, and smartphones. These are the reasons why – as already mentioned – the communication behavior of the linguistic community is changing drastically, leading to transformations in communicative practices (cf. Eckkrammer 2018).

In the field of linguistics, a wealth of research has been carried out on the topic of *social media* for several languages, particularly in the last decade, as evidenced by large volumes such as the one by Marx/Lobin/Schmidt (2020). According to Page et al. (2014, 1), this research focus is due to social media's particular attractiveness for linguistic research projects:

> Researching the language used in these social media contexts is a growing area of interest. There are many reasons why this field is particularly attractive for researchers. The sheer amount of interaction which takes place within social media contexts means there is a wealth of material that can be considered, and that material is often available in forms that are (relatively) easy to access. The fast-paced and rapidly evolving nature of these interactions mean that there is often something new to be observed, whether that be about the seemingly 'routine' interactions that interweave social media with people's day-to-day activities, or about the variously creative ways people adapt and innovate in their communication with each other. Given the scope of what might be included in a research project about the 'language in social media' it can be hard to know exactly where to start.

The very broad research paradigm described by the authors, which has also expanded significantly since 2014, offers numerous opportunities for studies with very different linguistic interests. Recent studies in the field of Romance linguistics show that researchers address very different aspects when analyzing communication in social media, and thus also address topics relevant to different languages. These topics are presented in the list below, which is far from exhaustive. In addition to general

media linguistic issues (cf. Thaler 2003; Baechler et al. 2016), the following topics are discussed:

- the creation of new, digital text types (cf. Rentel et al. 2014; Wenz 2017)
- multilingualism in computer-mediated communication (cf. Ueberwasser/Stark 2017)
- media-specific variation (cf. Jakob 2018)
- the phenomenon of code-switching (cf. Franko 2019)
- grammatical structures, e.g. on the syntactic complexity of *Twitter* messages (cf. e.g. Recio Diego/Tomé Cornejo 2017)
- the use of graphic elements (cf. in particular the studies on German by Dürscheid/Meletis 2019; Dürscheid 2020a; 2020b; 2020c)
- the language of journalism in social media (cf. Alizadeh Afrouzi 2021)
- the language of politics in social media (cf. Suray Ventura 2016; Mencke 2018; Visser 2018; Hesselbach 2020b; Leschzyk 2020; Eibensteiner 2021; Slimovich 2021 etc.)

The 2020 US presidential election campaign has made the importance of social media in political discourse clear to a wide audience. Politicians use social media to get their unfiltered messages out to the public directly. Social media has become the most important communication tool used by politicians nowadays.

The reach that can be gained through social media is enormous.[3] The majority of linguistic studies on social media therefore focus on analyzing political discourse in the digital space, as can be seen from the studies listed above. Their aim is to uncover and describe strategies of political language usage with the help of discourse-analytical methods. Several essays in this volume can also be assigned to this field:

In their article "Scapegoating in Telegram Groups: A Contrastive Analysis of Topoi and Rhetorical Strategies of Anti-Semitism in German and French Messages", **Eva Martha Eckkrammer** (Mannheim)

[3] Donald Trump has around 87 million people following his *Twitter* account (@realDonaldTrump), while Joe Biden has around 32 million people followers on his account as US President (@POTUS) and around 37 million on his private account (@JoeBiden) (figures from August 30, 2023).

and **Sandra Steidel** (Mannheim) analyze a bilingual corpus consisting of German and French messages from *Telegram* groups. The authors trace topoi and rhetorical strategies in these messages aimed at fueling anti-Semitic scapegoating narratives during the coronavirus pandemic. The authors conclude, among other things, that many of the cases described must be treated as anti-Semitic hate speech based primarily on false facts.

In his article "Analyzing Linguistic Patterns in the Social Media Discourse of Juan Guaidó and Nicolás Maduro during the 2019 Political Conflict in Venezuela", **Robert Hesselbach** (Erlangen-Nürnberg) presents an analysis of the battle for digital sovereignty of opinion in Venezuela's political conflict in 2019. In this corpus-based study, Hesselbach analyzes linguistic patterns in the tweets of the two political opponents Nicolás Maduro and Juan Guaidó. On the one hand, the results of the study show a change in the use of linguistic patterns by both politicians after Guaidó proclaimed himself the legitimate interim president of Venezuela on January 23, 2019. In addition, the discourse analysis reveals that Guaidó depicts himself more as the democratically legitimized representative of the Venezuelan people, while Maduro presents himself linguistically as the guarantor of state order and as the country's defender against threats from both home and abroad.

Miriam Zapf (Erlangen-Nürnberg) addresses the discussion on *Twitter* about gender-inclusive language use in the French context with her study "'Stop à cette ineptie d'écriture inclusive. Stop à la dictature des idéologies stupides!' – A Critical Analysis of Twitter Comments against Gender-Inclusive Language". Based on a multilingual corpus of *Twitter* comments, the author uses critical discourse analysis to identify the typical arguments against gender-inclusive language use and the underlying ideologies. Zapf claims that the language in her corpus is strongly ideological and that advocates of gender-inclusive language use are constructed as an out-group. She concludes that it is not primarily about gender-inclusive language use, but rather about the negotiation of social power relations.

However, social media are not only used by politicians to influence public opinion; they also offer speakers of a regional and/or minority language the opportunity to use them actively (cf. Tölke 2015; Erhart 2020). The article "'One does not simply bstell e Flammküeche ohne Ziwwle': Sociolinguistic Issues of Multilingual Computer Mediated Communica-

tion in Alsace" by **Pascale Erhart** (Strasbourg) can be located in this thematic area. The author deals with the question of how a language such as Alsatian, which was historically mainly used for oral communication, is increasingly used in written form in computer-mediated communication. After describing the sociolinguistic status of Alsatian, Erhart presents a typology of strategies for the written use of Alsatian in CMC contexts. In addition, she analyzes memes to discuss how a regional identity can be represented in social media characterized by a global media culture.

3 Social Media in Foreign Language Education

Recent studies on media use confirm that digital and social media have become an integral part of children's and young people's daily lives. For example, the JIM study shows that students aged 12–19 years spend an average of more than 200 minutes online every day. Most of this time is spent on messenger services and social media platforms such as *WhatsApp*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, or *TikTok* (mpfs 2021, 66). Such findings highlight the importance of providing educational-institutional support for students in developing media literacy. An influential definition of media literacy has been offered by Aufderheide, who defines it as the ability to "decode, evaluate, analyze and produce both print and electronic media. The fundamental objective of media literacy is *critical autonomy* in relationship to all media" (Aufderheide 1993, 1; emphasis added). Another prominent definition – at least in the German-speaking countries – goes back to Baacke's (1996) model of media competence, which distinguishes four different dimensions: the concept of media studies refers to knowledge about media (*Medienkunde*); media use concerns the ability to use different media (*Mediennutzung*); media design makes reference to innovative and creative design of media (*Mediengestaltung*); and finally, media critique concerns the ability to critically reflect on media and media use (*Medienkritik*).

Both Aufderheide and Baacke emphasize the importance of critical reflection on media and media use and the need to develop critical literacies, an aspect that has also been highlighted in the pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group 1996). In this framework, it is argued that in order to address societal challenges such as digitization, heterogeneity,

cultural and linguistic diversity, a merely text-based literacy that primarily focuses on monolingual individuals and interaction in purely physical spaces is no longer sufficient. Instead, a pedagogy of multiliteracies "focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone" (New London Group 1996, 64). It is emphasized that learners therefore need to be able to analyze, reflect and produce different kinds of multimodal and multilingual media. In addition, the pedagogy of multiliteracies asserts an emancipatory goal of empowering individuals to participate in diverse forms of social practice. This, in turn, requires critical literacy, which emphasizes that learners need to be trained to engage in societal discourses both online and offline (Küster 2014), including communication and interaction on social media platforms (Nagle 2018). Students should be empowered to analyze media, media use and media content from a critical perspective and become aware of how these can be potentially discriminatory or manipulative. In this sense, Vasquez, Janks and Comber (2019, 307) highlight that individuals should be encouraged to think critically about "social issues, including inequities of race, class, gender, or disability and the ways in which we use language and other semiotic resources to shape our understanding of these issues".

In order to respond appropriately to the challenges of an increasingly digital world in which social discourses are often shifted to digital or hybrid spaces, the KMK (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany) published a strategy paper entitled 'Education in the Digital World' ("Bildung in der digitalen Welt", KMK 2017), emphasizing the importance of promoting digital competences. In summary, they propose a model of digital competence with six dimensions:

- Searching, processing, and storing
- Communicating and cooperating
- Producing and presenting
- Protecting and safely acting
- Problem-solving and acting
- Analyzing and reflecting (KMK 2017, 10–13)

The KMK upholds that digital competence should be fostered in all school subjects, which means that foreign language education is also expected to contribute to its development. As highlighted in the new

Educational Standards for the First Foreign Language in Germany (KMK 2023), foreign language education should facilitate the development of a so-called foreign language-specific digital competence in its students. This includes 'competences for receptive, productive, and interactive participation in multimodal communication and interaction' and 'competences for critical and reflective use of opportunities to support one's own foreign language learning both inside and outside school' ("Kompetenzen zur rezeptiven, produktiven und interaktiven Teilhabe an multimodalen Kommunikations- und Interaktionsformen (mündlich, schriftlich, visuell, Mischformen)" as well as "Kompetenzen zur kritisch-reflektierenden Nutzung von Möglichkeiten der Unterstützung des eigenen Fremdsprachenlernens sowohl innerhalb als auch außerhalb von Schule und Unterricht", KMK 2023, 25–26; translated by the authors).

While virtually all forms of digital media hold potential for enhancing digital competences, this volume focusses on the possibilities of integrating social media into foreign language education (Beißwenger/Knopp 2019; Brocca 2020; Reinhardt 2019 & 2020; Würffel 2020). To elucidate the manifold advantages of leveraging social media within the foreign language classroom, Reinhardt (2020) employs four metaphors:

1. **Social media as *windows* into the target language/culture:** The first metaphor refers to the possibility of learners' observing how native speakers use the target language on social media platforms to interact and socialize in authentic communicative situations. Like through a window, students can gain access to authentic language input and cultural practices. These can be analyzed and discussed in the foreign language classroom, for example by focusing on linguistic, sociolinguistic or pragmatic aspects of language use. In addition, social media provide insights into different types and genres of discourse (Reinhardt 2020, 237). For example, micro-messenger services like *Twitter* contain mainly news and political discourse, while social networks such as *Facebook* or *Instagram* offer glimpses into (semi-)private everyday interactions. All these aspects can be used in foreign language education to gain authentic access to the target language/culture. This can have positive effects on the students' target language or inter-/transcultural competence.

2. **Social media as *mirrors* of the self:** Social media allow users to carefully construct and present their identity to the outside word (albeit often in an idealized and therefore not unproblematic form). The possibilities for self-presentation range from descriptions and comments written in personal blogs or published in a *Facebook* group, to image- or video-based posts on *Instagram* or *YouTube*. Activities that use social media as mirrors should encourage learners to reflect critically on how and why media content has been shared and how cultural factors may influence such self-presentation (ib., 237–238).
3. **Social media as *doorways* into a foreign discourse community:** Another benefit of social media is that they enable participation in a foreign language community as well as in inter-/transcultural discourses. In Reinhardt's words, they "serve as not just windows to look through, but as portals to traverse" (ib., 238). In this sense, learners can not only gain insights into the daily lives of target language speakers, e.g., by subscribing to famous influencers, but can also interact with them by sharing and contributing content (ib., 238–239). Moreover, social media provide an ideal way for heritage speakers to maintain contact with friends and family in their countries of origin, serving as an authentic reason for teachers to incorporate the respective heritage languages in the foreign language classroom.
4. **Social media as *playgrounds*:** Finally, social media can be seen as platforms on which students can learn and play in an informal and autonomous way, thereby discovering new languages and cultures. This involves using social media as a means for simulation pedagogy or situated learning. For instance, social media accounts can be used to create avatars the class controls, which can then be employed to interact with other users on the platforms (ib., 239–240).

While social media offers several advantages, it also poses numerous risks, which can be described by a fifth, more negative metaphor:

5. **Social media as a *precipice*:** This metaphor highlights dangers such as the significant potential for addiction, the perceived reduction in attention span due to excessive consumption of short videos (*shorts*, *reels*), exposure to illegal, discriminatory, and/or offensive content, and the thoughtless sharing or misuse of personal data. Activities

concerning this metaphor should develop students' critical literacy as mentioned above and help them to critically reflect on their own use of social media.

Against this background, Nagle (2018) argues that students should develop a social media-specific competence, referred to as *critical social media literacy*. She maintains that students should not only examine and evaluate social media as a tool, but should also critically reflect on issues of access and power, including questions of inclusion and exclusion (e.g., who is active on a social platform and in what way). Additionally, they should be made fully aware of the risks and be equipped with strategies to deal with possible cases of witnessing and experiencing cyberviolence, discrimination, etc.

In conclusion, the use of social media in foreign language education offers many opportunities, but also involves some challenges and risks. In the educational part of this volume, four contributions concentrate on such issues, focusing on the video platform *YouTube* and the social network *Instagram*.

YouTube is considered to be the most popular video platform among young people. Foreign language teachers can take advantage of its popularity by including video clips into the classroom in order to match the students' interests and preferences. One way of doing this is to deal with videos uploaded by well-known influencers (Höfler 2017). However, as **Elke Höfler** (Graz) argues in the first article of this section ("Learning Romance Languages with Influencers. Mission (im)possible?"), it is not sufficient to adopt a purely passive attitude of reception when watching *YouTube* videos. Instead, students must learn to actively and critically analyze and question them. She argues that a monolingual and written literacy is not enough in order to cope with the challenges of the 21st century and advocates for additional training of multimodal and multiliterate skills. To this end, she claims that *YouTube* videos of influencers are a fruitful medium and should therefore be considered more often in foreign language education.

The following two contributions also concentrate on *YouTube*, with an emphasis on the analysis of learner/explainer videos. Typically, such video clips are used to explain complex content in a pedagogically simplified way. Students often use them to learn new things autonomously,

to revisit misunderstood concepts, or to delve deeper into topics that have only been superficially covered in class (Eibensteiner 2024; Lachmund 2022). Since *YouTube* videos are widely used in both formal and informal learning, it is important to note that they are often not subject to any quality assessments (Zeyer 2023, 105). In their article "Exploring Multimedia Learning Principles in Explainer Videos for Foreign Language Instruction", **Diana Vesga**, **Felix Röhricht** and **Lukas Eibensteiner** (Jena) concentrate on explainer videos on *YouTube*. They focus on French past tenses (*passé composé* and *imparfait*) and investigate whether the videos meet general quality criteria of multimedia learning (Mayer 2001). Their results, based on a corpus of five videos, show that although the producers try to consider Mayer's multimedia design principles, there is still room for improvement.

In the third paper of this section ("Potential of *YouTube* Explainer Videos in Learning and Teaching Portuguese as a Foreign Language"), **Lukas Fiedler** and **Benjamin Meisnitzer** (Leipzig) focus on the potential of learner videos on *YouTube* for teaching Portuguese as a tertiary language. They show that such videos can be used as an authentic source of input. Additionally, they provide some practical ideas and worksheets to demonstrate how such videos can be employed not only to develop listening and audio-visual comprehension, but also to promote intercomprehension and receptive variety competence.

In the final contribution of the volume ("*Grande Littérature* meets Social Media: Transmedial and Transcultural Approaches to Fostering Sustainable Reading Motivation and Digital Discourse Literacies"), **Anne-Marie Lachmund** (Potsdam) describes how literary classics can be rediscovered through the use of the social media platform *Instagram*. The main part of her paper focuses on a hashtag analysis of Marcel Proust's novel collection *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Lachmund shows how the images resulting from the hashtag analysis can be utilized for an initial exploration of Proust's work, and how such a student-oriented approach "may arouse curiosity and increase reading motivation, paving the way for future consistent readers of literary classics" (p. 240).

*

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Part I:
Current Issues in Romance Linguistics

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Scapegoating in Telegram Groups: A Contrastive Analysis of Topoi and Rhetorical Strategies of Anti-Semitism in German and French Messages

Abstract: Human beings and social groups tend to apply diverse, often completely irrational strategies of self-defence when challenged with new situations that cause uncertainty or fear. Prejudices centred on blaming other groups are frequently articulated in messages distributed and shared on digital messaging services with a wide audience. In this synchronically grounded paper, we focus on contemporary anti-Semitic scapegoating strategies in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic. A bilingual corpus compiled from a large number of relevant Telegram-groups is analysed with regard to the topoi and rhetorical strategies applied in anti-Semitic scapegoating. A contrastive comparison of the French and the German data gives evidence of several similarities concerning the topoi, the rhetoric strategies, and the types of anti-Semitism in play, but also reveals some divergences. Most instances clearly qualify as hate speech based on fake facts, thus more research will be needed in the future to dismantle similar tendencies and create a growing awareness amongst media users.

Keywords: Telegram, scapegoating, anti-Semitism, Coronavirus pandemic, topos analysis

1 Introduction

Whenever societies are radically challenged – as during the Coronavirus pandemic – new conspiracy theories tend to emerge, and old hostilities and phobias are recycled and exploited in contemporary ways. In particular, scapegoating strategies – which are as old as humankind itself – are applied. Scapegoating shall be defined according to Glick as "an extreme form of prejudice in which an outgroup is unfairly blamed for having intentionally caused an ingroups' misfortune" (2005, 244). It is an individual cognitive process frequently related to irrational and maladaptive ego-defence mechanism (Allport 1979). Moreover, it involves – as this paper will focus on – a social process anchored on the group-level that continues to serve as *glue* for nations, societies, ethnicities, and all types

of communities and (political) groups, including groups created by computer mediated communication (CMC).[1]

The spread of viruses, with their ensuing epidemics and pandemics have always been attributed to certain groups reflected in the fact that throughout history diseases have recurrently been named according to their assumed groups of origin (from the *French Pox* to *Kung Flu*, cf. Eckkrammer 2016, 610–746). However, these groups do not necessarily have to be at all related to the factual genesis of the microbe. Thus, during the virulent Black Plague epidemic, which reshaped European society from 1348–1350, Jews were blamed for poisoning wells. In contemporary society, social media is used in various ways and, therefore, has many communicative forms (Dürscheid 2005) that foster scapegoating and hate speech with a communicative reach that is previously unknown, since the speed and storage capacity of social media are enormous in comparison to print culture. Conveying advanced media competency and enabling people to understand the impact of a message's medium, channel or communicative form is an important task for language teaching, especially for the younger generation who is most strongly engaged with social media. Even if we do not agree on the medium being the message itself (cf. Eckkrammer 2021), it is important to untangle the media-specific, multimodal and, above all, verbal strategies applied in scapegoating in the context of a pandemic and beyond.

In this paper, we will focus on hostility towards Jews in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic within a specific social media application. Anti-Semitism is not a modern phenomenon, as it dates back to antiquity. Throughout the centuries, it has manifested itself in various forms of discrimination and violence and has displayed an enormous capacity to change its form and adapt to new historical circumstances. Linguists cannot distance themselves from this issue, because anti-Semitism usually expresses itself in verbal and pictorial form – in texts – before it comes to physical assaults. In addition, we are in the midst of a profound

[1] In CMC the precise individual background of group members can hardly be traced, thus, group membership is constituted by a common interest and a language shared to communicate.

process of communicative change, a media turn[2] – triggered by the step from the atom to the bit and byte – in which the functions of the individual media are being redefined. In cyberspace especially, new forms of social interaction have emerged that trigger and enhance community building across space and time beyond the established forms of interaction and quality-assured media (cf. Baechler et al. 2016). Digital culture implies a multiplicity of digital spaces of interaction that may be public, semi-public, or reduced to certain individuals. Dynamic, non-linear, multimodal hypertextual interaction occurs in the most varied settings and groups, leading to new communicative forms and, genres and opening spaces for a variety of of mobile interaction (since smart phones and micro-computers have become omnipresent). Social networking is ubiquitous and creates platforms both for traditional interaction and for alternative countercultures and conspiracy theories.

Grounded in a genre-theoretical and media linguistic framework, we will analyse the topoi as well as the rhetorical strategies applied in messages posted (and/or reposted) in 50 different groups drawing on the messaging service *Telegram*. Given the strong presence of conspiracy theories and anti-Semitism in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic, we particularly spotlight the different types of topoi related to anti-Semitic patterns in the first half of 2021, at the time when COVID-19 vaccination started. We scrutinize the recurrent verbal strategies applied when anti-Semitic explanatory patterns come into play, for instance defamatory metaphors, but also analogies, synecdoches or euphemism etc.

To pave the ground linguistically, we will define in-group messaging as a specific social practice applied to dispense (fake) news and create an exclusive ingroup spirit by deliberately casting doubt on the truthfulness of other media outlets. As generic point of departure, in the first part of the following theoretical chapter (2.1) we will focus on the individual message, leaving it to later in the paper to address the interactive structures within the groups, with their heavy reliance on reposting,

[2] We use this term to refer to the German term *Medienwechsel* which describes an epochal functional transformation and redefinition of the media-scape (so far two periods: from the manuscript and oral culture to the printed book, and from the printing press to the digital Turing society) rather than *Medienwandel* which refers to the constant change in media experienced by each society.

reframing, and commenting previous messages. In the second part of the theoretical chapter (2.2) we will adress different forms of anti-Semitism – which are bound to contemporary conspiracy theories – by drawing on the relevant literature in different disciplines (Sociology, Political Science, History, etc.). In this way, the various forms of anti-Semitism will become evident in their historical entrenchment and in the specific contours of their content, and which contribute to the generation of those topoi which have been under analysis in politolinguistic research for some time (cf. Wengeler 2003). Analysing the diverse topoi from a contrastive viewpoint wil afford a better understanding of how anti-Semitic scapegoating was rhetorically carried out in different languages in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic.

2 Theoretical framework

Language generally occurs in communicative routines that are functionally grounded, thus in genres which according to Østergaard and Bundgaard represent "recurrent ways of using language that emerge according to the constraints inherent in situations" (2015, 98). Accordingly, the messages analysed in this paper are bound to a specific social setting and triggered by a hierarchical order of functions, which become apparent when studied in relation to the multidimensional model of genre emergence, classification, and analysis (Eckkrammer 2020). In this context, the appellative function governs subjacent functions such as the referential and expressive function, since the messages generally try to convince people of a certain point of view. The anti-Semitic content and its textualization (in the current study we do not include pictures, emoticons, and videos, but concentrate on verbal features) are prompted by the function (scapegoating) that is either drawing on old forms of Judeophobic prejudice introducing new ones. The conceptual level of the messages can be, conceptually oral written language (especially in the French corpus), but also highly elaborate conceptually written messages (mainly in the German corpus). The communicative form is the digital group message, in other words short instances of individually produced content (in some cases citations) shared with a large group (cf. 2.1 with reference to the size of the group). The size of the messages is exter-

nally governed by the platform (maximum size 4.096 signs),[3] which also determines the sign systems allowed and the form. Since we shed light on German and French messages, the Latin alphabet is used along with emoticons and (individually produced) stickers allowed by the application. Finally, the nature of the group (social setting) is defined by the digital medium used, which leads to recurring macrostructural features as well as rhetorical strategies that can be considered as typical for the messaging genre, including lexical choices, analogies, and metaphors. To understand them, however, it is necessary to understand the digital messaging service used in more detail.

2.1 *Telegram* as hybrid messaging service – media linguistic preliminaries

The first instant messaging services emerged in the early Internet era when the IRC (*Internet Relay Chat*) protocol was adopted and paved the way for text messaging. In 1996, the first messaging service, *ICQ* (short for "I Seek You"), was commercialized and instant messaging (SMS) became widely used and extremely popular as a fast quasi-synchronous or asynchronous form of text-based interaction. As ever more powerful micro-computers have been integrated into cell phones, making them *smart* and able to fulfil services previously assigned to personal computers, the communicative form of the text message amongst others (i.e. email, microblogging) has remained important. It has diversified and turned increasingly multimodal (with emojis, pictures, stickers, audio-messages, gifs, videos etc.). Applications such as *WhatsApp* have become extremely popular and messaging services have boomed, even though fervent discussions on data protection and privacy aspects have made people reconsider their habits to a certain extent and forced providers to enhance their protective policies. Each provider supplies slightly differing options and tools, for example the size of groups to be administered. Text messaging has turned from an essentially bilateral affair into a group or broadcasting activity, regrouping and catering to interest groups of very different social and political kinds.

[3] Messages exceeding the number of signs can be produced by adding another message.

The specific form of one-to-many group messaging is in the focus of our study. It serves as a type of push medium that provides the members of a group with the means to circulate (fake) news or information on a specific topic and therefore creates an ingroup sentiment. Communication may be encrypted to a certain degree (cf. below). Community building via messaging can also be seen as a social practice applied to create an exclusive group spirit – to the extremes of deliberately casting doubt on the truthfulness of other media outlets. Messaging groups are not isolated but interrelated in many ways, thus reposts of messages from other similar groups are frequent and seem to strengthen the ingroup spirit but also turn group messaging into a form of social networking. The individual messages may display a high degree of planning or be rather spontaneous, especially when commenting on other messages. Messaging services and their role and function in different societies display changes over time according to their options (especially group size, degree of rules, ban on certain content, i.e. hate speech).

Telegram is a messaging service launched in 2013 by Nikolai and Pawel Durow, the developers of vk.com (until 2012 Vkontakte.ru), a well-known platform in Russia. It is particularly known for its encrypted communication in one-to-one-chats and its lax moderation of content. It became known as a *safer* alternative to *WhatsApp* when the latter was accused of the lack of data protection, driving many users away, but subsequently turned into the preferred messaging service for groups with extremist political positions (cf. i.e. Squire 2020 on the use of *Telegram* by the radical Right). *Telegram* can be understood as part of a "hybrid system" (Rogers 2020, 216) that is located between private messaging and social networking. It provides three basic features (features 2 and 3 were added in 2015): 1) secret chats for one-to-one end-to-end-encrypted conversations, 2) public and private discussion groups focused on interaction within the groups, 3) public and private channels for one-way one-to-many broadcasts with unlimited followers.[4] All features allow multimodal content such as pictures, memes and videos, besides classical verbal text messages. Unlike other messaging

[4] There is quite a deal of cross usage of messages posted in channels and groups. In our corpus, reposts of channel broadcasted content in groups, in particular, is frequently observed.

services, up to 200,000 users can join *Telegram* discussion groups (*Signal* limits group to 1,000 people, *WhatsApp* currently to 256) and therefore reach an enormous number of people. With regards to these unlimited channels, Squire underlines that "for clandestine radical right extremist groups, these public Telegram channels are indispensable for spreading their memes, forwarding content from similar channels, and attracting new recruits" (2020, online). Users can search for keywords and thus find and read public *Telegram* groups. Consequently, in both German- and French-speaking contexts content specific groups can be found through systematic and targeted searches. It is typical for the groups to camouflage their content in the group name and change the name recurrently, making it hard to find the topic targeted in the messaging groups.[5] Accordingly a certain culture of camouflage seems widespread amongst *Telegram* users. The very limited terms of service provided by the *Telegram* application explicitly prohibit the promotion of violence on public channels but they do not interfere or moderate content in private channels or groups (and even with regard to the public one's requests are not responded to according to the established terms, cf. Molla 2021). The messenger service clearly states on its website that illegal content will not be taken down: "All Telegram chats and group chats are private among their participants. We do not process any requests related to them" (Telegram FAQ 2021). This frequently criticised *liberty* also triggers excesses, and *Telegram* has become a meeting place for conspiracy theorists (so far lawsuits against Apple to erase the App from its App Store – like *Parler* – have not been successful). Researchers on the subject, amongst others Rogers, warn that *Telegram* is also used by extremist groups such as ISIS (cf. Rogers 2020, 217).

From a genre-theoretical point of view, the individual message directed at the discussion group (even if it stems from other sources) is the nucleus of the interaction. It is either an autonomous text produced

[5] A vast majority of groups studied here do not contain the terms *Corona*, *COVID-19* or *conspiracy* in their names. It is only possible to find out which groups are relevant in this context from other sources or intense network searches, because the groups mainly operate with members simply sharing similar sentiments and points of view having been pointed to the groups in question by their *ideational network*.

by an individual sender, who is expressing a personal opinion and/or observation, or a text produced by somebody else shared with the group. The message is usually tailored to the targeted audience, and therefore a message to a public might differ from that sent to a private group.[6] Comments and answers are dependent generic entities since they can only be understood as reactions to an initial message, in many cases reaffirming, extending, or underlining previous content.

2.2 Conspiracy theories and forms of anti-Semitism

Times of crisis, such as famine, pandemic, or war, can lead to an increased psychological need for explanations and therefore give rise to the emergence of conspiracy theories. These theories attempt to explain the unexplainable through imaginary theories (cf. Popper 2003, 112). During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals increasingly had to deal with fears about the future, for instance the threat of unemployment and an increasing sense of frustration. At the same time, measures to contain the spread of the virus, such as social distancing, lead in many cases to a sense of loneliness, which is one of the factors behind the increase in the number of individuals suffering from depression and anxiety in response to the pandemic (Palgi et al. 2020, 110). Commonly, conspiracy theories are related to existing fears and find a scapegoat onto whom fears and anger are projected. By using already existing scapegoating concepts, conspiracy theories tend to simplify complex circumstances (cf. Jaecker 2005, 9). Seen from a linguistic perspective, their purpose is to discredit the self-declared enemy by persuasive means (cf. Pörksen 2005, 50). A decisive characteristic for the existence of a hostile image is the rejection of other groups of people, ideologies, or individuals without giving rational reasons (cf. Jesse 2004, 4). To a certain extent, scapegoating can be understood as a response to modern life, liberties, and its uncertainties, which result in a psychological burden for the individual (cf. Flohr 1991, 114). In this way, conspiracy theories

[6] Public and private groups only differ in terms of membership procedures, as there are none for public ones and differing ways of being admitted in private ones (e.g. questions to answer, interaction with other group members, bot chats etc.). Group members have the possibility to act anonymously or with real names (and even pictures or videos) in both types of groups.

and inherent scapegoating strategies may become a source of guidance, "doubts become dispensable; the individual arrives at a firm position that is cognitively underpinned by pseudo-rational justifications".[7] They are pseudo-rational in the sense that they partly rely on intertextuality, as in the case of anti-Semitism propagated by the "Protocol of the Elders of Zion", one of the best-known anti-Semitic propagandistic texts of the 20th century (cf. Holz and Kiefer 2010, 121). Constructing an enemy can entail an identity-forming mechanism, given that "an essential part of personal identity results from the demarcation of one's own person from others".[8] It can create a feeling of cohesion and security because a common enemy makes the differences within the group fade and common convictions grow (cf. Flohr 1991, 122). The latter outcome is pursued, in particular, by marginalized individuals. Often, a "victimization contest" can be observed among marginalized groups (cf. Stender 2010, 7) since the ascription of negative attributes to others, helps to create a positive self-image (cf. Flohr 1991, 119).

Scapegoating is to be understood as a deep-rooted social practice (cf. Glick 2005 on the choice of scapegoats) and Judeophobia existed long before it became the topic of research in the late 1970s (cf. Fischer 2018, 54). In this context, Jews are conceived as a counter-image to one's own group to whom all negative attributions are transferred, i.e. negatively perceived events such as an epidemic, a pandemic or a natural disaster (cf. Jaecker 2005, 11). Examples for associated events are the French Revolution, the First and Second World War (cf. Holz 2005, 28), or the assassination of Martin Luther King (cf. Anton 2011, 45). Jew-hatred differs from xenophobia by portraying Jews as homeless, imposing, and operating in secret. The appearance of the term *anti-Semitism* is often dated to 1879 and attributed to Wilhelm Marr, although it existed decades earlier (cf. Laqueur 2006, 21). Jew-hatred, as mentioned at the very beginning, is a phenomenon that already existed in the times of the plague in the Middle Age, as manifestation of conspiracies around poisoning

[7] "Zweifel werden überflüssig; das Individuum gelangt zu einem festen Standpunkt, der durch pseudorationale Begründungen kognitiv untermauert wird" (Flohr 1991, 116).

[8] "[E]s ergibt sich ein wesentlicher Teil der persönlichen Identität aus der Abgrenzung der eigenen Person gegenüber anderen" (Flohr 1991, 118).

wells (cf. Weyand 2010, 78). This pre-modern form of hatred was primarily carried out by a Christian in-group, accusing Jews of deicide (cf. Schwarz-Friesel 2013, 333) under the claim of knowing the sole truth (cf. Grözinger 1995, 57). Forms of Christian-influenced anti-Semitism have found their way into religious services up to the 20th century (cf. ibid.). With the Enlightenment, legitimisation of the exclusion of Jews ceases to exist (cf. Weyand 2010, 78–79). Therefore, a conception based on racist and Social Darwinist doctrine emerges and replaced the religiously influenced concept (cf. Stein 2011, 23). It is based on a dualism in which a distinction is made between Jews and all other peoples (cf. Schwarz-Friesel 2013, 337), resulting in a "double structure of differentiation" (Weyand 2010, 83). This lead to the establishment of a "völkisch racist" anti-Semitism during the National Socialist era (Schwarz-Friesel 2013, 333). "Eliminatory anti-Semitism" resulted in the killing of more than six million Jews (cf. ib., 336).

Numerous researchers (i.e. Holz 2005; Holz and Kiefer 2010; Stender 2010; Bergmann and Erb 1986; Schwarz-Friesel 2016) argue that the period following the mass murders in the concentration camps by the Nazi regime has been followed by secondary anti-Semitism, or, according to Laqueur (2006) and others, modern anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitic attitudes have persisted in the minds of many people far beyond the Second World War, but (due to legal constraints) they are no longer expressed openly (cf. Salzborn 2010, 204). The core of secondary anti-Semitism is to perform a perpetrator-victim reversal (cf. Holz 2005, 59), which is understood as an attempt to disburden oneself of a past, in which the memory of the Holocaust is seen as a disruption of national identity (cf. Salzborn 2010, 199). Furthermore, any compassion for Holocaust victims and their descendants is rejected. Instead, the confrontation with the murders is framed as an "experience of suffering of the Germans" (cf. Holz 2005, 58). As the author puts it very unmistakeably: "According to this, the *Jews* and not Auschwitz are to be blamed for the fact that Germany is not allowed to be a normal nation".[9] In this line, Jews are accused of being "troublemakers of memory" ("Störenfriede der Erinnerung", Stender 2010, 12) and expressions of dissatisfaction concerning

[9] "Demnach sind *die Juden* und nicht Auschwitz schuld daran, dass Deutschland keine *normale Nation* sein darf" Holz (2008, 215).

reparation payments are frequently spread (cf. Laqueur 2006, 128). The call to end preoccupation with National Socialism and the question of guilt is often referred to as democratic anti-Semitism (cf. Holz 2005, 11), a phenomenon also found in France. Nevertheless, in the French case it relates to colonial history as well as the atrocities of the Second World War (cf. Eckmann 2005, 107). Another difference between France and Germany is that a specifically Islamic anti-Semitism seems to be more frequent in France due to failures in integration policy (cf. Wetzel 2008, 108) and, to a certain extent, can also be perceived as a form of anti-modernism. In practice, it attributes anything that promotes the downfall of the Islamic world to Jews (cf. Holz 2005, 25). Additionally, young socially disfavoured migrants may see the defamations of other minorities as a possibility to level up their own social standing (cf. Eckmann 2005, 107).

Besides democratic anti-Semitism and anti-modernism, a third type of secondary anti-Semitism can be identified as *Israel-critical* or anti-Zionist anti-Semitism. In this case the semantics associated with the term *Jew* is replaced by *Israel* (cf. Beyer and Leuschner 2010, 136). Jews, regardless of their nationality, are perceived as a collective, and thus guilty (cf. Stein 2011, 27). According to Wetzel (2008, 108) this phenomenon can be found across Europe and is particularly spread by left-wing groups. To evade legal proceedings (cf. ib., 106), it is often based on the apodictic assertion that Jews are associated with Satan and strive for world domination (cf. Laqueur 2006, 1).[10]

3 Instant messaging and scapegoating in times of the COVID-19 pandemic

3.1 Previous studies on the subject

The changes in anti-Semitism, its different forms of expression and its latency over time have already been examined by Bergmann and Erb (1986). They outlined that, although people have remained aware of anti-Semitism remains in people's minds, the boundaries of what can

[10] Researchers dispute whether anti-Zionism is in fact necessarily anti-Semitic. It is argued that classifying anti-Zionism as anti-Semitic might result in an immunization of Israel's policies from any criticism (cf. Kiefer 2006, 279).

be said have shifted substantially (cf. ib., 230–231). In addition, Beyer and Krumpal (2010, 286) argue that a distinction between must be made the expression of anti-Semitic opinions in public and private groups. Accordingly, individuals tend to communicate anti-Semitic attitudes more often in a social environment not condemning or even endorsing them and the anti-Semitic message communicated does not necessarily correspond to one prevailing in public consciousness (ib., 701), which makes anti-Semitism difficult to study and entails methodological challenges. The study of anti-Semitism in the field of *computer-mediated communication* (CMC) is still in its infancy. Hortzitz in her analysis of the "Language of Hostility towards Jews" examines emails sent to the Central Council of Jews in Germany (CCJG) and concludes that the use of metaphors, synecdoche, analogies and euphemisms is particularly frequent (cf. Hortzitz 1995, 37). Schwarz-Friesel picks up this thread and analyses emails with anti-Semitic and anti-Israel content sent to the CCJG from a cognitive linguistic perspective. She gives clear evidence of a frequent use of metaphors with a defamatory effect and a revival of Nazi vocabulary. Furthermore, she identifies a high number of Holocaust-denying or -trivialising emails (cf. 2013, 198). As for the link between the Coronavirus pandemic and anti-Semitism the European Commission's study "The rise of antisemitism online during the pandemic", a comparison of the first months of 2020 to the first months of 2021, revealed that there was an enormous increase in both German (multiplication factor 13) and French (multiplication factor 7) anti-Semitic comments shared on social media (cf. European Commission 2021, 8). In the same field, the study "From anti-vaxxers to anti-Semitism: Conspiracy theory in the COVID-19 pandemic", published in 2020 by John Mann, analyses English-speaking Facebook groups on the topic of COVID-19 vaccinations. The author gives evidence that 79% of the groups contain at least one anti-Semitic statement (cf. Mann 2020, 19) and exemplifies various pseudo-arguments of conspiracy theorists, but without quantifying their frequency (ib., 8).

Even though linguists have made digital communication on social media in French and German the subject of debate linguists (cf. for example Rentel et al. 2014; Rentel and Schröder 2018), one-to-many messages in large discussion groups on messaging services with anonymisation functions such as *Telegram* or *Signal* have not yet been examined from a

linguistic perspective. It was a pre-study based on 300 conspiracist comments published at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in German and French *Telegram* groups that brought to light the relevance of the topic focused on in this paper, since it provided evidence of a strong presence of anti-Semitic topoi (22 % of the German, 11 % of the French topoi detected).

3.2 A topos-theoretical and rhetorical approach to telegram messages

3.2.1 Topos-analytical and rhetorical framework

As the aim of this paper is to examine messages from *Telegram* groups from a linguistic perspective in order to detect anti-Semitic topoi and rhetorics, it is Wengeler's topos analysis that provides a suitable form of discourse analysis, having been predominantly developed for political discourse. It is designed to dismantle comparable patterns of thought detected in a discourse and therefore, outlines a prevailing opinion without making a value judgement (cf. Wengeler 2003, 178). The term *topos* goes back to Aristotle and means the discussion of enthymemes, prototypical patterns of argumentation that aim towards plausibility. A topos therefore represents "the substantive reason for justifications".[11] The growing tendencies of individualism in current society contribute to a "multiperspectivity of opinions"[12] meaning that individuals can no longer rely on nation-wide traditions and shared knowledge, but instead they constantly have to deliberate and compare positions with each other (cf. Knoblauch 2000, 664–666). To avoid genuine deliberation, what is used to persuade group members of certain points of view are apodictic statements, which do not necessarily have to be true. Wengeler (2003, 177–178) refers to this type of argumentation by illustrating how the Toulminian three-step scheme is employed. It consists of an argument, leading to a rule of conclusion and the conclusion itself. The conclusion is derived from the conclusion rule, thus in terms of credibility it is crucial that the reader finds the conclusion rule plausible (cf. ib., 180–181) even if the argument is untrue. When recording basic social

[11] "der inhaltliche Grund für Begründungen" (Hamp 2017, 98).

[12] "Multiperspektivität der Meinungen" (Knoblauch 2000, 665).

attitudes within the framework of topos analysis, moral values should not be considered (cf. ib., 141), which is why Wengeler's discourse analysis is intended to bring rationality to political or social discourse (cf. ib., 244). The basis for a topos analysis is a text corpus which, according to Wengeler, should be limited to a specific genre, a defined time, and a specific topic (cf. ib., 294). The author understands topoi as content categories, which reveal different types of thinking patterns, designed "clichés that have congealed into linguistic commonplaces" (ib., 186). Thus, topoi do not compartmentalise information, but rather create thematic categories. Based on the assumption that certain knowledge is socially prescribed, but not necessarily verbalised (cf. ib., 248), a topos may be realised in different shapes, differing from each other in their degree of implicitness or explicitness (cf. ib., 253).

We have shown how the verbal strategies here in question can be analysed according to rhetorical strategies known since antiquity that are employed in manipulating texts with the purpose of evoking certain reactions. Rhetorical devices in Judeophobic discourse have already been examined by Hotzitz (1995) and Schwarz-Friesel (2013), with a focus on metaphors, comparisons, and synecdoches. In the following section, we will show to what extent the rhetorical means of the "Language of Hostility towards Jews" (Hortzitz 1995) can also be traced on *Telegram*. In this context, we define metaphors as the paradigmatic structure that establishes the relation "X is a Y" (Schwarz-Friesel 2013, 196), thereby serving to stimulate attention and generate a higher readiness to absorb information (cf. Dietz 2012, 77). The aim of attracting attention, in particular, is key, due to how numerous *Telegram* groups are, coupled with the fact that these groups can only gain a greater audience if group members remain participant in the discussion. "Conspiracy theorists are almost overflowing with the need to communicate and missionary eagerness for persuasion".[13] Synecdoches consist of an 'exchange between elements that stand in some sort of a *pars-totum* relationship',[14] implying that there is a transfer of meaning between a part and a total.

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[13] "Verschwörungstheoretiker quellen geradezu über vor Mitteilungsbedürfnissen und missionarischem Überzeugungseifer" (Jaworksi 2004, 41).

[14] "Austausch zwischen Elementen, die in einem wie auch immer gearteten *pars-totum*-Verhältnis stehen" (Dietz 2012, 40).

3.2.2 Corpus compilation

In order to approach the topic empirically, we identified 300 German and French *Telegram* groups containing conspiracy theory content in the time horizon of the pandemic. The precise time frame chosen was the first half of 2021, because it was at this point that mass vaccination started.[15] The central discourse event selected therefore was the start of mass vaccination. Subsequently, we made random selection of groups using French and German as their main languages until 25 German-language and 25 French-language groups containing anti-Semitic comments were identified. To cope with the large volume of anti-Semitic messages within these groups, we applied specific keywords such as *Hitler*, *Zion*, *Sion*, *Jews*, *juifs*, *Jewish*, *juif*, *juive* and *Holocaust*. In the successive stage of data collection, we randomly selected ten anti-Semitic messages above and underneath each keyword message until we had a compilation of 500 comments (250 in French, 250 in German). During the compilation process, we constantly took into account the second criterion – the association of the messages with the Coronavirus pandemic. In addition, we eliminated duplicates if individuals shared the exact same message multiple times in different groups.[16] If this was the case, an attempt was made to identify and quote the originally submitted message.

3.2.3 Results of the topos analysis

Following Wengeler's topos analysis (2003, 297), we created a list of all occurring topoi combining Coronavirus and anti-Semitism, after studying and reviewing the corpus data in French and German in detail. Once

[15] The Europeans Commission's recommendation for approval of the vaccine Comirnaty, developed by BioNTech and Pfizer, was issued at the end of December 2020, but due to the seasonal holidays and other organisational challenges, the actual vaccination process does not start for the most part until January 2021. Thus, the number of people who receive a first vaccination in week 52 of 2020 was below 55,000 across Europe, while more than two million first vaccinations were administered within the first week of January (cf. COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker).

[16] *Telegram* offers the option to forward messages, with the feature that corresponding messages are automatically marked with a disclaimer.

the list was completed and revised[17], in a second step of analysis we coded both corpora in relation to the listed topoi. Since Wengeler's analysis aims at identifying the most frequent ways of thinking (cf. ib., 296), topos analysis is less particularized in comparison to other approaches and infrequent topoi may also be omitted (cf. ib., 297). Percentage distributions are understood as indicative values according to Wengeler (ib., 299) and have to be contextualized and interpreted.

The following topoi were detected respectively in the French and German corpus and subsequently quantified in both corpora in order to determine their actual frequency. The following table shows the ten most frequently detected topoi in both the French and German, corpus, indicating their distribution:

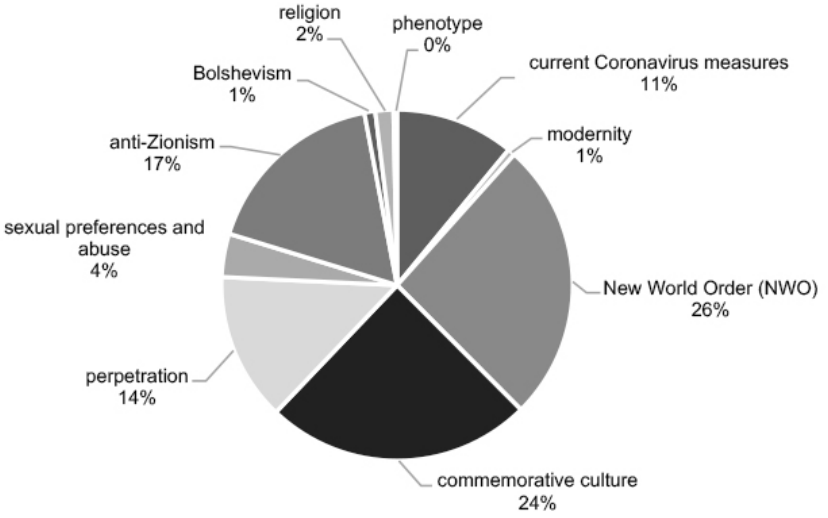

Fig. 1: Relative topoi frequency (French corpus)

[17] In contrast to content-analytical methodological approaches, topos analysis allows to revise the list during the reviewing process.

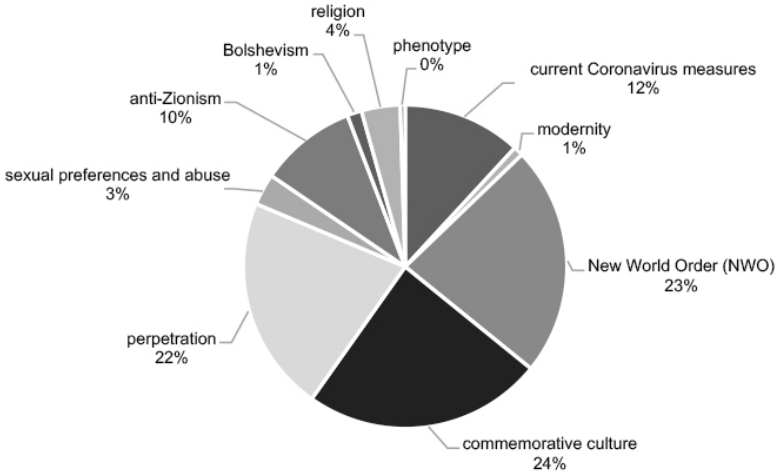

Fig. 2: Relative topoi frequency (German corpus)

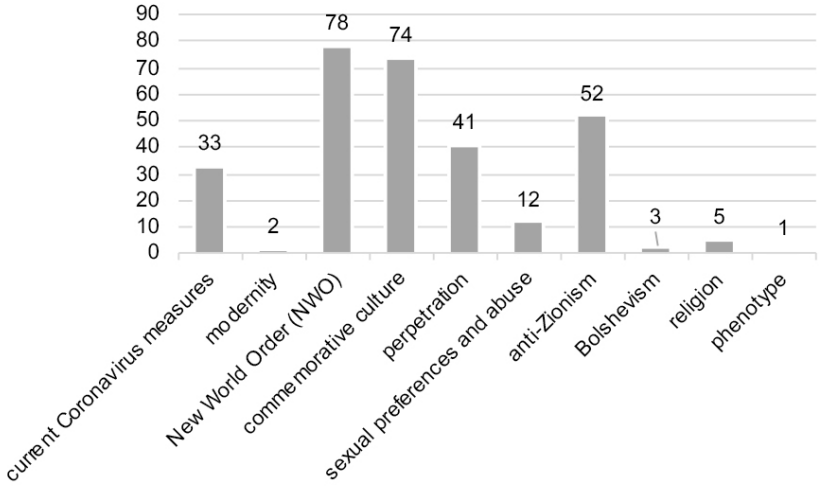

Fig. 3: Absolute topoi frequency (French corpus)

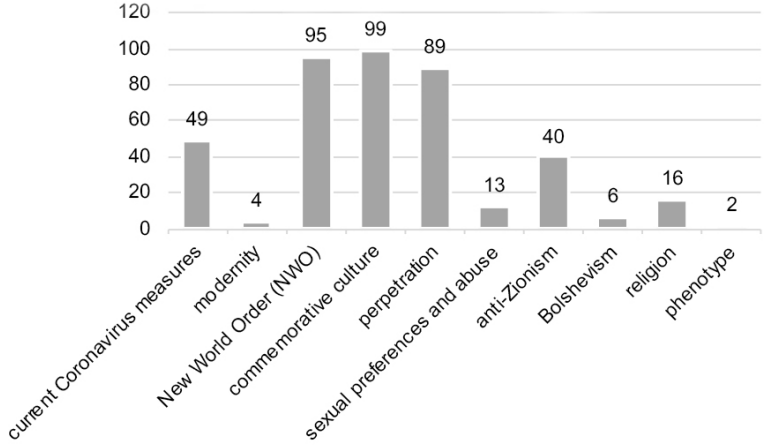

Fig. 4: Absolute topoi (German corpus)

The French and German corpus differ to a certain extent from each other in terms of the topoi most frequently represented, but also display an undeniable degree of homogeneity in terms of the five most widely addressed topoi (1–5). The three most frequent topoi in the French corpus are: NWO (26 %, 78 records), commemorative culture (24 %, 74 records) and by anti-Zionism (17 %, 52 records). In the German corpus, the most frequently occurring topoi are commemorative culture (24 %, 99 records), closely followed by the NWO topos (23 %, 95 records), and perpetration (partially including a perpetrator-victim reversal; 22 %, 89 records), though without specifying the deed. In the French corpus, the perpetration topos is also frequent, but only in forth position (14 %, 41 records), whereas anti-Zionism only figures in 10 % of the German messages (fifth position, 40 records).

However, there is a quite similar account of messages referring to contemporary Coronavirus measures as topos (12 % in German, 52 records; 11 % in French, 49 records), thus the pandemic seems to have caused a similar reaction in both language groups. All other topoi detected (6–10) are at 4 % or below and can therefore be considered marginal. From a contrastive perspective the most salient difference is that in the French messages, anti-Zionist ways of thinking – anchored in anti-Zionist anti-Semitism evident in the right- as well as left-wing spectrum (cf. Wet-

zel 2008, 107) – are much more prevalent as topoi in the context of anti-Semitic scapegoating, while the perpetration topos is more prominent in the German messages. The popularity in German messages of the perpetration topos, including perpetrator victim reversal, may be explained by a prevalence of democratic anti-Semitism (cf. 2.2) due to a guilt-ridden history.

Given the page limitations of this article, only the three most frequently detected topoi will be contextualised and explained in more detail. We also underline the fact that in many cases more than one topos is activated in a message. The NWO topos relates to a conspiracy theory that has its origins at the end of the Cold War and the breakdown of the Soviet Union. The actual term goes back to President George H. W. Bush, who used it to legitimise the American role in the Gulf War. On the liberation of Kuwait, he claimed that the New World Order consisted in the strengthening of the UN and its role as a guarantor of peace (cf. Ferdowsi 1994, 95). Conspiracy theorists have taken Bush's connection to Skull and Bones, as a starting point for the presumption that he is part of a secret society. According to this theory, a Deep State is striving for world domination by relying on the suppression of the world's population (cf. Barkun 2003, 40). As reported by the author, the conspiracy theory of the New World Order can be understood as a super conspiracy theory, which is constantly reinterpreted and therefore encompasses several other theories (cf. ib., 54). In anti-Semitic statements, the respective secret society is perceived as Jewish, and politicians are considered as puppets who merely carry out what they are ordered to do. The media play an essential role in this imaginary construct. They are said to perform a role in the spreading of conspiracy theories, but, paradoxically, they are also considered as a vehicle for the spread of Jewish omnipotent influence (cf. Anton 2011, 45). Also, traditional media are accused of wanting to conceal the truth:

(1) Les médias juifs ne veulent pas que nous connaissions la vérité […] (F-G-41)
'The Jewish media does not want us to know the truth […]'

The commemorative culture topos (most frequent in German and second in French) is based on the claim that the current prevailing conditions are similar or the same as the conditions of the extermination of Jews during the National Socialist period. For the French corpus it could

be illustrated by a large proportion of comments with reference to the star of David:

(2) Nous l'avons ! L'étoile jaune ☆ À nous de l'utiliser car finalement entre Hitler et Schwab et son Great Reset, où est la différence de finalité ? Des millions de gens vont mourir avec ce vaccin Pfeizer ! Ne l'oublions jamais (F-M-2).
'We have it! The yellow star ☆ It's up to us to use it, ultimately between Hitler and Schwab and his Great Reset, is there any difference in purpose? Millions of people will die of this Pfeizer vaccine! Let's never forget it'

A similar equation of the ingroup with Holocaust victims was discussed outside of *Telegram* with media resonance in Germany in November 2020, when a speaker from the so-called *Querdenker* movement compared herself to Sophie Scholl (a young resistance activist murdered by the Nazi regime). However, this phenomenon is not entirely new: such comparisons were already openly proclaimed in 2002 during discussions about the publication of the names of high-income individuals (cf. Schwarz-Friesel 2013, 198).

The third most represented topos in the French corpus consists in the criticism of Israel, namely anti-Zionism. This pattern can be identified across Europe since the establishment of the State of Israel (cf. Eckmann 2005, 104), which has been perceived as a threat (cf. Lacqueur 2006, IX). This form of secondary anti-Semitism is commonly based on the association of Jews with the state of Israel or its negation, holding Jews responsible for the state's policies (cf. Beyer and Leuschner 2010, 136).

The topos of the Jewish perpetrator – 22 % of the German corpus (in the French only 14 %), making it almost equal to commemorative culture (24 %) and NWO (23 %) – has its origins in medieval times, when Jews were held responsible for the murder of Christ, ritual killing and the drinking of child blood (cf. Erb 1995, 74). The peculiarity of this topos is that although it refers to Jews as perpetrators, it does not name the exact offence. Due to this very vague form, it could also be connected to the NWO, i.e. in messages such as

(3) DER JUDE IST DAS VIRUS 🦠 🕎 ✡ […] (D-C-27)
'The Jew is the virus'

(4) ES IST EINE JUDENPANDEMIE! (D-C-22)
'It is a Jewish pandemic!'

(5) Genauso ist es. Der Jude ist ein Parasit der die Völker der Welt aussaugt und vernichtet. Der Jude muss neutralisiert werden. Egal wie (D-E-7)
'That is how it is. The Jew is a parasite that sucks and destroys the peoples of the world. The Jew must be neutralised. No matter how.'

In other cases the perpetrator topos intertwines directly with the Coronavirus measure topos, i.e.

(6) DER JUDE WILL EUCH VERNICHTEN! Hier ein Video zum Buch […], wo die Vernichtungspläne der Juden anhand von Tora, Talmud und jüdische Kabala bewiesen werden. UND ES SOLL MIT CORONA UND DEN IMPFUNGEN GESCHEHEN. In diesem Sinne: Erwachet schnell! (D-I-1)
'THE JEW WANTS TO DESTROY YOU! Here is a video of the book […], where the extermination plans of the Jews are proven on the basis of the Torah, Talmud and Jewish Kabala. AND IT SHALL HAPPEN WITH CORONA AND THE VACCINATIONS. Therefore: Wake up now!'

To conclude our observations with a typical example of explicit Holocaust denial as part of an obviously fake commemorative culture linked to the perpetrator topos and the NOW topos, we give the following example from the German corpus, which was widely shared in the respective groups. It exemplifies how anti-semitic topoi are connected with current processes and measures linked to Coronavirus, such as vaccination.

(7) Der Holocaust ist eine fast so große Lüge wie die Korona-Pandemie! Beides erlogen vom Juden! Der Jude stürzte Deutschland erst in den ersten Weltkrieg und sorgte mit seiner Lüge vom verlorenen Krieg für die Niederlage! Als Hitler die Zentralbanken Rothschilds in Deutschland und Österreich entmachtete, eine eigene goldgedeckte Währung einführte, an der Rothschild nicht mitverdienen kann und ihn 1938 ins KZ brachte, begann wenig später der Krieg! Alle historischen Quellen belegen deutlich, dass die Juden zuerst Deutschland den Krieg erklärten und zwar schon 1933! Und 1936 sagte Churchill "Wir werden Hitler den Krieg aufzwingen ob er will oder nicht!" Er arbeitete für Rothschild! Die BRD wurde von Rothschild 1949 gegründet und um die Verfolgung ein immenser Kult erschaffen! Nazis brachten Juden um aber NIEMALS 6 Millionen! Letztlich erkannten sie vor allem den inneren Feind, der auch heute ein Feind blieb und hinter den Giftspritzen und der NWO steckt! DIE KOMPLETTE DEUTSCHE GESCHICHTE IST EINE DREISTE LÜGE! (D-M-1)
'The Holocaust is almost as big a lie as the Coronavirus pandemic! Both lies by the Jew! First, the Jew plunged Germany into the First World War and then ensured defeat with the lie of lost war! When Hitler disempowered the central bank of Rothschild in Germany and Austria and introduced an own gold-covered currency, so that Rothschild could not make any more money and then locked him up in a concentration camp in 1938, shortly after the war began! All historical sources prove clearly that the Jews were first in declaring war on Germany and as early as 1933!

Then in 1936 Churchill said "We will impose war on Hitler whether he wants it or not!" He worked for Rothschild! The FRG was founded by Rothschild in 1949 and an immense cult was created around persecution, an immense cult! Nazis killed Jews but NEVER 6 million! In the end they recognized above all the internal enemy, who has remained an enemy until today and is behind the lethal injections and the NWO! THE WHOLE HISTORY OF GERMANY IS A BRAZEN LIE!'

(8) 🤿😵 Es wird in sachen Corona keine aufarbeitung geben.. sie werden erneut lügengeschichten verbreiten wie nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg! Es ist der Endkampf.. Er, der ewige Jude oder Wir!
🤿🤿🤿 (D-I-11)
'There will be no reappraisal in the matter of Coronavirus. They will again spread lies as they did after the Second World War! It is the final battle. Him, the eternal Jew, or us!

3.2.4 Results with regard to rhetorical strategies

Following the quantitative analysis, we will illustrate from a qualitative viewpoint how schemes such as the perpetrator-victim reversal, the trivialisation of the Holocaust or its denial are realised rhetorically in the corpus. In public, democratic discourse *Auschwitz* is frequently applied as a euphemism for the murder of more than six million victims (cf. Holz 2005, 59) and a similar trivialisation also occurs in various *Telegram* groups. In addition to *Auschwitz*, *Nuremberg* is referred to in some cases with an attached *#2* (F-U-40) in order to equate the current situation and to stylise oneself as a victim. At the same time, in the French corpus victim stylisation manifests itself in the form of various analogies, which, along with metaphors, is the most popular linguistic device. The strategies applied range from a comparison of Macron with Hitler (F-D-26) to the closure of French bookshops to contain the virus with book burnings:

(9) Sous Hitler on brûlait les livres, maintenant on ferme juste les librairies (F-N-1).
'under Hitler they burned the books, now they just close the bookstores'

Analogies are also observed in the comparison of features or qualities, such as queuing for vaccinations being equated with *récupérer l'étoile jaune* ('picking up the Jewish star'; F-U-34) or the Coronavirus vaccine itself being associated with gas used to exterminate Jews (F-Y-1). Additionally, many messages have a sarcastic subtext that denies com-

passion toward Jews: *les éternels victimes* ('the eternal victims', F-T-5). Sometimes Jews are even explicitly blamed for other victims during the Second World War (F-D-9) giving evidence to the fact that sarcasm is a targeted strategy of scapegoating in the corpus. In the German-speaking corpus, in addition to comparisons between vaccine manufacturers and Mengele aiming at trivialising the Holocaust, there can also be found comparisons that ostensibly deny the Holocaust:

(10) Der Holocaust ist eine fast so große Lüge wie die Korona-Pandemie! (D-M-1, D-T-1).
'The Holocaust is almost as big a lie as the Coronavirus pandemic!'

Furthermore, neologisms are used as *contradictio in adiecto*, such as *the HOLOCAUST MÄRCHEN* ('the Holocaust fairy-tale'; D-C-34) to imply that the Holocaust is a myth. In addition to the denial of the Holocaust, however, a tendency towards trivialisation is also found in the German corpus, for instance by applying euphemisms. The verb *aufräumen* ('to clean up'; D-N-13) is euphemistically used for the murder of the Jews. At the same time, Hitler is exonerated in some messages of the German corpus by the means of metaphors such as *Spielfigur* ('game figure'; D-M-7) or *Marionette* ('puppet; D-T-11). In contrast, metaphors drawing on virus, parasites, diseases and vermin in farm animals are applied with the intention to depict Jews in a dehumanizing way, a strategy that implies, according to Hortzitz (1995, 24), that extermination is conceivable. Certain users escalate this way of thinking to the point where they explicitly share appeals for the murder of Jews on *Telegram* through euphemisms with reference to concentration camps:

(11) Ich glaube Dachau funktioniert noch (D-N-23)
'I think that Dachau still works'

or

(12) macht Auschwitz wieder auf (D-P-10)
'reopen Auschwitz'.

The defamatory attitude towards Jews is also expressed using synecdoche – a word or phrase applied to refer to the whole of it (*pars pro toto*) or inversely –, which is the most common linguistic device in the German corpus, for instance *der Jude* 'the Jew' to refer to all Jews. The expression *the Jew* additionally functions as a denial of individuality (cf.

Hortzitz 1995, 37). Another frequently applied synecdoche is *the eternal Jew*, alluding to a folk tale book published under this title in 1602 which established the stereotype of the anti-Christ. Since then, it has been repeatedly taken up in various modernised forms (cf. Körte 2008, 92). Intertextuality is also invoked by referring to propagandist writings, such as "The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion", "Mein Kampf" or speeches given by Goebbels. At the same time, Talmud quotations and citations of German television programmes or Jewish journals are frequently applied when the group members aim at legitimising their statements. In addition, reference is made to contemporary conspiratorial publications in book form. *Telegram*, in contrast to platforms like *Instagram*, offers the possibility to share relevant writings as PDF files, or to tag messages with URLs.

The studied texts frequently seem rather atypical for messages in messenger services with their different degrees of elaboration, although this may be related to the fact that anti-Semitic statements are blocked on other websites. Particularly in the German corpus they are rather long and detailed, and it seems as if they intend to familiarize new users with anti-Semitic *theories* as quickly as possible to enable them to join the discussion. Calls to redistribute the messages and content are frequent and indicate a very specific sharing culture in this *scene*, which aims at scapegoating in a targeted way, as well as enlarging the communities themselves. Drawing on Glick's (2005, 251–252) ideological scapegoating model it seems due to specific rhetorical devices that shared beliefs, stereotypes and ideologies are fervently propagated without allowing any counter-position. The group's interaction seems tailored to a "collective process by which commitment to hateful ideologies becomes widely shared within a community, creating a consensus that spawns political movements (e.g., Nazism) and coordinated hostile actions (…)" (ib., 251). The final aim in terms of lessening frustrations of the ingroup and their members, however, will challenge the respective societies even more.

4 Conclusions

Telegram clearly offers echo chambers to further radicalize people who already have a tendency towards conspiracy theories and extremist content. Especially in terms of anti-Semitism, the hybrid medium certainly caters to the shifting limit of what can be said (a lot of the analysed content is simply illegal). The more messages of this kind are spread and shared among the participants of the groups, or even channelled and stored online, the more opinions tend to fossilize. The Coronavirus pandemic has challenged our societies in many ways and obviously triggered a backlash with regards to Judeophobic conspiracy theories, but also some adaptions to the new situation. One can only hope that we get the genie back in the bottle and find ways of including topics such as social media scapegoating strategies in language learning. This would help to create an enhanced awareness of scapegoating practices and enable people to dismantle questionable or simply fake content in social media, especially in applications, lacking moderation of content, such as *Telegram*, and therefore invite the spread of hate and fake news. The return of diverse anti-Semitic topoi in both German and French *Telegram* groups cannot be ignored, neither by political nor legal nor educational entities. However, France and Germany have to tailor their respective activities and programmes as a joint endeavour because the NWO topos and the commemorative culture topos prevail in both corpora and must, therefore, be addressed first. The alleged media conspiracy combined with other accusations (cf. 3.2.3) makes clear that there is an overall manipulation of content that can only be countered by a thorough uninterrupted transmission and study of facts as well as a clear comparison of social media with good moderation and lax moderation, to introduce those ethical guidelines to which the traditional print press is already subject. The commemorative culture topos – anchored predominantly in secondary democratic anti-Semitism – is manifold but must be counteracted by a continuous effort striving for a truth-bound memory culture and a strict persecution of any denial or trivialization of the mass murders of the Nazi regime. Equations and exonerations encountered with regards to this topos must not leave us speechless, but rather be rejected at all times by all legally possible means. We have to teach – including when training a foreign language or future linguists

– how guilt-rejecting anti-Semitism is staged on the rhetorical level in our own as well as the foreign tongue in order to dismantle scapegoating practices and hate speech. The notable increase in anti-Semitic messages during the described observation period, probably similar to other linguistic communities, if we take into account recent studies on anti-Semitisms across Europe (Bergmann 2008; 2014) and beyond (Rabinovici and Speck and Sznajder 2004) make it paramount that we consider the pedagogical implications of this type of social media communication, which aims at simple explanatory patterns in order to submit a certain group to scapegoating. The interrelatedness of language and thinking should lead us to ask more explicitly for moderation or bans on certain messaging applications and for the inclusion of social media competency as a key faculty in any type of language learning activity. Courageous approaches are needed to counter fake news or hate speech in communicative spaces where fact-based exchanges of views no longer happens, but only targeted scapegoating.

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Analyzing Linguistic Patterns in the Social Media Discourse of Juan Guaidó and Nicolás Maduro during the 2019 Political Conflict in Venezuela

Abstract: In this paper, the political conflict in Venezuela in 2019 is approached from a corpus linguistic point of view. The conflict between Juan Guaidó, the speaker of the parliament, and Nicolás Maduro, who won the internationally unrecognized 2018 presidential election, escalated on January 23, 2019, when Guaidó proclaimed himself the legitimate president of Venezuela. By comparatively analyzing the tweets of the two politicians three months before and after January 23, 2019, a corpus-based discourse analysis will be conducted to investigate whether and to what extent linguistic patterns (especially most frequent words and their co-occurrences, as well as n-grams) change within the respective social media communication of these political opponents. The analysis reveals changes in linguistic patterns, especially with respect to co-occurrences and n-grams, detected in the corpus data, and demonstrates that politicians use *Twitter* to present themselves, in the case of Guaidó, as the representative of the people wanting to lead Venezuela into a democratic future, and, in the case of Maduro, as the only legitimate president and defender of Venezuela against internal and external threats.

Keywords: Juan Guaidó, Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela, corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, Social Media, Twitter, linguistic patterns

1 Introduction: The 2019 Political Conflict in Venezuela

In the beginning of 2019, a government crisis culminated in Venezuela, arousing widespread international attention. At the center of the controversy was the 2018 reelection of President Nicolás Maduro, the legitimacy of which was disputed or entirely unrecognized by both the Venezuelan opposition and a number of foreign governments (including both the United States and the European Union). The conflict between the ruling president and the opposition escalated in January of 2019, when a disempowered parliament found Maduro's reelection illegitimate, and, thereafter, when the President of the National Assembly, Juan Guaidó,

declared himself interim president. In this function, Guaidó's aim was to call for new elections as soon as possible. Maduro responded to these developments with repressive and violent measures that triggered a months-long supply crisis and an ongoing struggle for power, much of which was conducted on social media, especially on the platform *Twitter*.

In this paper, therefore, we would like to conduct empirical analysis of digital political discourse to help reveal different positions in this struggle for power. In this regard, the focus of this corpus-based research will be on linguistic patterns in the tweets both of Maduro and Guaidó during the Venezuelan political crisis. Of particular interest is the question of whether the politicians' respective tweets can be linguistically distinguished in the three months preceding and following January 23, 2019, and whether and how these differences are visible in corpus data.

We begin by remarking on the general research topic of social media and political discourse, illustrating this with examples from Romance languages. In the third section, the corpus linguistic study is presented in more detail and the results of the analysis are discussed. We then conclude in the fourth section with brief reflection on the findings.

2 Political Social Media Discourse

2.1 Recent studies of political social media discourse (in Romance Languages)

Since their emergence, social media platforms have led to profound changes in political communication. Politicians, political parties, and political journalists use social networks to disseminate their positions and various content directly among followers and other platform users. Linguistic patterns that were already important in past political discourse are now of even greater significance in the practice of social networks. If one thinks back, for example, to the successful presidential campaigns of Barack Obama or Donald Trump, it is the short phrases like "Yes, We Can" and "Make America Great Again" that became entrenched through constant, easy repetition. In an article on the manipulative potential of metaphors in English, Jamet and Terry highlight the importance of these

repetitions for a so-called "hammering effect" (2020, 35) of communicative manipulation. Moreover, it is precisely characteristic of social media that they favor the formation of linguistic patterns, since the function of hashtags, for example, is to represent retrievable character combinations and, thus, to network users and the messages they share. Examples of how much politicians use such hashtag-based patterns can be seen in *#MAGA* ('Make America Great Again') during Trump's election campaign, *#FranceUnie* ('France United') by Emmanuel Macron, and *#EsteVirusLoParamosUnidos* ('This Virus We Will Stop United') by Pedro Sánchez in their tweets during the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in spring 2020 (cf. Hesselbach 2020).

The analysis of social media discourse (cf. Page et al. 2014), and *Twitter* discourse in particular, has led to a large number of publications on cases in Romance languages, of which only a few will be mentioned: including, for example, studies on political language in Marine Le-Pen's tweets (Visser 2018) or on *Twitter* discourse in recent Catalonian political conflict (Eibensteiner 2022). Mencke (2018), furthermore, provides an analysis of the use of "@-mentions" and hashtags in Marion Maréchale Le Pen's activity on *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Wolf (2022) analyzes *Twitter* use of Macron and Le Pen in the 2019 European elections, demonstrating their respective application of framing processes in relation to the concept of Europe. Hesselbach (2020) focuses on the communicative strategies of three heads of state in Romance-speaking countries (Conte in Italy, Macron in France, and Sánchez in Spain) on *Twitter* and *Facebook* during the onset of the pandemic in Europe in 2020. In the context of the conflict in Venezuela,[1] Alizadeh Afrouzi examines the role of social media and newspapers during this crisis and shows "that both national and international press participated as external narrators in the political conflict and highlight the role of newspapers as political actors and social media as a tool in their hands" (2020, 3). Arias (2019) highlights the importance of social media for organizing the opposition and regime-critical movements in Venezuela,

[1] A recent comparative study of populism in Venezuela and Spain is presented by Connett (2023), who presents a discourse-linguistic analysis of texts by Hugo Chávez, the former president of Venezuela, and Pablo Iglesias, the former leader of the Spanish left-wing populist party *Podemos*.

in a similar vein to Morselli, Passini, and McGarty (2021), who focus on anti-Maduro protesters using *Twitter* following the 2017 elections. We can thus see there exists widespread studies on political discourse in social media, but comparative studies specifically of Guaidó's and Maduro's communication on social media in the context of this high-profile political conflict are, to my knowledge, not yet available. The aim of the present paper, therefore, is to analyze the social media discourse of the two politicians at the height of political tensions in January 2019, with particular focus on linguistic patterns.

2.2 The Importance of Social Media Discourse in the Venezuelan Political Conflict

In recent years, the development of social media platforms, including *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *TikTok*, has become an indispensable part of global political communication.[2] No exception to this, social media communication has thereby played a critical role for the two figures at the center of the 2019 Venezuelan political conflict. For example, both Juan Guaidó and Nicolás Maduro use the short-message service provided by *Twitter* to communicate their messages to their followers with both textual and multimodal information. The following table provides an overview of the politicians' *Twitter* use, history, and followers.

[2] Another example of this is that of Olaf Scholz, who created his own account, specifically as chancellor, on Twitter at the beginning of his time in office (he had already had an account before his election): "Frank-Walter #Steinmeier hat den Bürgerinnen und Bürgern in schwierigen Zeiten Orientierung gegeben und mit Herzblut das höchste Amt im Staat bekleidet. Ich bin froh, dass er dies weiterhin tun wird. Herzlichen Glückwunsch, lieber #Bundespräsident! Und: Hallo, Twitter!" (Tweet-ID: 1492866273021206535, @Bundeskanzler, 13/7/2022; 'Frank-Walter #Steinmeier has given citizens guidance in difficult times and held the highest office in the state with heart and soul. I am glad that he will continue to do so. Congratulations, dear #FederalPresident! And: Hello, Twitter!').

	Juan Guaidó	Nicolás Maduro
Account	@jguaido	@NicolasMaduro
On Twitter since …	May 2009	March 2013
Number of tweets	49,228	123,338
Number of followers	2.6 million	4.4 million

Tab. 1: Information on Juan Guiadó's and Nicolás Maduro's *Twitter* accounts (as of January 31, 2023)[3]

As can be seen, Maduro has not been using the platform for as long as Guaidó, but holds the larger number of followers. This can presumably be attributed to his more exposed position, due to his formal office as president of Venezuela.

In order to understand the importance of political communication in Venezuela, we refer to Adriana Bolívar, who describes political and communicative strategies of authoritarian populism in Venezuela. She names communicative hegemony (*hegemonía comunicacional*) as an important factor for political-populist communication:

> Este fue para Chávez un punto clave y sigue siéndolo para Nicolás Maduro. La estrategia de Chávez consistió en neutralizar todos los medios de Oposición, dificultar la tarea de quienes fueran disidentes, y crear nuevos medios para difundir la revolución, como Telesur. Al mismo tiempo, mantuvo el contacto directo con el pueblo a través de su Programa *Aló Presidente*, que se transmitía todos los domingos en cadena nacional por radio y televisión. A eso se suman las alocuciones presidenciales, las llamadas a la radio y a la televisión, su presencia activa en distintos eventos y, sobre todo, las cadenas nacionales que podían hacerse en cualquier momento por diferentes motivos. Maduro ha fortalecido esta hegemonía (2019, 25–26).
>
> 'This was a key point for Chávez and continues to be so for Nicolás Maduro. Chávez's strategy consisted in neutralizing all Opposition media, hindering the task of those who were dissidents, and creating new media to spread the revolution, such as Telesur. At the same time, he maintained direct contact with the people through his *Aló Presidente* Program, which was transmitted every Sunday in national radio and television chain. In addition to this, there were presidential addresses, calls to radio and television, his active presence in different events and, above all, the national chains that could be made at any time for different reasons. Maduro has strengthened this hegemony.'

[3] The names are presented here in alphabetical order.

Among other strategies, she mentions 'the deinstitutionalization of democracy' (*la desinstitucionalización de la democracia*), 'political polarization' (*la polarización política*), 'emotional bonding' (*la vinculación afectiva*), 'manipulation of emotions through fear' (*la manipulación de las emociones por el miedo*), and the 'legitimization of verbal and physical violence' (*la legitimación de la violencia verbal y física*) (2019, 25–27). A major component of such communicative hegemony is also the self-presentation of politicians on social media. Although the study presented here focuses on a textual analysis of Guaidó's and Maduro's tweets, it is nonetheless worth briefly considering how the two respectively portray themselves on their *Twitter* profiles.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, Guaidó shows himself together with the people (he calls himself *servidor público*, or 'public servant'), the national flag, and, as if perpetually taking an oath, his hand on his heart. All of this points to a supposed duty to serve the Venezuelan people as legitimate president of Venezuela, as stated in his profile's biography section: *Presidente (E) de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela* ('President (E) of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela').

Similar to Guaidó, the depiction of Maduro in Fig. 2 reveals a reference to the people as a means of legitimizing his political power. Maduro, moreover, leaves no doubt that he is the legitimate president of Venezuela: both the text superimposed on the image (*Presidente Maduro* 'President Maduro') and the image of Maduro wearing a sash are intended to visually emphasize that he is the only president of the country, as he also specifies in his biographical information (*Presidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela 2019–2024* 'President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela 2019–2024'). His raised arm and outstretched finger, furthermore, can also be interpreted as Maduro revealing the way forward for the country, a reading reinforced by the indication of the precise period of the legislature (2019–2024).

Both politicians – or, more precisely, their political strategists – are of course aware of the power of such depictions. The popularity of social media among politicians can be explained in large part by its impressive reach – perhaps also achievable by TV broadcasts, for example, but a circulation of which classic political print media, such as newspapers, cannot approximate. This is also clear from Tab. 1. While Maduro's account counts four million followers, Guaidó reaches 2.6 million people through his *Twitter* communication. Furthermore, politicians routinely declare

Fig. 1: Juan Gaidó on *Twitter* (https://twitter.com/jguaido, November 28, 2019)

that they and their followers benefit from there being no intermediaries, especially political journalists, between them and the recipients of their messages on *Twitter*, and that the political statements thereby reach their supporters directly and unaltered.

Both aforementioned points (i.e., the importance and the outreach of social media) also justify an increased interest of linguists in digital political discourses. The need to formulate and argue linguistically concisely and succinctly, the limited number of characters permitted in a tweet, and the use of linguistic patterns that are typical of (both spoken and written) political discourse define a distinct digital text type. This will be examined in more detail, in the following section, as regards the political conflict in Venezuela.

Fig. 2: Nicolás Maduro on *Twitter* (https://twitter.com/nicolasmaduro, November 28, 2019)

3 A Corpus-Based Approach

We now address the question of whether an event, such as Juan Guaidó's self-declaration as interim president of Venezuela, holds a demonstrable impact on the language used in social media posts by these two political opponents. For this purpose, corpus linguistic discourse analysis will be conducted, following Bubenhofer (2009, 18), who argues that 'discovering patterns in language use is the central operation of corpus linguistic discourse analysis' ("Muster im Sprachgebrauch zu entdecken ist die zentrale Operation einer korpuslinguistischen Diskursanalyse"). The aim of this paper, therefore, is to first make visible the linguistic patterns in Guaidó's and Maduro's social media discourses, before then drawing a comparison between both politicians.

3.1 Method

We employ a corpus-based approach to answer these research questions. Since Guaidó's January 23, 2019, self-proclamation as president assumes a central role in this political conflict, all tweets three months before and after that day are included in our analysis. Only the two politicians' own respective tweets (no retweets, e.g.) were taken into consideration for the research.[4] Likewise, no consideration was given to multimodal elements (which *Twitter* permits in the form of image or video files), so that it is only textual data from the tweets that will be processed. The following example will be used to explain the analysis: a tweet by Guaidó, in which he creates a text-image relationship by directly addressing a military general while providing an image of him, and thereby exposing him to public pressure.

It would be another research desideratum to study further multimodal relations (text-image or text-video) in social media, as these, too, of course influence users, and especially in political contexts. We will, instead, narrow our focus on the purely textual properties of tweets, as mentioned above, so that, in the example of Fig. 3, only the range of "Vamos a escri-

[4] Not considered relevant to the study is that social media teams, which often take care of individual politicians on social networks, may also have sent some of these tweets. The decisive factor for the analysis, however, is that messages were published under the account of Guaidó or Maduro, as these then reach their respective large audiences.

Fig. 3: Tweet by Guaidó (@jguaido) from January 19, 2019 (Tweet-ID: 1097901080233607170)

birle […] que entre la ayuda humanitaria. #SoldadoEscucha"[5] will be taken into consideration.

The first step was to collect all tweets from Guaidó and Maduro in the three months preceding and succeeding Guaidó self-declaration as interim president. The following table shows the distribution of the number of tweets by Guaidó and Maduro over this six-month period (October 23, 2018, to April 23, 2019):[6]

	23/10/2018 – 22/01/2019	**23/01/2019 – 23/04/2019**	**Σ**
Guaidó	182 (26 %)	528 (74 %)	710
Maduro	256 (42 %)	358 (58 %)	614

Tab. 2: Number of tweets by Guaidó and Maduro from October 23, 2018, until April 23, 2019

[5] "Let's write to him [...] let humanitarian aid come in. #SoldierListen."

[6] The research data is available under the following link: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10694169.

From the table, the size of the total corpus appears evident. With 710 tweets, Guaidó's subcorpus is slightly larger than that of Maduro, with 614 tweets. The ratio is very striking, however, when one considers the period before January 23, 2019. In this period, Maduro is more active on *Twitter* (with 256 tweets), while Guaidó has only roughly 70 % of the number of Maduro's tweets at that time (182 tweets). A first and very important insight can thus be gained by looking at what happened following January 23, 2019. While Maduro posts about 100 more tweets in the three months after than before, Guaidó's data demonstrates clearly the importance of social media for this infamous power struggle. After his self-proclamation as president on January 23, 2019, the number of Guido's tweets almost triples: from 182 to 528. This dramatic tack in the frequency of these two politicians' *Twitter* usage can also be seen in Fig. 4, which shows how Guaidó publishes a significantly higher number of tweets in the immediate lead-up to January 23, 2019.

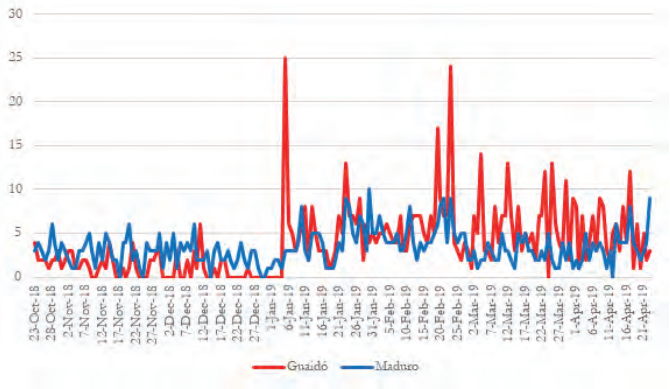

Fig. 4: Timeline of posted tweets by Guaidó (red) and Maduro (blue) between October 23, 2018, and April 23, 2019

The size of the corpus, in terms of the number of tokens, should also be mentioned at this point, with the sum of tokens shown referring to the partial sums of the periods before and after January 23, 2019.

	Guaidó	Maduro
total number of tweets	710	614
total number of tokens	29,647 (= 7,221 + 22,426)	25,460 (= 10,692 + 14,768)

Tab. 3: Number of tokens by Guaidó and Maduro from October 23, 2018, until April 23, 2019

While the total amount of tokens for both Maduro and Guaidó is between 25,000 and 30,000, and the analysis is therefore reasonably comparable, Guaidó in particular shows a distinctly uneven distribution of tokens. It is clearly visible that the tweets following January 23, 2019, reveal a greater number of tokens, which may be due to his needing to explain his policies to the people of Venezuela in more detail than did the standing president. In line with Bubenhofer (2009, 112), according to whom patterned structures can be defined as recurrent linguistic units (e.g., in the form of collocations, co-occurrences, and n-grams) in texts, in this study, we first identify the most frequently occurring nouns and their co-occurrences. In the analysis of recurrent patterns, the decomposition of texts into so-called n-grams, which generally refers to the fragmentation of a text into *n* parts, provides another useful approach. Bubenhofer defines the term as follows:

> "Das n steht für eine beliebige Zahl > 0; die Bezeichnung leitet sich von den Namen für Ein-, Zwei- oder Dreiwortausdrücke, ‚Unigramme', ‚Bigramme', ‚Trigramme', ab. Normalerweise werden n-Gramme nur als eine Reihe von direkt aufeinander folgenden Wörtern verstanden (Manning/Schütze 2002, 192ff.)" (2009, 118).
>
> 'The n stands for any number > 0; the name is derived from the names for one-, two-, or three-word expressions, 'unigrams', 'bigrams', 'trigrams'. Normally, n-grams are understood only as a series of words directly following each other […]'.

An n-gram analysis, therefore, will be used here to identify further syntagmatic speech patterns as a final step.

3.2 Results

All four subcorpora of the aforementioned study were analyzed using the R package *stylo* for stylometric analysis (Eder et al. 2013) and the software program *CorpusExplore*r (Rüdiger 2018). In a first step, the most frequent

words (MFW) and their co-occurrences form the focus of the analysis, followed by an examination of the most frequent n-grams in the corpus.

3.2.1 Most frequent words (MFW) and co-occurrences

To get an impression of the stylistic relation between the discourses of these two politicians, an analysis can be performed using the package *stylo* in R. In this case, the program calculates (here for the 1000 MFW = *most frequent words*) the proximity or distance of the four subcorpora, based on the classical delta distance measure[7] to each other. The result can then be seen in Fig. 5.

From the plot, one can see that Guaidó's texts, from before and after January 23, remain stylistically closer to each other (with respect to the

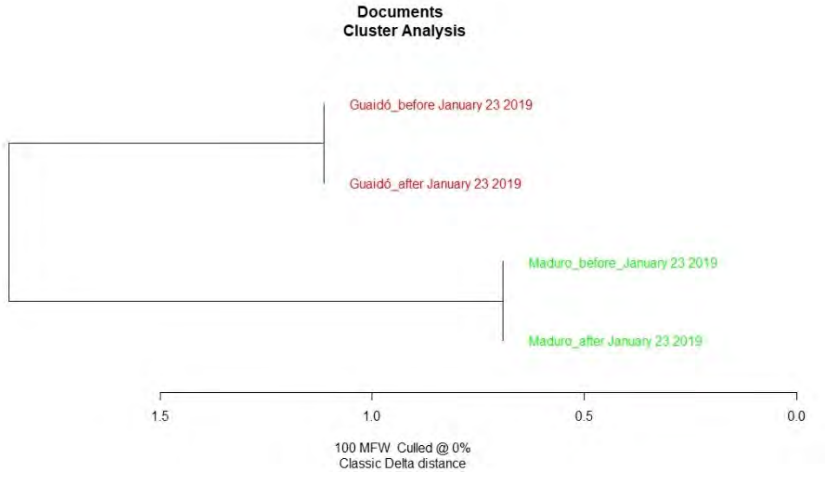

Fig. 5: Illustration of the stylometric analysis of the four sub-corpora (based on the 100 MFW and the Classic Delta distance measure)

[7] The classical delta is a distance measure described by Burrows (2002) – hence named the *Burrows Delta* – and can be used for stylistic comparisons of texts, and subsequently for determining authorship attribution. The algorithm is based on the relative frequency of types in different texts. If the difference measure is small, the closer the texts are in terms of style. For the exact calculation of the delta distance measure and its (stylometric) application, cf. also Burrows (2002) and Büttner et al. (2017).

feature of the most frequent words) than to those of Maduro. The same stands for Maduro, whose tweets following January 23 are more similar to their predecessors than to Guaido's tweets from the same time. Hence, it can generally be stated that following January 23, 2019, there were no abrupt changes in the tweets and linguistic characteristics thereof, as the politicians' messages remained relatively stable. If we take a closer look, however, at the high-frequency substantives, for example, we can note some interesting observations, as seen in Tab. 4:

	Guaidó		**Maduro**	
	before January 23	after January 23	before January 23	after January 23
1.	*venezolano* (36)	*país* (116)	*pueblo* (82)	*pueblo* (169)
2.	*país* (35)	*usurpación* (95)	*patria* (78)	*Venezuela* (128)
3.	*régimen* (33)	*ayuda* (80)	*Venezuela* (75)	*patria* (121)
4.	*pueblo* (24)	*venezolano* (79)	*año* (67)	*año* (55)
5.	*@AsambleaVE* (24)	*pueblo* (74)	*mundo* (38)	*paz* (48)

Tab. 4: The five most frequently occurring substantives in the corpora of Guaidó and Maduro, before and after January 23, 2019.

Looking at the results, we can see that, both before and after January 23, both politicians thematize the country (*Venezuela*, *país* 'country'; Maduro: *patria* 'homeland') and its people (*pueblo*, *venezolano*). While we do not notice significant difference in Maduro's tweets, we indeed observe in Guaidó's case that two nouns – *ayuda* ('help') and *usurpación* ('seizure of power') – appear with high frequency in his tweets following January 23, 2019, as can be seen in the following examples:

(1) Unidos en una sola voz dentro y fuera del territorio venezolano, logramos el reconocimiento del mundo entero, la confianza, la legitimidad y en 2 días logramos lo que ellos en 6 años no hicieron. ¡Autorizamos la *Ayuda* Humanitaria! # VzlaConLaANPorLaLibertad (@jguaido, Tweet-ID: 1088854491611516928, January 25, 2019)

'United in a single voice inside and outside Venezuelan territory, we achieved the recognition of the entire world, trust, legitimacy and in 2 days we achieved what they did not do in 6 years: we authorized Humanitarian Aid! #VzlaConLaANPorLaLibertad'

(2) ¡Somos muestra de fuerza y organización! Con cada manifestación ciudadana nos acercamos a nuestra merecida libertad y la urgente *ayuda* humanitaria. Levantamos en paz nuestra protesta y nos preparamos para el sábado en toda Venezuela y el mundo. ¡Vamos bien, muy bien! #VamosBien (@jguaido, Tweet-ID: 1090675094488256512, January 30, 2019)
'We are a sign of strength and organization! With every civil demonstration we get closer to our deserved freedom and urgent humanitarian aid. We raise in peace our protest and we prepare for Saturday all over Venezuela and the world. We are doing well, very well! #VamosBien'

(3) Ratificamos a los gobiernos de México y Uruguay nuestra posición de restituir el orden constitucional en Venezuela. Tenemos una ruta clara: 1. Cese de la *usurpación* 2. Gobierno de transición 3. Elecciones libres ¡Únanse a nuestro llamado democrático! (@jguaido, Tweet-ID: 1091308378046062592, February 1, 2019)
'We are ratifying to the governments of Mexico and Uruguay our position to restore constitutional order in Venezuela. We have a clear path: 1. Cessation of the *usurpation* 2. Transitional government 3. Free elections Join our democratic call!'

(4) ¡Punto aprobado! Acuerdo que reconoce al Grupo de Lima y los países de Europa su apoyo, así como el rechazo a cualquier diálogo o grupo de contacto que alargue el sufrimiento del pueblo. Único objetivo: cese de la *usurpación*, gobierno de transición y elecciones libres. #SesiónAN (@jguaido, Tweet-ID: 1092886581759918080, February 5, 2019)
'Point approved! Agreement recognizing the support of the Lima Group and the countries of Europe, as well as the rejection of any dialogue or contact group that prolongs the suffering of the people. Only objective: cessation of usurpation, transitional government, and free elections. #SessionAN'

An example of an almost metalinguistic explanation is demonstrated when Guaidó first explains the meaning of the word *usurpador* in a tweet. At first glance, it seems the following example can be read purely textually, as a semantic definition of the word *usurpador*:

(5) Un *usurpador* es una persona que reclama y toma el poder de forma ilegítima, que actúa fuera de autoridad, que se apodera de un derecho que legítimamente no le pertenece #ElUsurpador10Enero (@jguaido, Tweet-ID: 1072313434119778312, December 11, 2018)
'A usurper is a person who claims and seizes power illegitimately, who acts outside of authority, who seizes a right that does not legitimately belong to him #ElUsurpador10Enero'

This is a particularly remarkable tweet, as, at a second glance, there is a delegitimizing function that can be observed. In context, it is obvious that in this tweet he relates *usurpador* to Maduro, even without explicitly mentioning him. This reference is not entirely necessary, however, insofar as the corresponding frame is already set to the viewers of the tweet, which is one of the reasons he uses the word *usurpador* with such high frequency in the aftermath of January 23.

As we can see, such high-frequency lexemes are the topics talked or tweeted about. In the following, we will situate these in context. That is, we will investigate *how* they are talked or tweeted about and, therefore, compare the occurrences before and after January 23, which appear statistically frequently with the frequent nouns. First, we analyze the noun *pueblo*, which, as seen in Tab. 4, demonstrates a consistently high frequency in the tweets by both politicians.

(a) *Pueblo*

If we pursue the question of whether there exists linguistic change in the tweets after January 23, 2019, we can see from the analysis of Guaidó's tweets that different co-occurrences appear after that day. While prior to January 23, the adjective *venezolano* occurs primarily together with *pueblo*, it can be seen that, while *venezolano* continues similarly frequently, now words such as *reconocimiento* 'recognition', *voluntad* 'will' or 'wish', and *compromiso* 'engagement', 'agreement', or 'commitment' also increasingly appear together with *pueblo*. In addition, the representation in Tab. 5 shows that words such as *democracia* 'democracy' now also appear in the discourse, corresponding to Guaidó's self-image as a Venezuelan president legitimized by parliament:[8]

[8] The larger or thicker a word appears in the displayed word cloud, the greater the significance value that this word occurs in a sentence together with the examined lexeme. The significance is calculated here using the Poisson distribution.

Guaidó	
before January 23	after January 23
	

Tab. 5: Co-occurrences for *pueblo* in Guaidó's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

A change in terms of co-occurrences with *pueblo* can be traced even more clearly in Maduro's tweets. In this case, we see that before and after the relevant date, here, too, the adjective *venezolano* exhibits high frequency. While before January 23 there is talk of 'support' (*respaldo*) for the people, after that day a very different discourse is traced. Allusions point then to a confrontation initiated by the United States, by which the Venezuelan people are threatened, but, due to their resilience, able to fend off. The adjectives *aguerrido* 'battle-hardened' and *estadounidense* 'US-American' directly reveal this, as well as the call to the people to unite for a 'mobilization' (*movilizado*, *movilización*) in the 'streets' (*calles*):

Maduro	
before January 23	after January 23
	

Tab. 6: Co-occurrences for *pueblo* in Maduro's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

(b) *Venzuela /venezolano*

In the next case, the noun *Venezuela* and adjective *venezolano* will be analyzed in more detail, in order to better trace political discourse of the nation. In the case of Guaidó, it is clear that, both before and after January 23, the semantic field of freedom or liberation (*libre*, *libertad*, *liberar*) and democratization (*democracia*) remains central, as can be seen in Tab. 7. In this regard, no profound difference can be detected. What can indeed be seen, however, is that a greater number of different co-occurrences (within the same semantic field) become evident following January 23.

Guaidó	
before January 23	after January 23
	

Tab. 7: Co-occurrences for *Venezuela /venezolano* in Guaidó's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

New co-occurrences now appear, such as *Dinamarca* ('Denmark') and *reconocimiento* ('recognition, acknowledgement'), referring to Denmark's recognition of Guaidó as president of Venezuela. Another interesting pattern that emerges here is the hashtag *#PlanPaís*, alluding to the idea that Guaidó as president – in contrast to Maduro – possesses a concrete plan for the future of the country.

In the case of Maduro's tweets, differences in the content of co-occurrences with regard to *Venezuela* and *venezolano* are particularly evident. Especially in the context of *Venezuela*, Maduro's tweets before January 23 are above all full of discourses on domestic issues supposedly driving his government forward, such as different 'missions' (*Misión Cultura*, November 1, 2018; *Misión Vida*, November 13, 2018; *Gran Misión Vivienda Venzuela*, November 16, 2018). We see a clear change in the tweets after January 23. They now increasingly refer to a supposed 'threat' (*amenazas*) from abroad (not from within the country), and, most especially, by the United States in the form of then-President Donald Trump, whom he repeatedly accused of blocking (*bloqueo*) financial and medical aid. The results of this analysis can be seen in Tab. 8:

Maduro	
before January 23	after January 23
	

Tab. 8: Co-occurrences for *Venezuela /venezolano* in Maduro's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

Examples of such tweets, in which Maduro presents discourse in defense of Venezuela, are shown below, in the examples (6) and (7):

(6) Nuestro pueblo ha salido a las calles de Caracas y de toda nuestra Patria con la firme determinación de defender la paz de *Venezuela* y decirle a Donald *Trump* y al imperio norteamericano: ¡Yankee Go Home! # VenezuelaEnDefensaDeLaPaz (@NicolasMaduro, Tweet-ID: 1099427402109861889, February 23, 2019)

'Our people have gone out into the streets of Caracas and throughout our homeland with the firm determination to defend the peace of Venezuela and tell Donald Trump and the U.S. empire: Yankee Go Home! #VenezuelaInDefenseOfPeace'

(7) Hago un llamado a los gobiernos dignos e independientes del mundo, para que manifiesten su rechazo a las virulentas amenazas que hace Donald *Trump* contra *Venezuela*, acción que viola la Carta de las Naciones Unidas y los derechos internacionales.

(@NicolasMaduro, Tweet-ID: 1092497399942180865, February 4, 2019)

'I call on the worthy and independent governments of the world to express their rejection of the virulent threats made by Donald Trump against Venezuela, an action that violates the Charter of the United Nations and international rights.'

In both examples, it is evident that Maduro presents a conflict specifically with the government of the United States. By overcoming this threat, together with the Venezuelan people, and with reference to international rights (of the United Nations), it is to become clear that Venezuela will

win the fight against both external and internal enemies, on a purely legitimate basis. In this context, it must be understood that Maduro further sees these domestic problems as having been caused by external conditions: their being controlled by the 'U.S. empire' (*imperio norteamericano*).

(c) *#FANB*

In the last example to be considered here, we turn to analyze a particular expression that does not demonstrate a frequency-based basis. It is very important, nevertheless, for the social media discourse considered in this article. We thus move to examine co-occurrences for a typical use of the hashtag, in this case one regarding the military of Venezuela. The reference to the military and the use of the hashtag *#FANB* (*Fuerza Armanda Nacional Bolivariana* 'National Bolivarian Armed Forces') is of particular importance for this political conflict, as the respective Venezuelan president acts as their commander-in-chief. The conflict, thus, cannot be won without the support of the military.

The fact that a change can be observed in linguistic terms with regard to the military after January 23, 2019, is clearly evident when analyzing the tweets of the two politicians. In Guaidó's case, the topic does not play a major role before January 23. In fact, it is not once mentioned (and therefore has no co-occurrences), as can be seen in Tab. 9. With his self-proclamation as president of Venezuela, however, communication changes sharply, and the military indeed becomes the focus. What is striking about this is that nouns such as *orden* 'order', *constitución* 'constitution', and *garantías* 'guarantee, surety', as well as verbs like *acatar* 'to obey, to abide' and adjectives like *humanitaria* 'humanitarian' appear in connection with the hashtag *#FANB*. It is thus clear that Guaidó appeals to the military's loyalty to the constitution and claims to seek a democratic, peaceful transition to be accompanied by the military.

Guaidó	
before January 23	after January 23
	

Tab. 9: Co-occurrences for *#FANB* in Guaidó's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

A similar picture emerges in terms of quantitative differences after January 23, in the corpus data of Maduro's tweets. While words such as *independencia* 'indepedence', *gloriosa* 'glorious', and *chavista* (relating to Hugo Chávez) had already appeared in connection with *#FANB*, a clear increase can be seen after January 23: allusions, for example, to the 'defense' (*defender*, *defensa*) of the 'nation' (*nación*) or the 'state' (*estado*) can in particular be found, as can be seen in Tab. 10. Furthermore, the graph shows that the high occurrence of the possessive determinate *nuestra* 'our' (in pattern-like noun phrases, such as *nuestra #FANB* or *nuestra gloriosa #FANB*) is meant to emphasize that the military remains a fundamental part of the Venezuelan people, and that it will thereby be a joint effort made to defend the country and its citizens.

Maduro	
before January 23	after January 23
	

Tab. 10: Co-occurrences for *#FANB* in Maduro's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

Based on the analysis of the above data, we note that a change after January 23 can indeed be observed, especially with regard to the MFW and their co-occurrences in the aforementioned examples. In the following, we will investigate whether our hypothesis can also be confirmed through the analysis of n-grams.

3.2.2 n-grams

With the help of n-grams, one can draw conclusions about the probability of the appearance of a next element, which is why large online search engines operate with this method. If we now apply a 5-gram analysis to the four sub-corpora, clear differences emerge, as can be seen in Fig. 6.

On the one hand, we can observe that Guaidó's and Maduro's texts can be distinguished in terms of the 100 most frequent 5-grams. On the other hand, however, a clear distance in Guaidó's corpus data can be found: the distance between Guaidó's two sub-corpora corresponds *grosso modo* to the distance between Guaidó's texts before January 23 and Maduro's texts before and after January 23, which on their own are stylistically more homogeneous in terms of the 5-grams. Once again, this demonstrates a very distinct change in the language of Guaidó's tweets following January 23.

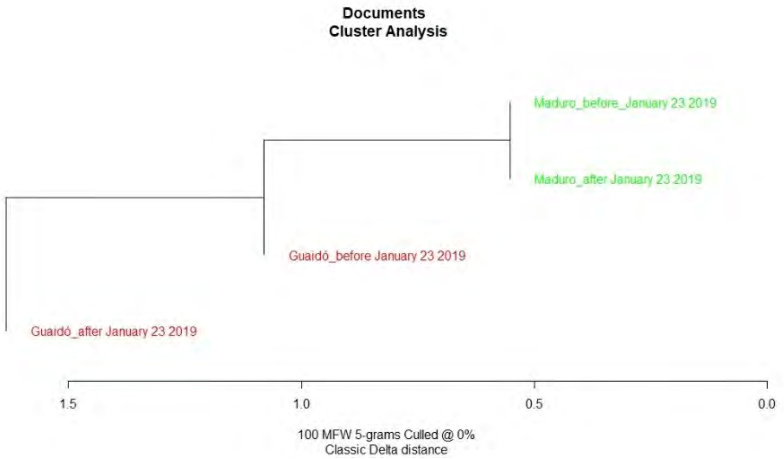

Fig. 6: Illustration of the stylometric analysis of the four sub-corpora (based on the 100 MFW 5-grams and Classic Delta distance measure)

If we now look at the most frequent 5-grams in the individual sub-corpora, we find differences between the two politicians here, as well. In Tab. 11, the four most frequent 5-grams are given for Guaidó's two sub-corpora:

	Guaidó	
	before January 23	after January 23
1.	*la libertad y la democracia*	*el cese de la usurpación*
2.	*el regimen de Nicolás Maduro*	*ingreso de la ayuda humanitaria*
3.	*libertad y la democracia de*	*el ingreso de la ayuda*
4.	*colapso de los servicios públicos*	*lograr el cese de la*

Tab. 11: Four most frequent 5-grams in Juan Guaidó's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

Prior to January 23, linguistic patterns could be found in Guaidó's tweets that can be interpreted in opposite ways: the desire for freedom and democracy (*la libertad y la democracia*) is set against Maduro's authoritarian regime (*el regimen de Nicolás Maduro*). Guaidó's frequent use of

these multi-word expressions indicates that, after January 23, his tweets primarily emphasize humanitarian aid (*ingreso de la ayuda humanitaria*) and ending Maduro's illegitimate seizure of power (*el cese de la usurpación*), according to Guaidó. In the context of his self-proclamation as president of Venezuela, Guaidó thus attempts to underpin his claim to legitimacy as well as to work for the people and provide them with help from abroad, which Maduro had refused to do.

In Maduro's texts, a linguistic change can also be detected. Particularly interesting as a 5-gram before January 23, 2019, is the expression *Plan de la Patria 2019–2025* ('Plan for the Homeland 2019–2025'), with which he wants to make clear that he was elected by the people for a full term, until 2025, and thereby considers himself the democratically legitimized president of Venezuela. The distribution of the most frequent 5-grams in the two sub-corpora containing Maduro's tweets is shown below, in Tab. 12:

	Maduro	
	before January 23	after January 23
1.	*la construcción de un mundo*	*recuperación del Sistema Eléctrico Nacional*
2.	*años de la siembra de*	*los enemigos de la Patria*
3.	*en el marco de*	*el imperio de los EE.UU.*
4.	*Plan de la Patria 2019-2025*	*en defensa de la paz*

Tab. 12: Four most frequent 5-grams in Nicolás Maduro's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

Once again, we can observe that, after January 23, 5-grams occur that aim at Venezuela's enemies (*los enemigos de la Patria*) and, in particular, the supposed imperial ambition of the United States (*el imperio de los EE.UU.*). In this semantic context, it is not surprising that Venezuela's defense discourse (*en defensa de la paz*) is again employed by Maduro. Maduro's creation of an enemy, or adversary, fulfills what Danler in German calls an *Anti-Volk* ('anti-people'):

> Das Volk entsteht aber auch, in dem das Anti-Volk diskursiv erschaffen wird. Das Anti-Volk ist der *Andere*, nicht der Gegner, sondern der Feind, vor dem das wahre Volk

> bewahrt und beschützt werden muss […]. Der Feind, also das Anti-Volk, muss eliminiert werden, wodurch sich der Populismus als antipluralistisch und somit als das Gegenteil von Demokratie herausstellt (2020, 132).
>
> 'But the people is also created in which the anti-people is discursively created. The anti-people is the *other*, not the adversary, but the enemy, from which the true people must be preserved and protected [...]. The enemy, i.e., the anti-people, must be eliminated, whereby populism turns out to be anti-pluralistic and thus the opposite of democracy'.

It is precisely this discursive creation of such an *anti-people*, which for Danler is one of the basic criteria for populism that we observe in the tweets above examined.

3.2.3 Summary

The primary aim of this study has been to consider the political conflict in Venezuela to identify linguistic patterns in Guaidó's and Maduro's respective corpora, and to examine the extent to which these might have changed following Guaidó's self-proclamation as legitimate president of Venezuela on January 23, 2019. It could be shown that both politicians use *Twitter* to convey their political messages to supporters. Through employing reoccurring linguistic patterns, both politicians have attempted to achieve the hammering effect, as described by Jamet and Terry (2020, 35), so as to influence discourse in their favor and to thus achieve an outcome to the conflict beneficial to their interests.

Guaidó presents himself as the democratically elected and thus legitimate president of Venezuela, who wants to replace Maduro's regime, which he criticizes, and thereby transform Venezuela into a free, democratic country. Maduro, on the other hand, presents himself as the representative of the legitimate order, who, after January 23, perceives a Venezuela threatened by powers both internal and external, and who, united with the military and people of Venezuela, defends the homeland.

4 Conclusion

In this article, we have used a very specific example – namely, the political conflict in Venezuela in 2019 – to show how the analysis of linguistic patterns can be applied, following Bubenhofer (2009), in a corpus-based discourse analysis of the tweets of Juan Guaidó and Nicolás Maduro. We

have used the analysis of co-occurrences of high-frequency or significant words, as well as n-grams, to demonstrate that these two politicians purposefully use *Twitter*, or social media communication in general, to spread political messages among their followers. The presented study cannot be considered exhaustive, of course, as one could study other patterned units (for example, by using an analysis of metaphor or phraseological entities). In addition, multimodal linkages also certainly play significant roles in the discourse and in the content's reception by followers. Nevertheless, with this article we hope to contribute to the politolinguistic research that can help to better understand, based on empirical analysis, the social media discourse during the political conflict in Venezuela in 2019, and the associated attempts to win communicative hegemony (Bolívar 2019).

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"Stop à cette ineptie d'écriture inclusive. Stop à la dictature des idéologies stupides !" – A Critical Analysis of Twitter Comments against Gender-Inclusive Language

Abstract: Gender-inclusive language is a highly debated topic in France and beyond. Research in linguistics and neighboring disciplines has focused on the relationship between linguistic gender and perceived biological sex and/or social gender, as well as on various factors related to the actual use of gender-inclusive language and the masculine generic. However, the arguments opponents of gender-inclusive language put forth in favor of their position have yet to be considered in more detail. This paper aims to shed light on typical arguments against gender-inclusive language and underlying ideologies. To this end, a corpus of tweets with comments against gender-inclusive language published in May 2021 in France, Spain, and Germany was created and examined from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis. The results show a strong ideological basis for the comments: proponents of gender-inclusive language are construed as an out-group, and its members are presented as ideologically blinded, manipulating, irrational, dangerous, and so forth. This out-group is contrasted with the in-group – opponents of gender-inclusive language –, and the in-group's need to fight against the out-group in order to protect *their* language and, with this, the existing social order is highlighted. Thus, it is not so much questions of language use but rather questions of power that are negotiated in this discourse.

Keywords: gender-inclusive language, linguistic attitudes, language and ideology, Twitter corpus, Critical Discourse Analysis

1 Introduction: The debate about gender-inclusive language

Issues of gender equality in language have been a topic of discussion for several decades both in linguistics and in society. Questions of whether women are discriminated against in language were raised in the early 1970s in the Anglo-American sphere during the period of 'second wave feminism' (cf., e.g., Lakoff 1975; Key 1975) and quickly spread to other

countries and language communities. While the *invisibility* of women in languages that commonly use a masculine generic[1] was one of the main topics in early discussions, the question of how to address or refer to non-binary gender identities came up with the turn of the millennium.

Gender-inclusive language use includes a variety of linguistic devices, or strategies, many of which aim at avoiding the masculine generic. In French, this can be achieved by naming both linguistic genders (e.g., *étudiantes et étudiants*), by using epicene words (e.g., *la personne*), infinitive or passive constructions (in order to not name the agent), gender-invariable pronouns and adjectives (e.g., *quiconque* instead of *celui qui*), or newly created morphemes (e.g., *Espagnolx*, pl. *Espagnolz* to refer to Spaniards of all genders, cf. Alpheratz 2018, 161–162).[2] One strategy that has received particular attention is a short version of feminine-masculine word pairs, where the two forms are combined with an interpunct (the so-called *point médian*) or a period (e.g., *les citoyen·ne·s* or *les citoyen.ne.s*) within one word.

In France, the topic of gender-inclusive language reached a broader public after the latter strategy was used in the schoolbook *Questionner le monde* (Le Callennec and François 2017), an event highly debated in the media. Several months later, then French Prime Minister Édouard Philippe stipulated in a memo to "ne pas faire usage de l'écriture dite inclusive" (Philippe 2017; 'not use the so-called inclusive writing') in administrative texts. At the same time, however, 314 teachers declared to not teach the grammatical rule 'le masculin l'emporte sur le féminin' ('the masculine prevails over the feminine') anymore, a formula that designates the principle that adjectives always take the masculine form when they refer to both masculine and feminine nouns (slate.fr 2017). Instead, they vowed to teach, among others, the principle of the *accord de proxim-*

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[1] It should be noted that the designation *masculine generic* is somehow misleading because *generic* is not used to describe the reference to a class (e.g. as in *The whale is a mammal.*), but to describe the (supposedly) unmarked, thus gender-neutral use of masculine reference forms (cf., e.g., Kotthoff and Nübling 2018, 91–92). Additionally, many perception studies have proved that masculine forms are often not interpreted in such a way (cf. below).

[2] These newly created morphemes allow non-binary gender identities to be expressed.

ité, where an adjective referring to more than one noun takes the gender of the nearest noun (e.g., "Les auteurs et les autrices *présentes* vont signer leurs livres.", Viennot 2018, 88). Recently, in May 2021, a memo about gender-inclusive language use in administration and education, signed by the French Minister of Education Jean-Michel Blanquer, was published (Blanquer 2021). In this document, he encourages the naming of both masculine and feminine forms of personal reference in administrative texts but bans the use of the *point médian* in schools, which, again, led to controversial debates across the country and beyond.

In such debates, numerous arguments both in favor of and against the use of gender-inclusive language are put forth, which is why a closer look at these debates is particularly promising for a better understanding of the prevailing positions. In this paper, the arguments opponents of gender-inclusive language often present are analyzed in more detail. To this end, a corpus of tweets commenting on Jean-Michel Blanquer's decision described above was created and examined from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, with a focus on the ideologies underlying the arguments.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the state of research in the area of gender-inclusive language. Section 3 reflects on the relationship between discourse, power, and ideology with an outline of the central ideas of Critical Discourse Analysis. After that, section 4 presents the method and the corpus used for this study, and section 5 explains its results in more detail. Finally, section 6 summarizes the most important findings and shows the necessity of follow-up studies.

2 Research on gender-inclusive language

In linguistics, two fronts seem to be facing each other: on the one hand, linguists who take the position that strategies of gender-inclusive language use are not necessary often refer to structuralist theories (e.g., Kalverkämper 1979; Bosque 2012). They claim that masculine forms can be used in an unmarked, thus gender-neutral, way and consequently do not need to be substituted by alternative forms. Often, they also assert that strategies to make language more gender-inclusive are complicated or even ungrammatical – an opinion supported by the *Académie française*

(cf. Académie française 2017) and the *Real Academia Española* (cf. Real Academia Española 2020, 73–74). On the other hand, linguists who do believe that the masculine generic should be avoided argue along the lines of cognitive linguistics, stating that there is a strong associative connection between the linguistic gender of a form of personal reference and the perceived biological sex and/or social gender of the person this form refers to (cf. Stefanowitsch 2017; Gygax et al. 2019). This assumption is based on a series of psycholinguistic studies which show that the masculine (linguistic) gender often leads to mental representations of male persons, and is thus not interpreted in a gender-neutral way (cf., among many others, Klein 1988; Nissen 1997; Braun et al. 1998; Stahlberg et al. 2001; Brauer and Landry 2008; Gygax et al. 2008).

Besides studies on the perception of masculine generics, research has been conducted on attitudes about gender-inclusive language (cf. Rubin and Greene 1991; Parks and Roberton 2008; Bengoechea and Simón 2014; Slemp et al. 2020; Cremades and Fernández-Portero 2022), on factors that might influence the use of gender-inclusive language (cf. Matheson and Kristiansen 1987; Cronin and Jreisat 1995; Kuhn and Gabriel 2014; Koeser et al. 2015; Patev et al. 2019), on possible societal effects of gender-inclusive language use, especially in the areas of job advertisement/recruitment and children's and adolescents' perception of occupations (cf. Chatard et al. 2005; Gaucher et al. 2011; Vervecken et al. 2013; Horvath et al. 2015; Vervecken et al. 2015), on comprehensibility, legibility, and perceived *aesthetics* of texts written in a gender-inclusive way (cf. Braun et al. 2007; Gygax and Gesto 2007; Blake and Klimmt 2010; Pöschko and Prieler 2018; Friedrich and Heise 2019) as well as on the perception of people who use gender-inclusive language (cf. Johnson and Dowling-Guyer 1996; Vervecken and Hannover 2012). Such studies have shown – to mention just a few examples – that women are more likely to show positive attitudes towards gender-inclusive language than men (cf. Rubin and Greene 1991), that using gender-inclusive language is perceived to be more difficult by people with negative attitudes towards transgender individuals (compared to people with positive attitudes, cf. Patev et al. 2019), or that adolescents report higher degrees of professional self-efficacity when job titles are used both in the masculine and in the feminine form (compared to the masculine generic, cf. Chatard et al. 2005).

Moreover, some studies have found a significant correlation between (non-)sexist attitudes in general and the acceptance or adoption of gender-inclusive language, meaning that people who are less in favor of gender equality in society also reject gender-inclusive language more often (cf., e.g., Parks and Roberton 2004; Sarrasin et al. 2012; Douglas and Sutton 2014). The reasons that opponents of gender-inclusive language outside of academia or the press (for this, cf., e.g., Blaubergs 1980; Pano Alamán 2022) put forth for their rejection have remained largely unanalyzed until now.[3] However, the link between attitudes towards gender equality and gender-inclusive language makes it seem likely that ideological beliefs play an important role here. Thus, a closer examination of the arguments opponents often present seems highly promising.

3 Discourse, power, and ideology

There is a close link between language, or, more precisely, discourse, and power. This becomes clear with questions such as: Who talks? What can be said by whom? What cannot be said? Who is being heard? What is accepted to be *the truth*? Making explicit such relations between discourse and power is one of the aims of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (cf. Fairclough et al. 2011, 358; S. Jäger 2015, 12; M. Jäger 2019, 63–65). However, CDA does not represent a fixed academic discipline, a distinct theory, or a clearly defined set of methods (cf. Wodak 2013, xxi–xxv). Rather, it can be regarded as a "problem-oriented interdisciplinary research programme, subsuming a variety of approaches, each drawing on different epistemological assumptions, with different theoretical models, research methods and agenda" (ib., xxi).

Relations of dominance and subordination are often based on ideologies, and, consequently, expressed and reproduced in discourse. The analysis of ideologies is thus crucial for CDA in order to understand how relations of power are represented and perpetuated in discursive prac-

[3] An exception is Gómez Sánchez (2022), who analyzes comments in online fora of Spanish newspapers. However, her focus is not on the reasons presented for the rejection of gender-inclusive language, but on the face-work (cf. Goffman 1967) performed with such comments.

tices (cf. van Dijk 2006, 117; Fairclough et al. 2011, 358). Ideology, of course, is a concept which cannot be defined in a single or unequivocal way (cf. Eagleton 2007, 1–31), but for the present study, a preliminary approach might be that ideologies are sets of beliefs which support existing or demand new power relations. These sets of beliefs, or belief systems, define, as van Dijk (2006, 116) puts it, the social identity of a group and are shared by its members. This results in a dichotomy between the in-group ('Us') and the out-group ('Them'), both of whom are often assigned different characteristics, values, or behaviors. Obviously, the representation of the in-group is usually positive, while the representation of the out-group is negative. Analyzing the representations of in- and out-groups can thus be a potent means to perceive underlying ideologies in discourse (cf. ib., 124–127).

In the debate about gender-inclusive language, which is often said to be strongly ideologically based, this polarization of the in-group and the out-group seems to be particularly pronounced. However, in order to gain a better understanding of this process, a closer analysis is necessary. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine in more detail how opponents of gender-inclusive language define their own group, how they define the resulting out-group and how they distinguish themselves from this out-group. This can help to make visible existing or supposed relations of power and underlying ideologies in the discourse.

4 Method and corpus

The present analysis required a corpus based on statements of opponents of gender-inclusive language. One medium where people often express their opinions quite bluntly and where a wide range of arguments (in the broadest sense) may be brought to bear is social media. Debates on gender-inclusive language repeatedly flare up, for example, when new language policy regulations are made. This was the case in May 2021, after the French Minister of Education banned the use of the *point médian* and similar strategies in schools (cf. above).

To compile the corpus, *Twitter* comments related to this event were collected manually. Due to the low use of particular hashtags in this debate, it was not possible to compile the corpus using hashtags. Instead,

taking as a starting point newspaper articles on Blanquer's ban which the respective newspapers posted on *Twitter*, tweets were collected that directly commented on the mention of these articles using the reply function.[4] This resulted in around 600 comments as a reaction to articles from five French newspapers. In order to depict a broad range of arguments, also beyond France, comments on articles from three Spanish and four German newspapers were included, increasing the corpus by about 560 comments. Thus, the final corpus contained around 1,160 tweets.

The following table provides an overview of the newspapers and tweets used as a starting point for the corpus compilation. Information on the publication dates, as well as the corresponding hyperlinks, can be found in the appendix.

Country	Newspaper	Tweet
France	France Info	*Jean-Michel Blanquer interdit l'écriture inclusive, "obstacle à la lecture et à la compréhension", à l'école* […]
	Le Figaro Étudiant	*Jean-Michel Blanquer interdit officiellement l'écriture inclusive à l'école*
	Le Monde	*Jean-Michel Blanquer interdit l'écriture inclusive à l'école : une circulaire publiée jeudi proscrit le recours en classe à l'écriture inclusive, considérée comme un « obstacle à l'acquisition de la langue comme de la lecture »*
	Libération	[…] *@jmblanquer chasse officiellement l'écriture inclusive des salles de classe*
		Le ministre de l'Education nationale a proscrit officiellement le recours au point médian dans les usages pédagogiques

[4] In the case of *Mediavenir*, attention was drawn to the matter in the form of a breaking news notification without a separate article being published.

Country	Newspaper	Tweet
France	Mediavenir	[…] *FLASH - Jean-Michel #Blanquer veut interdire l'écriture inclusive à l'école. Le ministre de l'Éducation nationale estime que cette écriture peut troubler l'apprentissage des élèves dyslexiques. (Le Figaro)*
		[…] *FLASH - Jean-Michel #Blanquer a officiellement interdit l'utilisation de l'écriture inclusive dans l'Éducation nationale. L'écriture inclusive serait selon lui "un barrage à la transmission de notre langue". (BFMTV)*
Spain	20 minutos	*Francia veta el lenguaje inclusivo en la educación nacional al considerarlo un obstáculo para el aprendizaje*
	ABC	*Francia prohíbe oficialmente el lenguaje inclusivo en la escuela* […]
	El Mundo	*Francia prohíbe oficialmente el lenguaje inclusivo en la escuela: "Constituye un obstáculo a la comprensión de la escritura"*
Germany	BILD	*Zu kompliziert für Französisch – Macrons Schulminister stoppt Gender-Sprache*
	Frankfurter Allgemeine	*Die französische Bildungsgewerkschaft SUD wirft Bildungsminister Jean-Michel Blanque* [sic!] *vor, der „pädagogischen Gemeinschaft seine eigene Rückständigkeit aufzuzwingen". […] #gendern*
	NTV	*"Pünktchen stören beim Lesen": Frankreich verbietet Gendern an Schulen*
	Der Spiegel	*Für Friedrich Merz ein Vorbild, für Kritiker ein Beispiel für »Rückständigkeit«: Frankreichs Bildungsminister will per Erlass verhindern, dass an Schulen »gegendert« wird. Frauen sollen anders berücksichtigt werden.* […]

Table 1: Tweets used as a starting point for the corpus compilation.

Although this corpus only depicts a small part of a much larger discourse, it offers a range of interesting phenomena which can help to gain insight into patterns of argumentation in the debate about gender-inclusive language, as will be exposed in more detail below.

In order to analyze how ideologies are expressed in discourse, van Dijk (2004) proposes a qualitative approach, in the form of a *heuristic*, which focuses on different levels of the discourse, like meaning (topics, implications, presuppositions, etc.), propositional structures, sentence syntax, and rhetoric, among others. He argues that strategies in ideological discourse come down to the very general principle of saying positive things about the in-group and negative things about the out-group (cf. ib., 76–77). As ideologies can be expressed on all these levels of discourse, they can be revealed by analyzing these levels in more detail. For example, topics often emphasize particular characteristics of the out-group, and presupposed information can influence what the recipient takes for granted (cf. ib., 78–81). Likewise, modality markers can be used to present information in a certain way (e.g., "It is well known that" or "It is necessary that", cf. ib., 88–89), and information can be highlighted by putting it right at the beginning of a sentence (cf. ib., 93–94).

Due to the idiosyncrasy of the corpus in this study, not all levels can be treated equally well. For example, discourse forms, expressed in the order of presented information, headlines, conclusions, etc. (cf. ib., 94–96), only unfold in a very limited way because the tweets cannot exceed 280 characters. However, van Dijk's qualitative approach provides a helpful basic framework and will therefore be used as a starting point for the following analysis.

5 Ideology in the *Twitter* corpus

The analysis of the corpus clearly showed that proponents of gender-inclusive language are construed as an out-group, while its opponents constitute themselves as a group that *fights* against this use of language and *defends* the *real* language. This dichotomic opposition between the in- and the out-group underlies several argumentative patterns, which are treated separately in the forthcoming section.

a) Gender-inclusive language is ideology.

A frequently recurring argument is that gender-inclusive language is the idea of an out-group which has no foundation in the *real* world, but

which springs from the purely ideological. This becomes evident in the following examples:[5]

(1) Enfin une connerie en moins ! Restera quelques twittos ridicule et gauchistes sois disante féministe (@VmYStiKe; Tweet-ID: 1390566239374872581)

(2) Parfait. Maintenant asseyons nous et buvons les larmes des progressistes hystériques. (@idedemasquee; Tweet-ID: 1390396189263245316)

(3) Der ist wenigstens nicht so so bescheuert wie die Grünen Spinner,! (@Wolfgan49776847; Tweet-ID: 1391113929888239618)

(4) Das „Gendern" in Deutschland belegt erneut, das eine links-grün-liberale Medienblase versucht öffentliche Meinung zu gestalten. […] (@312Pablo; Tweet-ID: 1390756596892962822)

In such comments, members of the out-group are defined by their political or ideological orientation (cf. *gauchiste* 'leftist', *féministe* 'feminist', *progressiste* 'progressive', *grün* 'Green', *links-grün-liberal* 'leftist-Green-liberal') which, at the same time, is devalued, e.g. by using adjectives with negative connotations as quasi-synonyms to political descriptions (cf. the use of *ridicule* 'ridiculous', *gauchiste* 'leftist', and *féministe* 'feminist' in (1)) or in noun phrases with them (cf. "des progressistes hystériques" 'hysterical progressives' in (2) or "die Grünen Spinner" 'the Green nutcases' in (3)). Thus, the out-group is presented as irrational, ideologically blinded, in opposition to a *neutral* in-group which does not adhere to any ideology. Hence, as van Dijk (2004, 20) describes it, the ideology of the out-group is opposed to the *true knowledge* of the in-group – and this knowledge refers to the understanding that gender-inclusive language should not be used.

b) Gender-inclusive language is manipulation.

Closely related to this is the presentation of gender-inclusive language as a manipulation by which the out-group wants to influence the in-group, enforcing a new language and, with this, some kind of new *ideological* order. This becomes evident in the following examples:

[5] The following tweets are cited as they appeared on *Twitter*, neither spelling nor punctuation are modified. Omissions are marked with "[…]". Each tweet is accompanied by its originator and its ID. Details on the publication dates, as well as the corresponding hyperlinks, are provided in the appendix.

(5) Oui mais c'est pareil pour ceux qui veulent nous l'imposer. Que ca dégage et vite. (@B4zing4_2; Tweet-ID: 1389367525692092422)

(6) Cette écriture peut surtout troubler le développement intellectuel de tout enfant, en lui mettant d'ineptes concepts pseudo-progressistes dans la tête, au lieu de simple bon sens. (@Hb77875573; Tweet-ID: 1389445182534426630)

(7) Enhorabuena. Los ignorantes nos quieren cambiar todo (@MMaria47760992; Tweet-ID: 1390670563992035330)

(8) Es ist eher umgekehrt, dass bei uns ideologisierte Geisteswissenschaftler und Aktivisten anderen eine ideologische Beeinflussung der Sprache aufzwängen, die die Gesellschaft spaltet. (@seppenradener; Tweet-ID: 1391015016095260672)

Consequently, the out-group is not only presented as ideologically blinded, but also as dangerous because they want to impose *their* language (and mindset) on the in-group. Supporters of gender-inclusive language are described in the role of the actor, the perpetrator, while the in-group is in danger and must defend itself. This is an interesting case of victimization (cf. van Dijk 2004, 130), especially since supporters of gender-inclusive language see the perpetrator-victim roles reversed: they claim that people who do not use gender-inclusive language are the ones who discriminate against others.

In addition to verbs such as fr. *imposer* 'impose', ger. *aufzwängen* 'force upon' etc., which emphasize the pressure that the out-group puts on the in-group, we even find descriptors such as 'terrorists'[6] for proponents of gender-inclusive language and 'dictatorship' (cf. the heading of this paper)[7] for their actions.[8] Thus, banning gender-inclusive language use is presented as a legitimate reaction to this threat, ignoring the fact that by these means, the in-group's reaction to a perceived repression is a no less repressive act. In some cases, even more far-reaching bans are demanded, like in the following examples:

(9) Il faut interdire l'écriture inclusive dans l'administration ; pas uniquement à l'école (@dodrio37; Tweet-ID: 1390567152105762816)

(10) Il faut l'interdire partout. (@AoikawaUS; Tweet-ID: 1389267399740956677)

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[6] Cf. "[…] Aber schön zu sehen das die Sprachterroristen eine Globale Seuche sind. […]" (@Deal2Happy; Tweet-ID: 1391022340792852483).

[7] For details on this tweet, cf. appendix.

[8] Cf. also the use of violence metaphors as in (14) (*Sprachverstümm[e]lung* 'language mutilation') and (30) (*Sprachvergewaltigung* 'language rape').

(11) Il DOIT interdire l'écriture inclusive et sans attendre. (@mchristine55; Tweet-ID: 1389472040265080832)

These formulations are also interesting in regard to their modality (cf. van Dijk 2004, 88–89). Using modal verbs such as fr. *falloir* 'need to', *devoir* 'must', etc., the demands are not presented as personal opinions, but as an objectively perceivable necessity. It is important to notice that these demands are based on the presupposition that only the in-group is allowed to exert influence on language use (by banning certain uses), while attempts from the out-group to do so are seen as invalid manipulation.

c) Supporters of gender-inclusive language are a minority.

Additionally, supporters of gender-inclusive language are described as a minority, which intends to make their attempts seem even less legitimate, as can be seen in the following comments:

(12) Tant mieux c bon on va pas changer de langue parce que 4 ou 5 hystériques pleurent parce qu'on a pas mis de E à la fin d'un mot et puis quoi encore? (@Adem0x; Tweet-ID: 1389417225065574400)

(13) Irgendwann is ja aber auch mal gut mit dem ganzen gleichberechtigungsgeschmarre … es nervt nur noch. Warum muss eine Mehrheit eine sog. selbstinszinierten und selbstgefälligen Minderheit bedienen ? (@pamaki2811; Tweet-ID: 1391097596261900291)

(14) Gut, das sich widerstand, gegen diese Sprachverstümmlung regt ! Eine kleine Minderheit versucht hier allen etwas aufzuzwingen. (@Pentiumkiller; Tweet-ID: 1390708361147072513)

From presenting the out-group as a minority also follows that the in-group, i.e., opponents of gender-inclusive language, must represent the majority and, moreover, the norm (*argumentum ad populum*). The commentators thus conclude that their position is the one that should prevail. In their argumentation, they seem to invoke democratic principles, but at the same time, they presuppose that minorities always have to adapt to the majority and that the ideas of a (supposed) minority must not be considered.

d) Gender-inclusive language is useless.

Another set of tweets refers to the supposed uselessness, even absurdity of gender-inclusive language, for example:

(15) L'écriture inclusive est pour le coup complètement absurde. Encore heureux que ça devienne pas la norme (@Globibuluxx; Tweet-ID: 1389268276010704896)

(16) Il n'y a même pas besoin de justification, cette horreur n'a pas sa place dans la langue française. (@koala24012; Tweet-ID: 1389462069393625090)

(17) Lenguaje inclusivo es un tontería, las palabras son solo eso. (@Emilio_ReyesC; Tweet-ID: 1390770931602178049)

Most of the comments do not give any justification for this assertion. Moreover, the actual goal of gender-inclusive language use, namely to contribute to gender equality in society, is hardly ever mentioned; keywords referring to 'women', 'equality', 'discrimination', etc. are extremely rare in the corpus. Rather, the tweeters' personal opinion is presented as a fact that arises from common sense and does not require any further justification or empirical basis (*argumentum ad iudicium*). Hence, the criterion of evidentiality (referring to the *proof*, or source, of the information, e.g., "I have seen/read it", "X told me", etc., cf. van Dijk 2004, 89) seems to be simply "I know it". This goes hand in hand with the almost complete absence of phenomena like hedging or vagueness in the corpus (cf. ib., 90). Verbs of thinking are also very rare.

By presenting their own opinion as a commonly-known fact, the members of the in-group are once again depicted as those who possess the knowledge and are able to think in a rational way.[9] According to them, members of the out-group in turn do not understand that gender-inclusive language is useless; consequently, they are irrational. This is also reflected by the frequent use of the adjective *absurde* 'absurd' in the French tweets, as well as by various descriptions of the out-group. Apart from the already mentioned adjectives 'ridiculous' and 'hysterical', we find, among others:

[9] Cf. van Dijk (2004, 127) about reasonableness as an important argumentative strategy.

(18) A part les drogués personne l'utilise (@MtgQuark; Tweet-ID: 1390397540856737796)

(19) […] aquí en cambio, cada día más retrasados, retrasadas y retrasades[10] (@Armando-Broncas4; Tweet-ID: 1390388086090108930)

(20) Bravo, der Sieg des normalen Menschenverstandes über weltfremde Ideologie.[11] (@obiwannnnnn; Tweet-ID: 1390905873942331392)

Consequently, these tweets present members of the in-group as those who are in the position to rationally judge the usefulness or uselessness of gender-inclusive language, while members of the out-group are not sound of mind, which is why their judgement is worthless.

e) Gender-inclusive language is complicated.

Another statement we often find in the comments asserts that gender-inclusive language is an attempt to unnecessarily complicate language. This becomes evident in the following examples:

(21) Enfin une bonne décision comme si la langue française était pas déjà assez compliquée. (@thomas272L; Tweet-ID: 1389452131162279936)

(22) La langue française est déjà suffisament dure comme ça […] (@Rokhonoa; Tweet-ID: 1390396078353264641)

In these cases, the members of the out-group are once again depicted as a threat for the in-group because they compromise language. Apart from this, numerous comments make up another group that seems to be threatened:

(23) […] C'est une aberration absolue. Les élèves ont déjà du mal à accorder les noms et les adjectifs, alors ça … (@Tatane_School; Tweet-ID: 1390719690184478720)

(24) Bravo à lui ! Cette soupe informe et illisible, discriminatoire envers les enfants dyslexiques et dysphasiques ne méritait pas mieux ! (@DejanteDu44; Tweet-ID: 1391289000242130946)

(25) De plus cette écriture est discriminante puisque elle est illisible par les ordinateurs vocaux donc les aveugles n'ont pas accès au contenu écrit en inclusive. […] (@fernandezm33; Tweet-ID: 1390589071689453568)

With such comments, members of the in-group present themselves as protectors, as caring citizens who are concerned about participation

[10] Here, France is being opposed to Spain, where gender-inclusive language has not been banned.

[11] This *victory* refers to Blanquer's ban described in section 1.

rights of supposedly weaker groups in society, like children or people with disabilities. Members of the out-group, on the other hand, are depicted as inconsiderate people who are enforcing their interests without regard for others. Interestingly, it is not mentioned that a ban of gender-inclusive language use might also discriminate against or exclude certain groups. The tweeters' solidarity is thus clearly reserved for members of their own group.

f) Gender-inclusive language threatens the *real* language.

According to the comments, gender-inclusive language is not only unnecessary and complicated, but also grammatically wrong, artificial, or unaesthetic. Thus, it endangers the *correct* language – meaning the language's (supposedly) *traditional* use[12] – as is evident from the following comments:

(26) Merci à lui de sauver le français, langue officielle de beaucoup de pays (@daghedick; Tweet-ID: 1390763451962757129)

(27) […] Déjà notre belle langue FRANCAISE perd de sa noblesse !!!! alors il était urgent d'intervenir. (@GaillardDenise; Tweet-ID: 1390754999345504258)

(28) Un bon point pour lui: cessons ces stupidités et revenons à un français écrit et parlé corrects (@MicheleGuillot1; Tweet-ID: 1389447922786443268)

(29) A CAMBIO EN ESPAÑA ESTOS MALVADOS LA PROMUEVEN A PESAR DE QUE LA RAE HA DICHO QUE NO ES CORRECTA.[13] (@Jobancin1942; Tweet-ID: 1390792547790950402)

(30) Sprachvergewaltigung im Land der Dichter und Denker (@Winiegarske; Tweet-ID: 1390925935160004608)

(31) Die Kinder erlernen in der Schule eine künstlich erzeugte Sprache die ein paar Spinner toll finden. […] (@Kai79974889; Tweet-ID: 1390908823980888064)

Consequently, the members of the in-group are presented as language experts who have to save *their* language (cf., e.g., (27)) from the external danger represented by the out-group (which is described particu-

[12] These arguments can thus be seen as *argumenta ad antiquitatem*.

[13] This is a typical case of an *argumentum ad autoritatem* which we often find in the discourse about gender-inclusive language.

larly drastically in (30)).[14] In many comments, the tweeters use what they believe to be gender-inclusive language in an exaggerated way to make their point clear, for example in the following comments:

(32) Bravo.e.s !!!! Je.tu.il.elle m'en sortait-ent plus.e ! […] (@soa_gti; Tweet-ID: 1390598151694864384)

(33) Partout et partouse il faut l'interdire. (@AoikawaUS; Tweet-ID: 1389267491755597829)

(34) Pero , pera , pere , los , las , les franceses , fracesas y francesos son diderentes , diferentas y diferentos a los , las , les , españoles , españolas y españolos (@AgustinMaset; Tweet-ID: 1390418787124514820)

(35) España, somos: Idiotas. Idiotos. Idiotes. (@ManuelMH15; Tweet-ID: 1390689799753932802)

(36) Ich wusste gar nicht, dass die Franzosen*innen ihre Sprache auch vergendert haben. Das ist jedenfalls eine gute Entscheidung für die Kinder*innen. Ich hoffe, die Deutschen*innen werden folgen. (@Andfisch1899; Tweet-ID: 1390913465896865793)

(37) Sternchen*Innen auch (@ThorstenD6; Tweet-ID: 1390902377855782914)

This can be regarded as a form of *crossing* (cf. Rampton 1995), by which the commentators stylize and parody some characteristics of the out-group's supposed way of speaking (by using certain features of gender-inclusive language in an exaggerated way) and, at the same time, denigrate them (cf. Higuera Del Moral and Jansen 2017, 138–149). Thus, by means of humor, the tweeters strongly distance themselves from the out-group.[15] Furthermore, they present these strategies not as linguistic devices that can and should only be used in very specific cases (namely, to refer to human beings), but pretend that a whole language is being invented and imposed on others.[16] Thus, comments claiming that

[14] Gómez Sánchez finds similar comments in her study and analyzes them as "Actividades de autoimagen basadas en el conocimiento (real o no) de la lengua" (2022, 25–26).

[15] Cf. also the strategies that Gómez Sánchez analyzes as "Actividades descorteses basadas en la ridiculización y los juegos de palabras" (2022, 223).

[16] It is interesting to notice how in these comments linguistic means to make person designations gender-inclusive are transferred to interjections (as in (32)), adverbs (as in (33)), conjunctions (as in (34)), epicene nouns (as in (35) and (36)) or to nouns that do not designate human beings (as in (37)). These comments also suggest that the tweeters might be unaware of the great variety of linguistic

gender-inclusive language use is *new*, *wrong*, or *ugly* emphasize the in-group's need to fight to maintain language in its *traditional*, and therefore *correct*, form, threatened by the out-group.

g) Gender-inclusive language threatens culture.

Finally, some comments refer to a close connection between language and culture, warning that *destroying* language will also destroy culture. This becomes clear in comments like the following:

(38) Ouf, mais ça ne durera pas ! Nous avons la pression de ceux qui veulent nous deculturer …. (@PascalPgreco; Tweet-ID: 1392042733272014848)

(39) El lenguaje inclusivo es muestra de incultura (@jjaviercf1; Tweet-ID: 1390947527449526273)

(40) Die Franzosen haben eben noch eine Sprachkultur, die in unserem Land schon längst verloren wurde. (@IngeBunge; Tweet-ID: 1390939614161129472)

With these comments, members of the in-group not only define themselves by sharing the same language (as opposed to gender-inclusive language as the language of the out-group), but also by having access to the same culture. The out-group, in turn, does not have access to this culture, is *decultured*, almost barbaric. This fits with the portrayals of the out-group as irrational described above, and emphasizes once again the danger that the out-group represents – they are depicted as willingly destroying not only language, but also culture. Fighting against gender-inclusive language is thus presented as an act of general benefit (to the in-group) because it also means protecting culture.

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means that gender-inclusive language encompasses; they concentrate on very specific devices which seem to be most controversial. In French, this is the period to name both linguistic genders in one word (e.g., *les citoyen.nes*), in Spanish, the new morpheme {e} (which was created to replace morphemes that refer to male or female gender, like {o} and {a}, e.g., *les ciudadanes*), and in German, the asterisk (which is put between the masculine and the feminine form, e.g., *die Bürger*innen*).

6 Conclusion

This analysis of tweets about gender-inclusive language not only gives insight into what arguments are typically put forth by opponents of gender-inclusive language, but also clearly shows that the debate is grounded in a strong ideological basis. Members of the in-group present themselves in a positive way: according to them, they act rationally, do not adhere to any ideology, recognize the danger that gender-inclusive language represents, and protect their own group, especially those who cannot stand up for their rights themselves and whom gender-inclusive language harms the most. Furthermore, they depict themselves as language experts who protect the language of their group from defacement and thus also preserve culture. The out-group, in turn, is presented in a negative way: according to the comments, its members are ideologically blinded, they attempt to manipulate the population, and, although a minority, are a threat to the in-group. Moreover, they are unable to recognize that their language is useless, complicated, grammatically incorrect and unaesthetic. With their attempt to change language, they are at the same time knowingly and willingly destroying culture.

This also shows that the whole debate is less about language itself than it is about power and social order. What is being negotiated is the question of who gets to decide about language, who gets to change it, and who holds the interpretive sovereignty over what is correct, aesthetic, useful, etc. Trying to preserve language in its (supposedly) *traditional*, thus *correct* form means preserving the existing social order and, relatedly, patriarchal structures in society. Hence, fighting against gender-inclusive language really means fighting against those who seem to try to change the existing social order.

Of course, this study is based on a small amount of data which refer to a very specific event. Consequently, its results can only be a first insight and need to be confirmed and extended by further studies. It would be useful to create larger corpora that contain more data from a longer period of time (and thus also on different events) and from more language communities. In addition to that, data from other domains, i.e., other social media, newspaper articles, television debates, or even private conversations, could be useful. Finally, it also seems promising to analyze arguments of those who stand up for gender-inclusive lan-

guage use. Studies could examine, for example, whether the opposition between in- and out-groups is similarly pronounced here, how in- and out-groups are presented, and, ultimately, how questions of power and social order are negotiated.

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Appendix

a) Corpus information

The following newspapers' tweets were used as a starting point for the collection of comments (as described in section 4)

French newspapers

Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
@franceinfo	May 7, 2021; 7.14 am	https://twitter.com/franceinfo/status/1390535462440349697
@Figaro_Etudiant	May 6, 2021; 7.15 pm	https://twitter.com/Figaro_Etudiant/status/1390354592974659590
@lemondefr	May 7, 2021; 9.03 am	https://twitter.com/lemondefr/status/1390563019038539776
@libe	May 7, 2021; 8.01 am	https://twitter.com/libe/status/1390547205455556609
@Mediavenir	May 3, 2021; 7.15 pm	https://twitter.com/Mediavenir/status/13892672579608412241[17]
@Mediavenir	May 6, 2021; 10.00 pm	https://twitter.com/Mediavenir/status/1390395949835382784

Spanish newspapers

Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
@20m	May 6, 2021; 9.24 pm	https://twitter.com/20m/status/1390386985525723140
@abc_es	May 7, 2021; 2.55 pm	https://twitter.com/abc_es/status/1390651383725109251
@elmundoes	May 7, 2021; 6.42 pm	https://twitter.com/elmundoes/status/1390708724185145346

[17] This article does not inform about Blanquer's ban itself, but about his intention to do so. As it triggered a wave of comments on this topic, it was also included in the corpus.

German newspapers

Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
@BILD	May 8, 2021; 5.25 pm	https://twitter.com/BILD/status/1391051523715747841
@faznet	May 8, 2021; 1.12 pm	https://twitter.com/faznet/status/1390987858190667779
@ntvde	May 8, 2021; 5.54 am	https://twitter.com/ntvde/status/1390877754233540613
@derspiegel	May 7, 2021; 6.36 pm	https://twitter.com/derspiegel/status/1390707029958807555

b) Information on author, date and time of publication, and hyperlink of the cited tweets

No. in paper	Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
[Heading]	@hephbe	May 6, 2021; 7.40 pm	https://twitter.com/hephbe/status/1390360800913760258
(1)	@VmYStiKe	May 7, 2021; 9.16 am	https://twitter.com/VmYStiKe/status/1390566239374872581
(2)	@idedemasquee	May 6, 2021; 10.00 pm	https://twitter.com/demasqueen/status/1390396189263245316
(3)	@Wolfgan49776847	May 8, 2021; 9.33 pm	https://twitter.com/Wolfgan49776847/status/1391113929888239618
(4)	@312Pablo	May 7, 2021; 9.53 pm	https://twitter.com/312Pablo/status/1390756596892962822
(5)	@B4zing4_2	May 4, 2021; 1.53 am	https://twitter.com/B4zing4_2/status/1389367525692092422
(6)	@Hb77875573	May 4, 2021; 7.02 am	https://twitter.com/Hb77875573/status/1389445182534426630

No. in paper	Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
(7)	@MMaria47760992	May 7, 2021; 4.11 pm	https://twitter.com/MMaria47760992/status/1390670563992035330
(8)	@seppenradener	May 8, 2021; 2.59 pm	https://twitter.com/seppenradener/status/1391015016095260672
(9)	@dodrio37	May 7, 2021; 9.20 am	https://twitter.com/dodrio37/status/1390567152105762816
(10)	@AoikawaUS	May 3, 2021; 7.15 pm	https://twitter.com/AoikawaUS/status/1389267399740956677
(11)	@mchristine55	May 4, 2021; 8.48 am	https://twitter.com/mchristine55/status/1389472040265080832
(12)	@Adem0x	May 4, 2021; 5.10 am	https://twitter.com/Adem0xx/status/1389417225065574400
(13)	@pamaki2811	May 8, 2021; 8.28 pm	https://twitter.com/pamaki2811/status/1391097596261900291
(14)	@Pentiumkiller	May 7, 2021; 6.41 pm	https://twitter.com/Pentiumkiller/status/1390708361147072513
(15)	@Globibuluxx	May 3, 2021; 7.19 pm	https://twitter.com/Globibuluxx/status/1389268276010704896
(16)	@koala24012	May 4, 2021; 8.09 am	https://twitter.com/Tetouchaud/status/1389462069393625090
(17)	@Emilio_ReyesC	May 7, 2021; 10.50 pm	https://twitter.com/Emilio_ReyesC/status/1390770931602178049
(18)	@MtgQuark	May 6, 2021; 10.06 pm	https://twitter.com/MtgQuark/status/1390397540856737796
(19)	@ArmandoBroncas4	May 6, 2021; 9.28 pm	https://twitter.com/ArmandoBroncas4/status/1390388086090108930

No. in paper	Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
(20)	@obiwannnnnn	May 8, 2021; 7.46 am	https://twitter.com/obiwannnnnn/status/1390905873942331392
(21)	@thomas272L	May 4, 2021; 7.29 am	https://twitter.com/thomas272L/status/1389452131162279936
(22)	@Rokhonoa	May 6, 2021; 10.00 pm	https://twitter.com/Fujit0ra_/status/1390396078353264641
(23)	@Tatane_School	May 7, 2021; 7.26 pm	https://twitter.com/Tatane_School/status/1390719690184478720
(24)	@DejanteDu44	May 9, 2021; 9.08 am	https://twitter.com/DejanteDu44/status/1391289000242130946
(25)	@fernandezm33	May 7, 2021; 10.47 am	https://twitter.com/fernandezm33/status/1390589071689453568
(26)	@daghedick	May 7, 2021; 10.20 pm	https://twitter.com/daghedick/status/1390763451962757129
(27)	@GaillardDenise	May 7, 2021; 9.46 pm	https://twitter.com/GaillardDenise/status/1390754999345504258
(28)	@MicheleGuillot1	May 4, 2021; 7.12 am	https://twitter.com/MicheleGuillot1/status/1389447922786443268
(29)	@Jobancin1942	May 8, 2021; 12:15 am	https://twitter.com/Jobancin1942/status/1390792547790950402
(30)	@Winiegarske	May 8, 2021; 9.05 am	https://twitter.com/Winiegarske/status/1390925935160004608
(31)	@Kai79974889	May 8, 2021; 7.58 am	https://twitter.com/Kai79974889/status/1390908823980888064
(32)	@soa_gti	May 7, 2021; 11.23 am	https://twitter.com/soa_gti/status/1390598151694864384

No. in paper	Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
(33)	@AoikawaUS	May 3, 2021; 7.15 pm	https://twitter.com/AoikawaUS/status/1389267491755597829
(34)	@AgustinMaset	May 6, 2021; 11.30 pm	https://twitter.com/AgustinMaset/status/1390418787124514820
(35)	@ManuelMH15	May 7, 2021; 5.27 pm	https://twitter.com/ManuelMH15/status/1390689799753932802
(36)	@Andfisch1899	May 8, 2021; 8.16 am	https://twitter.com/Andfisch1899/status/1390913465896865793
(37)	@ThorstenD6	May 8, 2021; 7.32 am	https://twitter.com/ThorstenD6/status/1390902377855782914
(38)	@PascalPgreco	May 11, 2021; 11.03 am	https://twitter.com/PascalPgreco/status/1392042733272014848
(39)	@jjaviercf1	May 8, 2021; 10.31 am	https://twitter.com/jjaviercf1/status/1390947527449526273
(40)	@IngeBunge	May 8, 2021; 10.00 am	https://twitter.com/IngeBunge/status/1390939614161129472
[Foot note 6]	@Deal2Happy	May 11, 2021; 3.29 pm	https://twitter.com/Deal2Happy/status/1391022340792852483

Pascale Erhart (Strasbourg)

"One does not simply bstell e Flammküeche ohne Ziwwle": Sociolinguistic Issues of Multilingual Computer Mediated Communication in Alsace

Abstract: This chapter discusses the sociolinguistic questions arousing about the subjective status of the Alemannic and Franconian dialectal speeches called *Alsatian* among society via a new phenomenon observed in Alsace: those dialects, which were traditionally limited to oral interaction, are more and more frequently written in computer mediated communication (CMC), despite their lack of standardization, and in combination with the other languages known by their speakers. To what extent, how and why *Alsatian* is becoming a written language is the main issue addressed in this chapter. After a presentation of some characteristics of the Alsatian sociolinguistic situation to explain the originality of those new multilingual written forms, the theoretical and methodological issues of their analysis will be discussed and will lead to a typology of 'Alsatian' writing strategies. A last section will question the part played by multilingual CMC in the combination of global computer mediated culture and regional identity through the analysis of multilingual Internet memes produced in Alsace.

Keywords: Alsatian, Computer Mediated Communication, Internet memes, language contact, regional identity

1 Introduction

Through its history, Alsace has always been a privileged field for the observation of multilingualism and languages in contact. Despite the imposition of standard languages in the education system (alternatively French and German) due to the emergence of national states from the 18th century on, on the one hand, and the effects of globalization which brings about a high diversity of languages as in many other regions in the world (Jørgensen et al. 2011), on the other hand, a fairly large part of the population in Alsace still uses German dialectal speeches called *Alsatian* (Huck and Erhart 2019). Until recently, those dialects were mostly limited to oral interaction, but in the two last decades, the Internet and *computer mediated communication* (from now on CMC) have radically

changed the way in which most Alsatians (as well as all other people who have internet access) communicate with each another (Paveau 2019): more and more speakers are now writing their electronic texts (SMS or e-mails, posts on social networks, etc.) in Alsatian increasingly frequently, despite its lack of standardization.

In this chapter, the sociolinguistic questions arousing via this new phenomenon about the subjective status of Alsatian among society are discussed. Since they have at least one standard language at their disposal in which they can read and write, why do Alsatians use another non-standardized language in their digital communication? How do they use it? What part does multilingual CMC play in the combination of global computer mediated culture and regional identity?

First, we will present some characteristics of the complex Alsatian sociolinguistic situation (section 2), followed by the discussion of the theoretical and methodological issues of the analysis of multilingual computer mediated communication in Alsace (section 3). In section 4, we will develop a typology of *Alsatian* writing strategies drawing on the corpora and first results of exploratory case studies we've been leading until now (Erhart 2018; 2020; 2022 for examples taken from the regional media, Erhart and Kahn 2022 for examples taken from the economic sphere). In section 5, we will focus on the analysis of multilingual Internet memes on a cultural basis, which will lead us to ask ourselves to what extent such multilingual CMC can be understood as "acts of identity" (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985, 14–15) and to what extent it influences the status or the perception of *Alsatian* as a language of its own.

2 Sociolinguistic context

The observation of language practices reveals that *Alsatian* is among the most perennial so-called *regional* languages (fr. *langues régionales*) in France, despite the very sharp decline in their practice: In 2001, INSEE declared "Alsatian, the second regional language of France" with about 500,000 speakers (Duée 2002, 1), while in January 2020, another survey revealed that only 5 % of the respondents declared *Alsatian* as their main language, while 25 % declared themselves *bilingual* (Alsatian-French) (IFOP 2020). 70 % declared French as their only language. Intergen-

erational transmission seems almost at a standstill: in the same survey, 82 % of those under 35 said they speak *only French*. Despite this undeniable decline in their practice, Alsatian dialectal speeches still seem to be invested with symbolic functions which have led to new uses of *Alsatian*, no longer oral, but written, on the Internet and social networks (Erhart 2020).

2.1 *Traditional* geolinguistic features

The collective term *Alsatian* began to be used at the end of the 19th century, at a time when Alsace was part of the German Empire, as a means of differentiation (Irvine and Gal 2000) from other German speaking

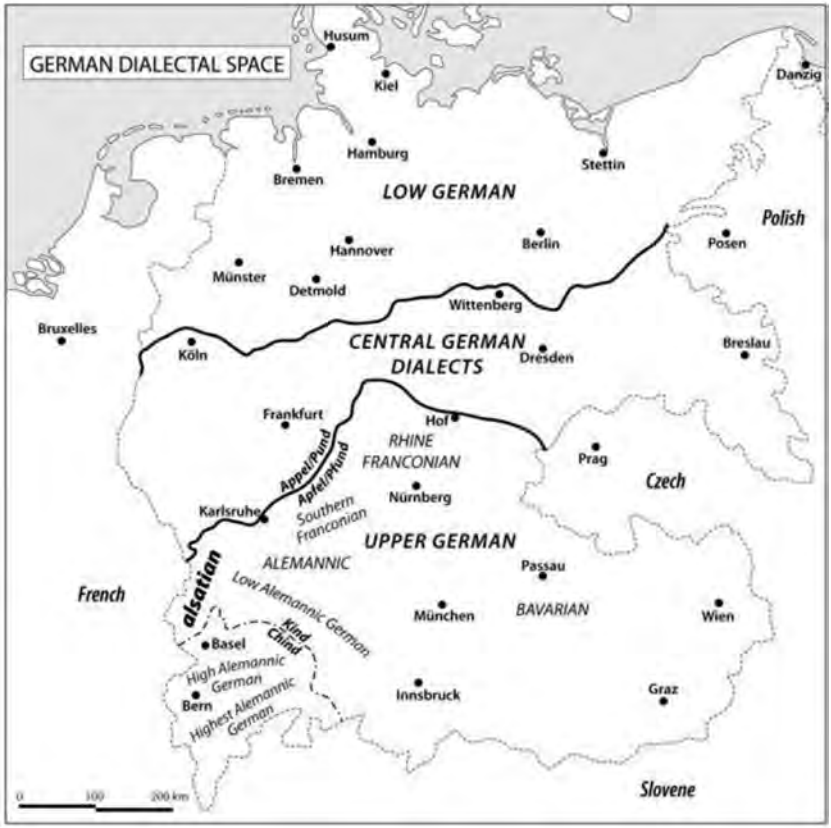

Fig. 1: German dialectal space (© Université de Strasbourg)

areas and has been used since then by lay people as well as politicians and scientists to name the Alemannic and Franconian dialects that were imported by Germanic tribes around the 5th century. Geographically, the Alsatian dialect area is located in the southwest of the German dialect area (Fig. 1).

The Alsatian dialect area is structured by phonetic elements stemming from the linguistic history of the German dialect area, and more specifically by the effects of the second Germanic consonant shift (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Effects of the Germanic Consonant Shift in Alsace (© Université de Strasbourg)

The Rhenish Franconian dialects, that are part of Central German, are spoken in the north-western part of the area (*Alsace bossue*) and can be distinguished from the Alemannic dialects, that belong to Upper German and are predominant in the rest of the area through the isophone *p/pf* (*Pund* [pʰʊnd̥] /*Pfund* [pfʊnd̥], 'pound'), while in the southernmost part, the k-/[x]- isophone (at the beginning of a word, as in *Kind* [kʰInd̥]/ *Ching* [xIŋ], 'child') discriminates between Low Alemannic German and High Alemannic German (Huck, to appear). Inside of these three main areas, many other isophones and isoglosses lead to a great amount of diatopic variations. Those linguistic categorizations are not well known by speakers, who overcome this diatopic variation with the hyperonym *Alsatian*.

2.2 Language name and status

Although these dialects can be clearly assigned to the German dialects from a linguistic point of view, they are almost never referred to as *German* or *German dialects* by speakers, but as *Alsatian* (als. *Elsassisch*, fr. *alsacien*), sometimes still as *Elsasserditsch*, i.e. *Alsatian German*, or as *the dialect* (fr. *le dialecte*) (Huck and Erhart 2019, 156).

At regional and national level, however, the Alsatian dialects are considered as dialects of German, which is seen as the standard and written language of the Alsatian dialects and has therefore been taught as a *regional language* in schools since 1982 (Huck and Erhart 2019, 168). Whereas "it was not too difficult to 'identify' such 'entities' as 'Alsatian' as opposed to 'French', it was […] impossible […] to be agreement as to whether a bilingual education policy meant teaching both 'French' and 'Alsatian', or whether it must mean teaching 'French' and 'German', since 'Alsatian' was not identified as 'a language'" (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985, 3). This may explain why the dialects are never referred to with the term *Alsatian* in the official school regulation texts that have been published since then. At the international level, only the Alemannic dialects spoken in Alsace belong to the ISO 639-3 standard Swiss German [gsw]. This excludes the Franconian varieties that are spoken in the North West.

2.3 New written uses of *Alsatian*

This lack of institutionalization can explain the fact that those dialectal speeches have never been standardized, what however does not mean that no written use is made of them. Until before the Second World War, there was no real need for standardization of the dialect due to the script-oriented tradition of reading and writing the German standard language, so that its written use remained fairly low among most dialect speakers (Bernhard et al. 2021, 289). However, dialectal features in the written German could be observed as early as the 17th century in the writing practices of "less experienced Alsatian writers" (Werner 2020, 93).

From the 1990s onwards, the presence of endogenous written German in Alsace became marginal. Nowadays, most dialect speakers no longer understand Standard German as a standard form of their mother tongue, but as a foreign language that is or must be learned in school. With a few exceptions, the Alsatians spontaneously use French as their written language. In fact, the majority of the dialect-speaking Alsatians surveyed do not trust themselves to write German, despite all the efforts made in the educational area: in primary elementary education standard German is taught as early as the third year of kindergarten (5 year-old children) for up to 3 hours a week and was used (and still is) as a teaching language in bilingual curricula (French/German) in elementary schools, in which 15 % of the pupils are enrolled voluntarily (12 hours in French, 12 hours in German).

Until the end of the 20th century, the Alsatian dialects were mainly written by poets, playwrights and writers, i.e. for a literary purpose, so that the corpus of written Alsatian is limited. In addition to the literary works, there are also some Alsatian dictionaries and encyclopaedias (also online), newspaper columns in Alsatian in *Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace* and *L'Alsace*, and also some online texts, especially on Wikipedia in Alemannic. The written use of the dialect in terms of graphics is also free of norms. There are some suggestions for formal orthographic rules for the written form, such as the Orthal method (Zeidler and Crévenat-Werner 2008), which tries to integrate all the different variants of Alsatian, but no common, standardized written form has been able to prevail up to now. Many writers rely on the graphics of German, whose graphic choices seem to be closest to them, but are not necessarily

familiar to all today's readers. Most of them (for example Marie Hart or Germain Muller) especially adapt the vowels to their dialect so that one can recognize the different varieties when reading. On the readers' side, the greatest part of dialect speakers find it difficult to read or write Alsatian because – in contrast to French and standard German – they did not learn it in school, which is considered the place of written language acquisition.

To deal with this great amount of variations among written forms of Alsatian, computational linguistics and natural language processing research has begun within the Restaure project,[1] "whose goal was to develop resources and tools for three regional languages of France" (Bernhard et al. 2021, 286): Alsatian, Occitan and Picard. Several tools were developed to assist digital written communication in Alsatian, such as the Orthaliseur,[2] which offers corrections in accordance with the Orthal-method. Researchers of this project also contributed to the development of predictive keyboards for Alsatian and Occitan (AnySoftKeyboard extensions for Gascon, Lengadocian and Alsatian) and Microsoft Swiftkey, which are conceived to make the use of digital social networks and messaging applications in Alsatian easier. The news about the creation of this predictive keyboard was successfully disseminated in the media and welcomed very positively.[3] This shows that CMC might have an impact on the use of the written dialect. In our research, we formulate the hypothesis that dialect speakers, when they become writers, resort in the same fluid and unpredictable way to the different resources that make up their multilingual repertoire and make more or less conscious graphic choices referring to the symbolic functions and meanings of *Alsatian* when they are led to write it as when they speak (Bothorel-Witz 2007; Erhart 2020).

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[1] Ressources informatisées et Traitement Automatique pour les langues régionales, funded by the project-based funding agency for research in France ANR (2015–2018)

[2] Demonstration interface accessible via the following link: http://orthaliseur.alwaysdata.net/ (15/2/2022).

[3] Many articles were published in the national press, for example in *Le Figaro* and *Le Parisien*.

3 Theoretical and methodological issues

Digital technology has not only led to the emergence of new forms of written communication that did not fit into any established tradition (Dürscheid 2020), but it has also increased its modes of appropriation (Candea and Véron 2019, 203). From now on, poets, playwrights and writers – who become increasingly rare – are no longer the only ones to write in Alsatian: both private users and institutional structures such as the public radio and television stations *France Bleu Elsass* and *France 3 Alsace* have been starting to write in Alsatian, e.g. in digital text messages or on social networks (Erhart 2018; 2020). CMC brought about "secondary orality" (Ong 2012, 133–34), a kind of intermediate stage between speaking and writing, without a clear separation between them, and, in our case, without a clear separation between Alsatian and the other languages in the speakers' repertoire. Obviously, since CMC mostly takes the form of "dialogues" and is characterized by features such as "free turn-taking", "familiarity of the partners", "free development of a theme" and "spontaneity", we are dealing here with what Koch and Oesterreicher (2012, 447) call "language of immediacy" to characterize the *spoken* pole of their conceptual continuum, but the effects of language contact also need to be taken into account for the study of those new written forms of *Alsatian*. In addition to that, CMC has visual characteristics going far beyond alphabetical writing, which reflect the meaning of the message or bring an additional meaning to it (cf. section 4). The iconic communication through *smileys* or *emoticons* would probably deserve and need a study apart, but we cannot ignore their presence in our corpora, so that we will try to take them as much as possible into account in our analysis.

The lack of available data, which is due to the very heterogeneous and complex sociolinguistic situation in Alsace (cf. section 2), makes it difficult to circumscribe the phenomenon of spontaneous Alsatian writing and to analyse the corresponding digital productions. The same difficulties arise in other German dialect speaking areas such as Switzerland or South Tirol in Italy, where CMC in dialects is more and more common and has become a research object (Dürscheid 2020; Ueberwasser 2017; Frey, Glaznieks and Stemle 2015). The Alsatian case differs, however, since German does not enjoy the same level of institutionalization as in

those areas where it is, at least partly, an official language, which is not the case of Alsatian in France (cf. section 2).

Another issue would be the fact that most of the CMC we have observed until now is multilingual, and only a part of it can be qualified as *Alsatian*. Actually, Alsatian is mainly used in short sentences or comments of a few words, as in greetings or birthday wishes, and more generally for the means of secondary orality, i.e. the writing of daily oral communication (rites of conversation, daily themes: weather, meals, etc.) which precisely characterizes the current use of Alsatian oral dialects. Longer posts are generally multilingual, as in Figure 3, which begins in French and switches in Alsatian after *Pari gagné*. The Alsatian part of this post can be identified through the use of diacritic signs which do not appear in French, nor in German (*mìt, ùnd*). It has to be noticed that those parts in Alsatian are not translated, which means the authors of this post are betting that the readers understand/can read both French and Alsatian.

Fig. 3: Screenshot of France 3 Alsace's *Facebook* page[4]

However, it is quite interesting to observe that the latter seem to develop and spread more and more, despite the absence of language planning (Haugen 1966) concerning Alsatian. Even in the economic sphere, private companies, especially restaurants (Fig. 5), seem to follow this trend and frequently use written Alsatian in their digital communication (Erhart and Kahn 2022). Since the language skills of standard German in Alsace are declining more and more, the written forms of the dia-

[4] 'Suss Farm in Mattstall embarks on farm produce. Butter with wild garlic, walnuts and figs … A milk producer for a long time, the Suss family has embarked on the production of farm products. A winning bet, *the family makes business with restaurants of the region and will soon open its own little store*' (our translation, Alsatian part in italics). *Facebook*, March 23, 2021. https://fb.watch/6o8eu4vTVn/ (15/2/2022)

lect that are encountered on social media in this area are mostly unique and peculiar, as can be seen on the following screenshot of a *Facebook* publication of a local distillery (Fig. 4) announcing that *De waldmeister*[5] *wachs'ds* (instead of ger. *Der Waldmeister wächst* 'woodruff is growing').

Fig. 4: Screenshot of Distillerie Hepp's *Facebook* page[6]

If the spelling of the masculine definite article *de* is very common in Alsatian texts, the spelling of the conjugated verb *wachs'ds* is really surprising by the addition of an apostrophe before the person-number mark, on the one hand, and by the choice of the spelling <ds> instead of <t> for the person-number mark of the verb, on the other hand. It may be explained by the possible confusion between the plosive consonants [t] and [d] which are not distinguished in the Alsatian dialects (cf. infra), but it could also indicate a desire to put some distance between *Alsatian* and Standard German. Another explanation would be the lack of knowledge of the latter. This short example shows the originality of the Alsatian situation in comparison to other German dialects and the need to develop a specific grid for the analysis of the observed forms (section 4).

4 What leads to *Alsatian* written forms in CMC?

In this section, we will describe and analyse some Alsatian written forms used in CMC and try to identify and understand the strategies that led to their emergence. To do so, we will use the criteria formulated by LePage

[5] Ger. *Waldmeister* (literally 'Master of the woods') stands for *asperula odorata,* which is used to produce liqueurs that are particularly appreciated in Alsace.

[6] *Facebook,* March 23, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/DistillerieHepp (15/2/2022).

and Tabouret-Keller (1985, 5–12) to characterize such linguistically heterogeneous situations as the Alsatian one. According to them, *predictability*, *acceptability* and the *creativity of speakers* are criteria that can distinguish a language from others not only on a typological level but also on a social and ethnic one. In our case, we will try to show that this hypothesis also applies to written acts in *Alsatian* and to what extent those reveal a social and ethnic solidarity among the speaker/writers of this language variety. Thus, our analysis is based on the hypothesis that there is such a language called *Alsatian* in the users' linguistic repertoire, which has to be considered as a separate system from the two standard languages with which it is in contact, Standard German and French.

Actually, these criteria fall under what Moreau calls a "functioning norm" (*norme de fonctionnement*), an implicit and descriptive norm which corresponds to "the linguistic habits shared by the members of a community or a subgroup of it" (1997, 219), from which a deviation would be immediately noticed (cf. Huck and Erhart 2020). Building on those three criteria, we will try to verify the existence of such a language as a *common Alsatian*, in spite of the huge variety of written forms and the lack of a prescriptive norm. Until recently, this functioning norm has only been described by linguists for the oral use of the Alsatian language (Huck, to appear) and the challenge here will be to see to what extent digital productions contribute to the elaboration of a functioning written norm of Alsatian.

4.1 Predictability

Predictability being "a condition to successful communication" (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985, 5), the first issue that we are confronted with is the lack of predictability of the written forms of Alsatian: Although the oral use of Alsatian involves a degree of unpredictability due to effects of language contact, mainly with French (Koehler 2020), the main features shared by these dialects are well known by their users (Huck, to appear) and allow a certain predictability of the forms produced orally. But when it comes to writing Alsatian, the CMC user has to take a chance on the potential reader "sharing his linguistic rules and values" (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985, 5), since there is no standard use of the written language known to users. Despite the difficulties in building relevant and

representative corpora discussed before (section 3), we can try to identify "discrete and identifiable units in the underlying system, a system which all speakers of the language share" (ib., 8), in order to determine the specific features of digital written Alsatian. To do that, we can draw on the features that are shared by nearly all Alsatian dialect speech-forms and identified in available language descriptions (Huck, to appear) to describe the many different forms they can take when they are written. In other words, we can try to see to what extent the functioning norm of Alsatian in oral communication can be transposed to written communication. A phrase as simple as *big kiss*, which is, on the pragmatic level, a loan transposition of the French *gros bisou* that closes many emails, instant messages or posts on social networks (Fig. 5), can then exist in many various forms in written Alsatian: *dicker Schmutz*[7], *dìcker Schmùtz* (Orthal), *decker schmutz*, *dicker schmoutz*, *decker schmoutz*, *deger schmoutz*, *dieger schmoutz,* etc.

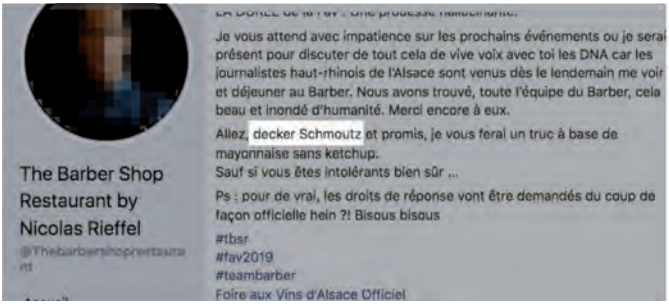

Fig. 5: Post on *The Barber Shop Restaurant*'s *Facebook* page[8]

The main divergences with Standard German occur on the phonological level, and especially the vowel phenomena, which transcend the ages (Werner 2020, 101). For example, the phonographic marking of

[7] This writing is the closest to German *dick* ('big'), but has a different meaning ('kiss' in Alsatian, 'dirt' in German). The use of capital letters on nouns is a feature of the German graphic system that often occurs in written Alsatian.

[8] *Facebook*, August 11, 2019. https://www.facebook.com/Thebarbershop restaurant (15/2/2022).

the opening of the [ɪ], which is specific to Alsatian, can be <e>, <ì>/[9] or even in <ie>[10], while the very open and long [ʊ] can be transcribed by <u>, <ù> or <ou>[11] (Fig. 5). The phonographic marking of diphthongs, which do not exist in French, nor in German, can in particular become a real challenge for writers. The phonographic marking of the consonants, especially the plosives [p] - [b] (*Pomp/Bomb* 'bomb'), [t] - [d] (*Tisch/Disch* 'table', cf. Fig. 4) and [k] -[g] (*dick/dig* 'big', cf. Fig. 5), can also be problematic because the Alsatian dialects do not distinguish them. These two examples show that the lack of predictability of written Alsatian forms is compensated by a set of discriminating elements that allow distinguishing the forms of Alsatian quite clearly from both French and German.

4.2 Acceptability and norm elaboration

In this section, we discuss the existence of criteria which would allow to consider written forms of Alsatian as acceptable or not, in a perspective near to the one of perceptual dialectology or folk linguistics (Niedzielski and Preston 2010). As a non-standardized language, Alsatian is even more unpredictable and, in contrary to its oral occurrences, it is sometimes very difficult to distinguish its written forms from Standard German or French, which makes it even more difficult to determine which form can be categorized as Alsatian or not.

Since there is no established norm of writing Alsatian and since no one learnt to read or write it at school, its degree of acceptability may be as high as its degree of variability. The only valid criterion would then be that of the readability and understanding of the produced forms by other users, which is quite complicated to establish: how can we be sure that everything that is written is understood, or even read, by other users?

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[9] Diacritical signs have been added to many of the graphic regulations proposed so far, especially Orthal, to transcribe all the sounds of Alsatian that do not occur in French or German, such as [å], [ɪ] or [ʊ], cf. http://www.orthal.fr/ORTHAL_2016.pdf (15/2/2022).

[10] In this case, <ie> cannot indicate a diphthong, so that adding the <-e> after the <i> can only be a graphic strategy to indicate the inflection of the vowel.

[11] In this case, <ou> corresponds to the French graphem applied to the Alsatian phonem [ʊ].

The presence of reactions (*likes* or emoticons) or comments can only give some hints about that and remain biased by many contextual factors. Only explicitly formulated metalinguistic comments on some specific forms can allow us to get an idea of their degree of acceptability, but their occurrences in our corpora are very random and cannot be considered as representative. In absence of any established spelling rules, there must be some users who would not agree with the written forms they are confronted with but who refrain from criticizing, as they do not feel legitimate to do so. Bearing these limitations in mind, we will nevertheless search for evidence of these implicit norms in our data.

The following example is a post on the "fun Facebook page for the Alsatians of the whole world"[12] (Fig. 6) which explicitly asks its followers to "say IN ALSATIAN" which object is located next to them to their right (in their home or wherever they are) while reading this post, the fun challenge surely being to guess where the users are.

Fig. 6: Post on the *Alsace Facebook* page[13]

The wording of the instructions alone reveals the confusion between *orality* and *literacy* to which CMC has led: to respond to this instruction, users won't actually have to *speak* but to *write* on their phone or computer. At another level of analysis, the addition of a smiley at the end of the instruction seems to indicate that writing in Alsatian is just for fun (cf. section 5). Whatever the purpose of this publication, the fact that about 200 people commented it with various answers in *Alsatian* indicates that the latter is indeed considered by them a language that can be written.

[12] "La page Facebook fun et divertissante pour les Alsaciens et Alsaciennes du monde entier", https://www.facebook.com/alsacien (15/2/2022).

[13] *Facebook*, April 20, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/alsacien/posts/10158386427463435 (15/2/2022).

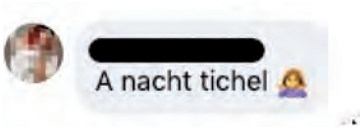

Fig. 7: Comment on the previous post (Fig. 6)[14]

Beyond the multiplicity of the observed written forms of the mentioned objects' names (e.g. *A nacht tichel*, *S'nocht dechel* and *A nocht Déchel* for 'night table', Fig. 7), some interesting attitudes can be observed among the reactions to this post. One user seems to be unsecure about her production and therefore also gives the French translation in parenthesis in her comment: "*A café tasala und à hacha bara (tasse à café et cendrier)*" ('a coffee cup and an ashtray') (Fig. 8). The form *hacha bara* is very far away from the German form *Aschenbecher* and can be seen as a *tinkered* form (*bricolage*) using the means of French graphemes (<r> for <x>, for example) that reveals some kind of linguistic distress (Lüdi 1994).

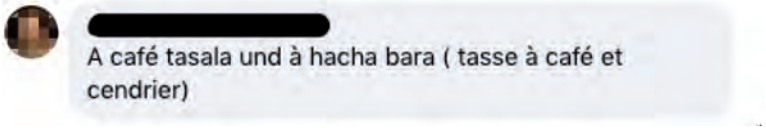

Fig. 8: Comment on the previous post (Fig. 6)[15]

Other users saw this post as an opportunity of learning new words, as in the following interaction between three users (Fig. 9): the first one asks for the Alsatian word for a video game controller ("Comment on dit manette en Alsacien?"), the second one suggests using the French word *manette* (probably meaning that there is no word in Alsatian for that) while the third makes the proposition *greff* which exists in Alsatian (ger. *Griff*) with the larger meaning of 'handle'. The first user reacts to this last comment with an astonished smiley, which could mean he was not actually expecting getting an appropriate answer.

[14] *Facebook*, April 20, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/alsacien/posts/10158386427463435 (15/2/2022).

[15] *Facebook*, April 20, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/alsacien/posts/10158386427463435 (15/2/2022).

Fig. 9: Comment on the previous post (Fig. 6)[16]

Another type of interaction observed is the peer-to-peer evaluation and correction among users (who are not supposed to know each other).

Fig. 10: Comment on the previous post (Fig. 6)[17]

[16] *Facebook*, April 20, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/alsacien/posts/10158386427463435 (15/2/2022).

[17] *Facebook*, April 20, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/alsacien/posts/10158386427463435 (15/2/2022).

In Fig. 10, an unsecure user answers "Une chéézˀ (Sais pas le dire en alsacien)", *chéézˀ* being the phonographic marking of the French *chaise* pronounced with an Alsatian accent (vowel lengthening), and creates a kind of emulation among other users who make several suggestions: a first user proposes "A Setz" which is more general ('a seat') and a second one "e Stüehl", which reflects a possible dialectal pronunciation (graphematic display of the diphtong [yə]) of the German *Stuhl* and gets nine like-reactions from other users. A third one suggests the form "chdehl" which is immediately *corrected* by the second one with a comment saying (in French!) he would rather write it otherwise: "Stiehl plutôt". This indicates that for this second user, the graphem <ch> for the hissing phonem [ʃ], which is used in French writing, is not acceptable for written Alsatian. In the further comment, a fourth user proposes "a Stuehl" which is close to the one proposed by the second user ("Stüehl") and also gets one like reaction. Those two forms which are close to written German but differ in the phonographematic marking of the vowel thus seem to be the most acceptable. Of course, we cannot draw any conclusion from this only example but it shows that negotiations about what is acceptable or not may emerge in such publications, which thus can be seen as a laboratory for the development of a bottom-up norm of written Alsatian.

4.3 The creativity of users

"The absence of standard spelling systems leads to interpersonal variation, in which each writer chooses her/his own spelling convention" (Bernhard et al. 2021, 286). This freedom can be seen by CMC users as a challenge, or even as an obstacle, but also as an open space for their creativity. Since there are no rules for written Alsatian, users are able and free to make up their own rules (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985, 11) and can exploit all of the possibilities of their linguistic repertoire, including Alsatian.

This is the case in the following examples, which still refer to comments made in the context of the previously commented post (Fig. 6). To designate the object on his right, a user answers "À éclairèl (oder à crèmnüdel in Süfflom)" (Fig. 11): he first uses the integrated French loan-

word[18] to which has been added the diminutive suffix *-el,* a traditional Alsatian feature, which gives it a familiar and affective dimension.

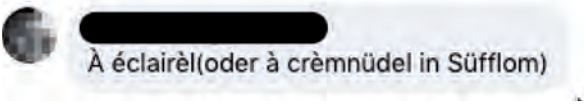

Fig. 11: Comment on the previous post (Fig. 6)[19]

Between parentheses he adds the metaphorical compound word *crèmnüdel* (literally 'creamnoodle') coined in his village,[20] which allows him to create a form of collusion with other speakers who will understand his pun, and at the same time to assert his local roots. However, the use of French diacritic signs shows that he is not familiar with the various Alsatian spelling regulations proposed so far, so he falls back on the graphic signs and diacritical marks he uses most, i.e. mostly in French (<é>, <è>) but also in German (<ü>), and then adapts it to his pronunciation of Alsatian. Thus, only individuals with a similar repertoire will be able to decode such productions. Another user answers "A muldi-brise" which is an unusual writing for the French word *multiprise* ('multiple socket') (Fig. 12).

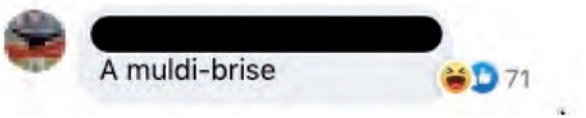

Fig. 12: Comment on the previous post (Fig. 6)[21]

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[18] An *éclair* is an elongated french choux pastry traditionally filled with chocolate or vanilla custard and glazed on top.

[19] *Facebook*, April 20, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/alsacien/posts/10158386427463435 (15/2/2022).

[20] *Süfflom* is the Alsatian oral form of the toponym *Soufflenheim*.

[21] *Facebook*, April 20, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/alsacien/posts/10158386427463435 (15/2/2022).

By using <d> and <b> instead of <t> and <p>, this user reminds the others of the special way in which Alsatian dialect speakers pronounce those consonants in French and is characteristic of their accent (Steiblé 2014). In this case, the creativity relies on the mixing of two codes, French and Alsatian, which seems to be very appreciated by other users who share the same codes: this comment got 71 like reactions, among which 51 smileys conveying hearty laughter, and the administrator of the *Facebook* page found it so funny that he/she re-posted it the following day to get other reactions by asking "vous aussi vous avez des *muldibrise* chez vous?" ('do you also have *muldibrise* at home?'). The comic effect (no doubt intended by its initiator) of this playing with the effects of language contact raises questions about the cultural functions of this multilingual communication (cf. section 5).

This kind of digital multilingual productions can allow occasional speakers of Alsatian, especially among the youngest, to reappropriate a language of which they had little use and thus give it a new functionality. From this perspective, multilingual CMC can ben seen as a means of agency, in the sense of speakers becoming agents of their language evolution, or even of empowerment for the community of Alsatian speakers who can compensate their lack of "interactions with societal institutions" (Cummins 1987, 29), which happen only in standard languages.

5 Alsatian as an identity marker in a global world?

In this last section, we still follow LePage and Tabouret-Keller who assume, in their analysis of "the nature of the relationship of ethnicity to language" (1985, 15) that "[w]ith every speech act all individuals perform, to a greater or less extent, an 'act of identity', revealing through their personal use of language their sense of social and ethnic solidarity or difference" (1985, back cover). In the absence of a more detailed and comprehensive study, we can only put forward hypotheses about why the *Alsatian CMC* users prefer to express themselves in a non-standardized written form than in standard languages. This phenomenon can probably be related to special functions of Alsatian that already appeared in the previously discussed examples: the feeling of belonging to a group, the emotional dimension, as well as the humour that is traditionally used in

dialect theatre and also in radio and television broadcasts (Erhart 2018) can now also be individually expressed or designed by using digital means, even by people who do not speak a dialect but are aware of those special functions.

As we have seen previously, forms in Alsatian are mostly short and completed by a text in French or possibly in another standard language – long and flowing texts in Alsatian are very rare in CMC. It is therefore interesting to consider the cultural and even identity-related added value of the presence of Alsatian forms in this type of multilingual communication. Indeed, the creation of a written norm for a language can not only be considered as a technical, graphical gesture (Haugen 1966) but must be understood as a cultural and social process. In order to focus our analysis of computer mediated written Alsatian on its cultural dimension, we would like to study a particular aspect of this phenomenon. For a few years now, there has been an increasing number of entertainment or humorous pages dedicated to Alsace on social networks,[22] and especially on *Facebook*, on which multilingual memes, containing written Alsatian parts, started to spread. From there, users on text message applications such as *WhatsApp* often forward them to their contacts.

"The term 'meme' was coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976 to describe small units of culture that spread from person to person by copying or imitation" (Shifman 2014, 2)[23]. Memes can be defined as "(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance; (b) that were created with awareness of each other; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users" (ib., 7–8). The primary functions of these "stock characters", which are most often fictional, are diverted and remixed to "represent stereotypical behaviors" (ib., 112). Themes of such memes can be very various: they often comment the latest news but can also draw on specific identity markers.

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[22] Such as *Humour en Alsace*, *Made in Alsace* (sic), *Elsassischi memes*, *Meme uff Elsassisch*, etc.

[23] The word *meme* itself "derives from the Greek mimema, signifying 'something which is imitated', which Dawkins shortened to rhyme with 'gene'" (Shifman 2014, 10).

In the following short case study, we will focus on two *Alsatian memes*, which are mixing worldwide famous pop culture stock characters with a locally well known Alsatian culinary tradition, the *Flammküeche*.[24] It has become the subject of many posts and memes on the Internet, one aspect of the globalization of culture.

For the author of the following meme (Fig. 13), the onion topping is an essential feature of the *Flammküeche* that cannot be disrespected without facing consequences.

Fig. 13: Alsatian Boromir-meme[25]

This is why he remixes the well known[26] quote from the 2001 fantasy epic film *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, 'One Does Not Simply Walk Into Mordor', which has become a catchphrase, of which

[24] Generally pronounced [ˈflåmkyəxeə] or [ˈflåmkø:ʃə], *Flammkueche* (ger. *Flammkuchen*) is one of the most traditional dishes in Alsace, made of a thin flattened bread dough base, traditionally topped with white cheese, onions and bacon, and baked on a clean part of the oven between the glowing. If we allow ourselves an exaggeration, we could say that this is the Alsatian version of pizza, which is served in almost every Alsatian traditional restaurant.

[25] Screenshot of the *Facebook* page *Elsässischi Memes*, July 18, 2019 https://www.facebook.com/Els%C3%A4ssischi-Memes-152515232153974 (15/2/2022).

[26] At least from younger users, which suggests that it is also a generational tendency.

variants are often used in image macros featuring the character Boromir, who originally says the line in the film.[27] In this meme, the second part of the catchphrase is replaced by a sentence in Alsatian meaning 'order a Flammküeche without onions'. The Boromir-meme was probably chosen for the very serious facial expression of its character and to give the violation of the onion tradition a very dramatic dimension. This is of course quite exaggerated but it shows a very deep attachment to the traditional *Flammküeche* of the author, who seems at the same time to be fully aware of the codes of modernity and of the globalization of communication. The discrepancy between the seriousness suggested by the image and the triviality of the topic it deals with also contributes to a humorous effect probably intended by the author.

What is also really interesting about this meme is its multilingual aspect: it shows a dynamic use of a multilingual and multicultural repertoire of which both global English and local Alsatian are part. The used graphic signs reflect traditional oral marks of Alsatian dialects: contraction of the prefix *be-* and apocope of *-en* in *bstell* (Standard ger. *bestellen*), phonographic marking of the vowels (diphthong [yə] transcribed by <üe>). The form *Ziwwle* contains most of the dialectal marks that allow distinguishing the Alsatian word from the Standard German *Zwiebeln* 'onions': the double writing (<-ww->) of the consonant [v] indicates that the previous [I] is short, contrary to the long [i:] of Standard German, and at the same time marks the intervocalic fricativation of [b] that is characteristic of the low Alemannic dialects of Alsace (Breuninger 2016).

Another example of remixing modern pop culture and Alsatian tradition is the following remixing of the "Drake alternative meme" (Fig. 14), built on a screenshot of the YouTube video "Hotline Bling" by the Canadian singer Drake.

[27] In the scene, the Council of Elrond reveals that an evil ring must be destroyed by being thrown into the fires of Mount Doom, a volcano deep in the territory of Mordor. Boromir promptly points out the difficultly of the task by saying, "One does not simply walk into Mordor". Source: https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/one-does-not-simply-walk-into-mordor (15/2/2022).

Fig. 14: Alsatian Drake alternative meme[28]

While the facial disapproving and approving expressions of the character in the two pictures can be understood even by people who do not know Drake, the written message is more complicated to decipher. In the form *Fla-meun-cuche*, the use of the French graphems <eu>, <c> and <u>, which correspond to the sounds [ø], [k] and [y], as well as the decomposition of the word in three syllables through hyphens, suggest that the form corresponds to the erroneous pronunciation by non-dialect-speaking French speakers, who do not know that the correct spelling should be *flamm-küe-che* with an emphasis on the first syllable in the Alsatian pronunciation. The disapproving character in the image also suggests that this form is not correct. Why the author of this meme does not use hyphens in the form *Flammküeche*, approved by the character in the image, remains a mystery: only the use of <k> and <üe> hints to the fact that this is an Alsatian form but does not really help a non-native speaker for the pronunciation. The graphem <a> does not allow

[28] Screenshot of the *Facebook* page *Elsässischi Memes*, July 18, 2019. https://www.facebook.com/Els%C3%A4ssischi-Memes-152515232153974 (15/2/2022).

distinguishing the sound [å], which is specific to the Alsatian dialectal speeches, from the French or the German pronunciation, and which is transcribed with an <à> by most of the Alsatian writers. The fact that the author of this meme does not use it can be explained by the fact that he does not know this writing habit or that he does not approve it, finding it unnecessary. In any case, this meme mocks as well as it denounces the way non-native speakers mess with the only acceptable pronunciation for native speakers (cf. section 4.2.). However, the message will only be understood by those who share the same speaking and writing codes, so that this meme seems to come from a desire to establish a connivance between the members of the group sharing the same linguistic features and to stand out by asserting its own specificities.

The shift from the original meaning and function of these macros to the meaning they obtain through their imitation and remixing implies that their authors take a more or less critical and humoristic distance with the commented topic, so that we can ask ourselves to what extent the Alsatian version of such memes can be seen as acts of projection of the social mind-sets that prevail in Alsace about those topics. By remixing markers of global and local languages and cultures, multilingual memes may say something about their authors' perception of the dynamics of language and culture contacts in the global world. Since those memes are spread worldwide and occur in many languages that are generally known and used by Alsatian speakers (French, German, English), it is interesting to ask ourselves why and for what purpose those memes are also developed in Alsatian. The two examples we discussed show that the use of written Alsatian functions as a marker of belonging to a specific culture. The combination of Alsatian with standard languages can be interpreted as means of standing out in a global world were standard languages tend to erase cultural differences.

6 Conclusion

The analysis we developed and discussed in this chapter allowed us to show that there were probably forms that could be qualified as *Alsatian* used by regional users of CMC, who create, share and sometimes negotiate specific forms, so that Internet social networks like *Facebook* become

open spaces for the elaboration of a written autonomous Alsatian language. The central question remains that of the scope of the phenomenon, which is difficult to assess in the absence of precise measures. The perception of this phenomenon also needs to be investigated, to understand if it remains a marginal playful activity of some isolated users or if it is strong enough to increase the distinction between Alsatian and the standard languages with which it coexists: if the digital uses of Alsatian were to remain anecdotal, their impact on distribution and transmission will remain weak, if not zero. On the other hand, if these uses were to become generalized, especially among the youngest speakers/writers, they could bring about a change in the sociolinguistic representations of Alsatian, and digital resources and tools could become a considerable leverage in stopping or even reversing its decline. However, this could only happen if the process was supported by a strong political will to assert Alsatian as a language and no longer only as a dialect confined to orality. This phenomenon, although still confidential compared to the majoritarian linguistic uses of CMC, could also be interpreted as a subversive, anti-establishment act, seeking to challenge the domination of standard languages on the web, even that of English.

Definitely, the choice to write in Alsatian on social media as well as the strategies which lead to very diverse written productions, stem from a form of identity affirmation, since they "are felt to have social as well as semantic meaning in terms of the way in which each individual wishes to project his/her own universe, and to invite others to share it" (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985, 247). Presumably, this is one way for users of CMC to assert their participation in the global world without giving up their local identity (Lee 2016, 123).

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Part II:
Current Issues in
Foreign Language Education

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Learning Romance Languages with Influencers: Mission (im)possible?

Abstract: Influencers and their videos play a central role in young people's media consumption. These videos are watched for both entertainment and information purposes. In this paper, we will explore the question of whether influencer videos are suitable for second language learning, more specifically French, Italian, and Spanish, in schools, and which competencies and literacies are required for language learning with influencer videos. Empirical findings will not be discussed, but a framework for further scientific endeavors and empirical surveys will be established. The aim of the paper is to show the potential of influencer videos for the language learning process despite linguistic hurdles.

Keywords: Romance Languages, YouTube, influencers, Social Media, Media Literacy

1 Introduction

In the 21st century, social media apps have not only become important places of entertainment but also essential sources of information for people of all ages (cf. mpfs 2021, 40). Learning no longer only takes place in formal learning settings but ubiquitously. The boundaries between informal and formal learning settings are becoming increasingly blurred (cf. Uhl 2019).

Social media come with their own (set of) rules and develop continuously. Users of social media apps are not only consumers but also producers, so-called prosumers. The traditional triad of author, reader, and publisher, which could still be discerned in earlier times, has lost its significance in this particular context. In addition to traditional media providers, such as newspapers or broadcasters, a new important group of producers can be found on different social media platforms: individuals who have a high number of followers who these individuals provide with information. Through their reach and impact, they have become so-called influencers (cf. Aran-Ramspott et al. 2018).

For language learners, these influencers provide new opportunities to engage with authentic materials (cf. Buendgens-Kosten 2013). *YouTube* videos and *Instagram* reels, *Tik-Tok* videos and tweets are current, authentic artefacts that meet the demands of incidental consumption as they are usually very short (cf. Uhl 2019). To make learning effective, media and visual literacies are often necessary in addition to linguistic skills when trying to grasp the content. This is where the interdisciplinary potential but also the interdisciplinary requirements of language learning lie: when it comes to decoding visual and linguistic elements of a multimodal text, you need to identify the text's literary or cultural context and bear in mind the rules and affordances of the media itself.

There are only a few current publications in reputable international journals and anthologies on language learning with social media. They mostly focus on the use of vlogs, i.e. video blogs, and learning English in formal and informal language learning settings (e.g. Uhl 2019; Aloraini and Cardoso 2020; Pikhart and Botezat 2021). Therefore, this article will focus on learning Romance languages in a formal classroom setting from an Austrian point of view. We will critically evaluate the possibilities, challenges, and limitations of engaging with influencers in a language learning context. This will reveal which skills are necessary for dealing with social media and linguistic challenges, it help develop a framework for multimedia and competence-based learning. Based on these theoretical considerations, we will try to answer the question whether the use of authentic influencer videos in Romance languages is possible and which obstacles must be overcome.

2 Competence-based language learning

Foreign language teaching in the 21st century can be described by the call for skill-based learning (e.g. Brune 2020; Ehlers 2007; Hallet 2015b), task-based language learning (e.g. Brune 2020; Surkamp 2007) and authenticity (e.g. Buendgens-Kosten 2013; Ollivier 2018), among others. Many of these approaches go back to Weinert's (2001, 27–28) definition of *competence*. He describes *competence* as a set of cognitive skills that are acquired and used in different and diverse situations to solve problems. In addition to the subject-related competencies, which, in lan-

guage teaching, are the linguistic competencies of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, he also mentions cross-curricular competencies, such as problem-solving competence or the ability to work in a team, and action competencies, which cover the social, motivational, volitional, and moral components.

Weinert's definition of the concept of competence is a pedagogical and rather encompassing one and a basis of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), which focuses on a task-based understanding of competence in the context of language learning. For two decades, the CEFR has served as a basis for the development of foreign language curricula in schools, among other things, and as a guideline for language teachers and learners. In its current version, it presents itself as a complex construct of different areas of competence:

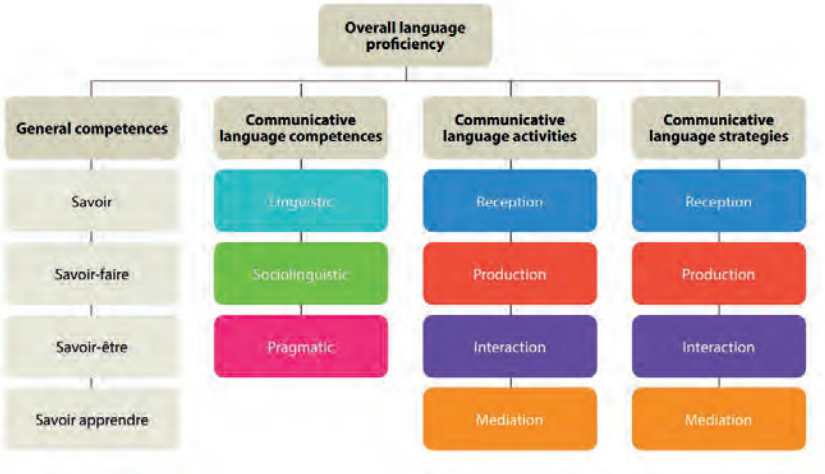

Fig. 1: The structure of the CEFR descriptive scheme (Council of Europe 2020, 32)

Whereas earlier versions of the CEFR came in the form of a matrix of four skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking) and three elements (grammatical structure, vocabulary, phonology/graphology), the current version emphasizes that "a move away from the matrix […] may promote communicative criteria for quality of performance" and that "the

distinction 'reception, interaction, production' recalls classifications used for learning and performance strategies and may well facilitate a broader concept of strategic competence" (Council of Europe 2020, 33). The performative approach still prevails, but the focus shifts toward accomplishing communicative tasks on an interactive and strategic level. The CEFR explains this shift by referring to authenticity and an orientation towards the real world, as the former matrix "has increasingly proved inadequate in capturing the complex reality of communication. […]. The [new] organization proposed by the CEFR is closer to real-life language use, which is grounded in interaction in which meaning is co-constructed" (ibid.).

To participate in a conversation (whether written or oral), one must possess receptive, productive and interactional skills; one has to react to what the other person says. To do so, mediation is needed, that is to say, "the two key notions of co-construction of meaning in interaction and constant movement between the individual and social level in language learning, mainly through its vision of the user/learner as a social agent" (Council of Europe 2020, 36). On a strategic level, mediation means "linking to previous knowledge", "adapting language" and "breaking down complicated information" (ib., 90). Mediating a text, hence, includes, for example, "explaining data", "translating a written text" or "analysis and criticism of creative texts" (ibid.). Creative texts, according to the CEFR, are not only written texts, but cover a wider range of works: "Film, theatre, recitals and multimodal installations are just some of the other types of creative text, as works of imagination and cultural significance" (ib., 105). To consume and understand multimodal texts, audio-visual comprehension is required to be able to co-construct meaning.

A competent language user must not only have knowledge and skills, but must also be able to use them actively in (interactive) speech acts. Verbal and non-verbal, as well as auditory and visual aspects, must be considered equally, especially in multimodal contexts. Language use, regardless of whether it is the first, second or third language, means recognizing, understanding, and contextualizing linguistic and non-linguistic signs, to understand and respond to them (in interactive settings). Successfully using a language is thus, amongst other things, linked to listening and visual comprehension. When it comes to the reception of audio-visual media, different codes must be taken into consideration.

According to Biechele (2010, 118), who refers to the semiotic status of films and different film genres in her article, audio-visual comprehension comprises perception, understanding and interpretation of both images and sounds (e.g. spoken language, background sounds, music) in their respective codes.

Nowadays Biechele's focus on films, however, is too restricted, since TV series and videos, for example on *YouTube*, *Snapchat*, *Instagram* or *TikTok*, are currently the central audio-visual elements of young people's lives (cf. mpfs 2021, 37–48). Nevertheless, the extension of the four skills originally distinguished in the CEFR by visual and audio-visual comprehension seems justified in a visually dominated "culture of digitality" (Stalder 2017). Biechele (2011, 15) correctly states, long before the most recent revision of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2020), that pure listening comprehension in real life is quite limited (e.g. radio broadcasts, podcasts, or loudspeaker announcements). Consequently, audio-visual comprehension is a very important part of everyday life and therefore has to be focused on in language learning and teaching as well.

2.1 Multimodal reading comprehension

When text is integrated into multimedia content, reading comprehension also comes into play as a central point in the comprehension process (cf. Ehlers 2007). When it comes to reading, different goals can be pursued: the acquisition of different reading purposes (*skimming*, *scanning*, intensive and extensive reading), reading for comprehension, a promotion of personality development, the development of cultural and/or regional knowledge, literary-aesthetic competences and the improvement of vocabulary and grammar (cf. ibid.; Hallet 2007; 2015b; Surkamp 2007). According to Hallet (2007, 13), literature should be approached with a broader conceptual understanding that opens up the classical literary canon. He considers the integration of non-conventional literary texts into a literary-aesthetic education as a challenge for schools and names TV sitcoms, comics, graphic novels, videos, pop songs and films as examples of multimodal formats. According to Hallet's broader understand literature, the term does not only refer to a printed, text-dominated book, but also comprises numerous multimodal and digitally available formats. He considers picking up on new literary aesthetic experiences

and practices that are often part of youth and popular culture as a social responsibility of the language learning classroom.

Particularly in teenage years, there seems to be a certain lack of desire to read classical literature, even more so when it is written in a foreign language, as the linguistic challenges and cultural subtleties makes it even more difficult to read, understand and enjoy. The Austrian curriculum for language learning also suggests including authentic texts in addition to didactic texts in the textbook. According to Hallet (ibid.), authentic texts could or should also take multimodal formats into account. However, since the linguistic level in the second foreign language is lower than in English as the first foreign language (at least in Austria) and the predominance of English on *YouTube* and other platforms (Codreanu and Combe 2020, 166), it is difficult to find appealing and adequate texts. If we take the Austrian curriculum for secondary schools as an example: foreign language requirements for both the first and second foreign languages are still based on the four competence areas. The goal for English, as the dominant first foreign language, is the B2 level in all skill areas, whereas in the second foreign language the target level is B1 (except for reading competence in the six-year-system). (cf. Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung 2021). Texts of children's literature, for example, are often not appropriate for the corresponding age group, and texts of youth literature are usually too difficult in terms of language level. However, individualization and differentiation can help to maintain or even increase the pleasure of reading against linguistic barriers. This is especially true for older students who, for example, can be involved in the selection of texts and who contribute their real-world experiences to the reading process (cf. Hallet 2007, 34; Ollivier 2018).

According to Hallet (2007, 13), a proximity of the formats he cites as examples to more classical formats already considered in literary didactics, such as films, and new formats, can be discerned. Likewise, classical reading strategies can be applied in multimodal reading as well, even though one would then call the consumption process a decoding and not a reading process. Well-known methods can be applied to new literary and cultural artefacts (cf. ibid.): *Skimming*, for example, means the skimming of a (written) text to grasp the basic contents and thoughts, whereas *scanning* intends the targeted search for a specific piece of information in texts. However, these two reading strategies can also be

applied to multimodal formats such as video clips. The same holds for extensive and intensive reading approaches: both can be applied to serial formats, such as those offered on *Netflix* or by influencers. Serial formats are often chosen for pleasure and not for close reading and interpretation. Watching serial formats and videos by influencers are recreational activities, however, if watched in a different language than L1 these recreational activities can help increasing vocabulary and grammar knowledge as well as historical or social background knowledge. Depending on the learning objective when consuming a (written or/and spoken) text, different scaffolding strategies must be applied, inter alia, linguistic and thematic support, socio-historical and cultural backgrounds, biographical details, genre-specific information.

Beyond these goals and approaches, however, a debate has arisen about the direction in which literary-aesthetic learning should expand. On the one hand, there are those who argue that teaching literature is a means to an end, namely competence, and that linguistic output is the ultimate goal. On the other hand, there are those who believe in a general educational mission and for whom this mission is incompatible with the former view and the old version of the CEFR (for a deeper understanding of these discussions cf. Hallet 2007 and 2015b and Suhrkamp 2012). They are convinced that not everything in language teaching needs to or can be tested. A third group argues dialectically, such as Brune (2020), Hallet (2007; 2015b) and Surkamp (2012), and does not see any contradiction between competence orientation and the educational mission, but rather emphasizes the role of literary-aesthetic competence for personality development and the development of intercultural competences. The new edition of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2020, 105–108) supports and consolidates the position of the second group: mediation is precisely about consuming creative texts, understanding them, critically questioning them, and decoding and encoding them in one's own socio-cultural background.

2.2 Multiliteracy

Following his broad, heterarchical and multimodal concept of literature, Hallet (2007, 31) emphasizes early on in his reflections the importance of multiliteracy, which, in a broader understanding, also includes visual

and, consequently, media literacy. This is a necessity in a participatory culture (cf. Stalder 2017) and at the same time provides the frame for "creating the learning conditions for full social participation" (The New London Group 1996, 61). Social participation requires a new, comprehensive literacy, which is to be understood as a complex and culturally shaped construct. As an example, visual literacy is twofold: Students should (1) be able to articulate content when analyzing (moving) images and (2) be able to recognize a wide variety of (moving) pictorial elements. This reception includes, among other things, the perception of space, time, movement, perspective. Authentic, as opposed to didactically designed, formats present greater challenges, but also possess the appeal of the non-artistic, the genuine (cf. Brune 2020; Hallet 2015a, 13–18). Visual literacy means having an awareness of the fact that a film, an image, a photograph is always subjectively shaped by the producer's perspective and cultural background; it consequently has a certain intention (cf. ib., 15). Decoding and mediating a text, in turn, takes place against the culture-specific background of the recipient (cf. Hallet 2007) and their literality (cf. Brune 2020).

3 Multimedia Learning

Decoding multimodal texts can be highly difficult as the reader's / recipient's working memory must process different pieces of information, i.e., auditive and visual information, at the same time. Mayer's (2014) *Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning* assumes that our working memory has only a limited capacity and that learning should happen in a focused way so that the working memory is not cognitively overloaded. In multimedia learning, cognitive capacity is challenged threefold: by extraneous processing, essential processing, and generative processing. The first "refers to cognitive processing that does not support the instructional goal and is caused by poor instructional design" (ibid.) and should therefore be reduced. The second "refers to cognitive processing aimed at mentally representing the presented material in working memory and is caused by the complexity of the material" (ib., 60) and should be managed in a balanced way. The materials should neither be too simple nor too complex. They should challenge the learners but not overwhelm

them. The third "refers to cognitive processing aimed at making sense of the presented material and is caused by the learner's motivation to learn" (ibid.). To facilitate the consumption and subsequent understanding of multimodal texts, such as videos, and to prevent possible cognitive overload, Mayer (ib., 63) names 15 principles for multimedia learning. They can be used by teachers as design and evaluation criteria for teaching and learning materials. The following eight principles grouped into three overarching categories seem to be most important when it comes to choosing and analyzing videos provided by influencers.

Principles for reducing extraneous processing in multimedia learning:

- *Coherence*: Elements that do not contain relevant information should be avoided. This applies, for example, to background music and sounds, pictures or graphics that are not relevant for the learning process. These elements are distracting and steer attention in a non-relevant direction.
- *Signaling*: Important information and elements are accentuated.
- *Redundancy*: Redundancy of seen and heard written information should be avoided. Written text should not contain the same information as spoken words.
- *Contiguity*: Pictures and words (written and spoken) should be used in spatial and temporal proximity.

Principles for managing essential processing in multimedia learning:

- *Segmentation and pre-training*: Complex content should be segmented into smaller units. If content is presented in multimedia and multimodal form, the cognitive load should be reduced through pre-reading/viewing activities. Prior knowledge and familiarity facilitate the comprehension process (i.e. scaffolding strategies).
- *Modality*: Multimodality relieves comprehension. However, if pictures and spoken words are combined, learners should not have to concentrate on two visual inputs at the same time.
- *Multimedia*: Pictures and words (written and spoken) should be used together where possible, with pictures taking on a function that supports understanding rather than a purely decorative one. This multi-codality is especially important when learners have little prior knowledge.

Principles for fostering generative processing in multimedia learning:

- *Personalization*, *voice*, and *image*: The language used should be adapted to the target group and be oral-informal (cf. Koch and Oesterreicher 1985). Seeing the speaker in addition can facilitate the comprehension process but is not mandatory.

Due to the fact that several sensory channels are addressed and processed simultaneously in multimedia learning, audio-visual comprehension is understood as a complex mental process. The mental effort required can be enormous; learners may be overtaxed or concentrate on the visual or the auditory level, resulting in an incomplete comprehension process. The mental processes that are set in motion during the processing of multimodal input and thus during auditory-visual comprehension have already been recognized, researched, and described many times. Examples include the work of Ohler (1990), Thaler (2007), and Mayer (2014). Although the different approaches show different models of how auditory and visual inputs can be received and cognitively processed, the authors unanimously emphasize that the input becomes more varied and richer by addressing several channels, which can contribute to a better understanding and increase motivation. For this, however, it is important to build on already existing (prior) knowledge, which assumes a central function in the comprehension process. Through preparatory methods and methods of scaffolding, this knowledge must be activated and expanded to support the comprehension process and consequently facilitate the learning process.

4 Media literate learning

With the Internet and modern technologies, information can nowadays be accessed anytime and anywhere; information is up-to-date and spreads very quickly; the production of knowledge has greatly increased (cf. De Bruyckere et al. 2015a). Learning has changed and is still changing: "Over the last twenty years, technology has reorganized how we live, how we communicate, and how we learn" (Siemens 2005, 3). Siemens particularly emphasizes the importance of informal as opposed to formal learning: "Informal learning is a significant aspect of our learning

experience. Formal education no longer comprises the majority of our learning" (ibid.). In his opinion, technological change has altered both the quantity of information and the quality of learning. Learning has become a ubiquitous act, no longer confined to institutional contexts (cf. Uhl 2019; Codreanu and Combe 2020). The smartphone provides access to information almost anywhere and at any time, and the distinction between information and entertainment is becoming increasingly blurred. The same applies to the quality of the information and learning materials used in the informal learning setting. Authentic materials, such as YouTube videos, are integrated into the informal learning process, but are neither checked in terms of quality nor necessarily aligned with didactic principles. Apart from this, the participatory aspect of social media blurs the classic triad of reader, author, and publisher. Anyone can consume a video on *YouTube* (as a reader), produce videos themselves (as an author), and share them with an international audience via *YouTube* (as a publisher). Content on social media is no longer editorially reviewed, contrary to the habitus of traditional journalistic channels (cf. Ollivier 2018). Information is shared at the click of a button; consequently, content must be checked for correctness, relevance, and timeliness by readers themselves (cf. Siemens 2005, 7). For this reason, there is a need for specific literacies that help to consciously select learning materials.

As early as the 1990s, Baacke (1996) identified four dimensions that, in his view and from an educational perspective, constitute media literacy: *media criticism* ('Medienkritik'), *media studies* ('Medienkunde'), *media usage* ('Mediennutzung'), and *media design* ('Mediengestaltung'). *Media criticism* means to examine social processes analytically, reflexively drawing consequences for one's own actions from this analysis and consequently acting ethically and responsibly in society. This is even more important as the media landscape is continuously changing and new phenomena, such as influencers and their videos, require new critical and meaning-making skills. *Media studies* include the knowledge of (traditional and modern) media and media systems as well as the ability to use these media, for example logging into different applications on the web. *Media usage* can be divided into a receptive and an interactive sub-dimension. The receptive level means, for example, the consumption of video clips, the interactive level involves creating one's own video

clips. *Media design* is also divided into two sub-dimensions: innovative and creative. Innovation means bringing about change within the media system while respecting its internal logic. The creative sub-dimension includes creative approaches to producing something new, even beyond an internal logic.

These dimensions are anchored in all three of the important media roles, i.e., reader, author, and publisher. Depending on the respective role, certain dimensions have a stronger or weaker impact. Baacke sees media literacy not as an individual phenomenon, but as a social one. Media literate people can act critically and maturely in a media-driven society.

5 Influencer Videos and Language Learning: Arguments and Counterarguments

Just as traditional print media have undergone adaptation to reflect logics of the online world, social media likewise continues to evolve. The boundary between the private and public spheres is blurring (Reckwitz 2019a), as is the dividing line between information and entertainment. While Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 60–62), in their early classification of social media apps, still saw a difference between information and entertainment in the separation of self-expression and social proximity, nowadays not only a qualitative, but also a quantitative shift can be recognized. The content community platform *YouTube* may serve as an example.

Originally designed as a video platform just less than 15 years ago, *YouTube* has been discovered by young people who use it to spread messages in short videos. Today, it is impossible to imagine *YouTube*, or other social media, such as *Instagram* or *Twitch,* without influencers, formerly known as *YouTube* stars, providing an audience of millions with information and entertaining videos. There is a broad range of video formats: from funny videos and parodies to product tests, shopping videos, book tubes (cf. Höfler 2020a) to so-called *hauls* (cf. Höfler 2018), *Let's Plays*, and question-and-answer videos. The target groups are diverse. What the videos have in common is a staged proximity to and interaction with the audience, an everyday, colloquial language that provides many

aspects of a conceptual orality (cf. Koch and Oesterreicher 1985), the direct addressing of and interaction with the viewers, as well as a regularity in publication (cf. Höfler 2018; 2019; 2020ab). For young people, *their* influencers are not only role models and aspirational figures in terms of potential careers (cf. Ebner 2019); they also inform their opinions and shape their consumption (cf. Aran-Ramspott et al. 2018).

Influencers are part of young people's everyday lives and contribute to their knowledge. This real-world reference provides an important source of prior knowledge for decoding (cf. Hallet 2007, 34) and creating (cf. Ollivier 2018) cultural artefacts and this reference is hence important for mediating texts (Council of Europe 2020, 90) and reducing extraneous processing (Mayer 2014, 59). These cultural artefacts, i.e. the videos, offer different options to be integrated into formal and informal learning contexts: Many of the videos are staged like short plays, playing with authenticity, information, and entertainment. They can be read like inner monologues, short moral treatises, or autobiographical narratives. Like the authors of the *Moral Weeklies* in the 18th century (a relationship that requires further scientific study and can only be briefly touched upon here cf. also https://gams.uni-graz.at/context:mws/sdef:Context/get?mode=about&locale=en), the influencers pursue a specific, latent, or obvious intention that needs to be decoded. Their videos follow what Ollivier describes as "dual authenticity", namely "situational authenticity and interactional authenticity" (2018, 50); they are not didactic and do not pursue any learning goals. They are designed to inform and entertain viewers and to generate revenue through clicks.

Influencers are part of everyday life and the informal learning processes of young people (cf. mpfs 2021, 40 & 48). Their videos combine (narrative) content with self-disclosure or self-dramatization on a pictorial level. On a linguistic level, information and entertainment are mixed. To be able to understand these videos, in addition to linguistic skills, especially audio-visual comprehension and mediation skills, specific media literacy skills are needed. It is difficult to give a general answer to the question of the potential of the influencers' videos for language learning because the videos are very different and heterogeneous and allow for different readings – depending on the learning goals (cf. Höfler 2020b). The following paragraphs mention some general observations that apply to many videos, certainly not to all of them, and show research desider-

ata and therefore a gap that a future corpus-based, empirical study of the observations could address. The *YouTube* channel of Cyprien, one of the best-known French YouTubers (https://www.youtube.com/c/cyprien/), serves as the basis for the following considerations; "Le CLASH des consoles" (https://youtu.be/OxTicIgXyKw) is used as an example.

5.1 Mayer's (2014) principles of multimedia learning

Influencer videos are neither designed as artefacts for multimedia learning following Mayer's (2014) principles nor for a target group that learns the language spoken in the video as a foreign language. Extraneous load is high and might exploit or exceed the learner's cognitive capacity. The spoken text and the images shown do not necessarily have a close relationship in terms of time and place. Even though Mayer's (2014) principles are not applied consciously in the editing and conceptualization processes, they are, nevertheless, a useful framework for considering the potential of videos to promote or hinder learning.

The interaction of image and text varies according to the influencer's individual style; sometimes textual insertions are made that support the content, sometimes they rather contradict it. *Let's Play* and *haul* videos are examples of this. The former shows a video gamer during the game, who may or may not comment on his moves and cheats. Here, the principles of contiguity, redundancy and coherence are mostly followed. *Hauls* (cf. Höfler 2018) show mainly female influencers opening their shopping bags after shopping, presenting, and describing the items purchased and explaining their purchase decisions. These videos, too, seem to adhere to the three aforementioned principles. The brand and the price might be shown – as text, which can be seen as a signaling mechanism according to Mayer (2014, 63). Learners who like to play video games and learners who like to talk about their purchases can draw on their real-life knowledge in these videos. This frees up cognitive resources in the learning process.

In "Le CLASH des consoles", Cyprien discusses the pros and cons of different gaming consoles. The consoles are shown with their brand logos, following the *modality* & *signaling* principles according to Mayer (2014, 63) (e.g. 4:10, 7:02), as important information is hereby accentuated. In this video, Cyprien chose clothes that match the style of the respec-

tive console ‚according to his subjective interpretation (e.g. retro-style at 2:11). This refers to Mayer's (2014, 63) presentation style principle: Cyprien functions as the thread and framework of the story, simultaneously staging himself as different game consoles. The games mentioned are also shown in short sequences and in quick editing (e.g. 2:30; 7:22). Learners who are more familiar with gaming consoles and games can follow the argumentation more easily because of their prior knowledge than learners who are unfamiliar with the world of gaming consoles (*Pre-Training* Principle according to Mayer 2014, 63). No redundancy can be seen in the video (cf. ibid.).

5.2 Linguistic challenges

Although the videos seem to be aimed at a non-specific audience, a common linguistic and cultural basis is assumed. The language is directed at a peer group and can, therefore, be described as a language of proximity according to Koch and Oesterreicher (1985). It is conceptually oral and fluctuates in its realization between orality and textuality, with a tendency towards spoken language. Sentences remain incomplete, the style is rather paratactic, interjections and onomatopoeia are used. The discourse is not clearly structured. Although the texts are prepared, they simulate spontaneity and naturalness. The rate of speech is very high, the vocabulary is colloquial or even vulgar and shows characteristics of youth language (e.g. 0:37–0:48; 1:16–1:30). The linguistic structures are oral; coherence and cohesion are accordingly low. (Inter-)cultural allusions and allusions to daily political and economic events are not uncommon (e.g. the information that new gaming consoles tend to appear in November, 0:59–1:05). Understanding the videos requires a high level of global knowledge, culture-specific knowledge, and linguistic skills.

If we look at the descriptors of the *CEFR Companion volume* (Council of Europe 2020), it is noticeable that the can-do-statements necessary for decoding videos require competences at least at level B2. In the category *Overall oral comprehension*, the expectation is that the learner: "Can follow extended discourse and complex lines of argument, provided the topic is reasonably familiar, and the direction of the argument is signposted by explicit markers" (ib., 48). If we look at the category of *Understanding as a member of a live audience*, the descriptors say: "Can follow complex

lines of argument in a clearly articulated lecture, provided the topic is reasonably familiar. Can distinguish main themes from asides, provided the lecture or talk is delivered in standard language or a familiar variety. Can recognise the point of view expressed and distinguish this from facts being reporting" (ib., 50). "Le CLASH des consoles" is an authentic video whose topic might be familiar (to gamers) and whose content is multi-coded, but it uses non-standard language and can, therefore, not be wholly assigned to level B2. The category *Watching TV, film and video* would probably categorize these videos at the C1 level: "Can follow films employing a considerable degree of slang and idiomatic usage" (ib., 53). The cognitive load is even higher when the videos have a quick pace or are recorded in an authentic situation with a smartphone, and when background noise usually makes comprehension even more difficult.

The can-do statements show that the linguistic level of such videos is higher than the requirements for Romance languages in a formal pimary and secondary education context (i.e. level B1 in Austria, cf. above). Although the learners are familiar with the video formats and the content and can, therefore, draw on a broad (formal) knowledge, the linguistic content might be too demanding in many cases and lead to cognitive overload.

5.3 Media Literacy

Since these videos, in addition to their informational and entertainment values, are also intended to engage viewers and gain channel subscriptions and clicks, they are designed to be personal and to influence behavior on both formal and content levels, as well as on an audio-visual level. They subtly aim to persuade viewers to buy things, such as in *haul* videos. Influencers are sometimes paid by stores, brands, and companies for their posts, just like Cyprien in his video "Le CLASH des consoles" (e.g. 07:59–08:10). Although this advertorial / marketing content must be explicitly marked as such on social media channels, subtle influences also result from the setting and camera angles (cf. for example Cyprien's background at 0:03 or "le carton de la honte" at 1:25). We see a seemingly randomly placed decorative object on the bookshelf, the open bag of chips on the kitchen table, the gaming chair. They are not directly mentioned as objects in the video, but the setting draws the eye to them.

Especially when influencers take a stand on topics such as nutrition or fitness, or even daily political events, they convey their own opinions or their own levels of knowledge. A review of the content by third parties does not take place or only in the comment section under the videos. Regardless as to the accuracy of the videos, the opinions and interpretations are usually not questioned by the audience. This is the reason why YouTubers are now called influencers. They influence their audience through their appearance, their self-portrayal, their consumption and lifestyle habits and their language (cf. Aran-Ramspott et al. 2018). As these are often artificially created personalities, the pressure on the audience is growing. People want to emulate their role models and achieve the same goals. The "society of singularities" described by Reckwitz (2019a) sets unattainable standards in the participatory and algorithmic "culture of digitality" (Stalder 2017) and leads to a "logic of the particular" (ibid.) through the "culture of the authentic" (Reckwitz 2019a, 11) and the "culture of the attractive" (ibid.). These new cultures and their affordances often lead to body image distortions and a sense of inadequacy (cf. Reckwitz 2019b, 204–206). In the case of "Le CLASH des consoles", a desire may arise in the young viewers to own the latest gaming console, even if they don't have the financial means. A feeling of not belonging to the gaming peer group might be the result: One can no longer participate in conversations about the newest games that are only playable on the newest consoles.

These phenomena and the mechanisms used should be exposed as such, which is why the four dimensions of media literacy by Baacke (1996) should be applied to video consumption. Some exemplary reflections on Cyprien's video:

- *media criticism*: Viewers question their own media use. They see the different consoles and ask themselves which of them they use and whether they might not purchase on one or the other.
- *media studies*: Viewers are aware that Cyprien was paid for the video. This circumstance may affect the message of the video, the information given, and a possible call to action to play the game.
- *media use*: Viewers are prompted to subscribe to the channel at the end of the video, which refers to the interactive sub-dimension of media use. On the one hand, viewers need to know how to sub-

scribe to a channel and, on the other hand, they need to recognize the interactive possibilities that arise from the subscription.
- *media design*: Cyprien appears to pay a lot of attention to detail: He promotes the consoles through his clothing and language, and he placed decorative objects around his apartment to convey a certain message about his lifestyle as well. In analyzing these features of the video, viewers get to know one possible method of storytelling.

In addition to its entertainment value, the information conveyed in such a video should always be subjected to critical scrutiny. This seems more difficult when the language barrier means that the verbally encoded content cannot be (fully) understood or can only be understood to a limited extent.

6 Mission impossible? A plea instead of a conclusion

Following a brief introductory analysis of the different competences needed to understand influencer videos, the suspicion arises that they may not be suitable for use in the foreign language classroom, particularly when it comes to Romance languages. Further obstacles are added to this analysis: Since there are hardly any teaching materials in this area, the challenge for teachers is to create adequate materials. This requires time, especially since teachers often do not know enough about the influencer scene to have the expertise that would facilitate the selection of videos and the creation of materials. The real-world argument, which attempts to justify the use of (digital) media by arguing that they are part of the real world of young people and should, therefore, find a place in the classroom, does not go far enough, as De Bruyckere et al. (2015b) point out. However, does this mean that even though influencer videos are part of the informal learning biography of young people, they cannot be used in Italian, French, and Spanish lessons?

It is a fact that influencers are an international phenomenon and part of the everyday life of adolescents all over the world (cf. Aran-Ramspott et al. 2018; mpfs 2021). Their videos are authentic and up-to-date, and they address topics that interest, occupy and move young people. Influencers seem to speak to them as equals, and therefore, influencers have

a great impact on young people's opinions and consumer behavior, but also on their body image and life choices. This influence is even bigger because influencers use the (social media) channels that are important to young people. Against this backdrop, these videos should rather be discussed in the classroom once too often than not often enough. The *perfect* world in which, for example, financial or health concerns hardly seem to play a role, is often fiction and does not reflect reality.

At the same time, authenticity also helps to overcome the language and culture shocks that learners sometimes experience when they hear native speakers for the first time: they are overtaxed by their encounter with different accents, language registers, and rates of speech. So, the use of influencer videos provides learners with a first impression of authentic language use.

It is important to emphasize that barely any didactic considerations and resources or empirical studies on the use of influencer videos in language teaching exist. A clear research gap can be identified here. However, some general recommendations can be derived from these first considerations:

- Based on the learning goals and the type of video, the video can first be watched without sound to focus on visual comprehension and the images. The students form hypotheses, then the video is watched with sound and the hypotheses are verified (cf. Mayer 2014, 63).
- There are different ways of decoding influencer videos that align with different learning goals (cf. Höfler 2020b). This ranges from a purely entertaining consumption of the content to a critical and informative examination.
- Technically, pre-viewing activities to lessen the cognitive load can also be achieved on *YouTube* by reducing the speed or inserting subtitles, although doing this partly contradicts Mayer's (2014, 63) principles.
- Students can contribute video suggestions based on their expertise. This relieves the teacher of the task to find interesting videos and transfers some of the responsibility to the students, who actively shape the lessons and practically train their media literacy (Baacke 1996) and their mediation competence (Council of Europe 2020, 90).

Although the linguistic hurdle may be difficult to overcome, there are possibilities of integrating these authentic videos into one's lessons as one of many types of (multimodal) texts. The aim should not be to base lessons on influencers, but to make them a topic in class, e.g. by examining their activities critically in a media literacy sense, and to arouse or, in the best case, further strengthen the students' interest, in target language artefacts.

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Exploring Multimedia Learning Principles in Explainer Videos for Foreign Language Instruction

Abstract: Nowadays, explainer videos are a widely used medium for teaching and learning foreign languages. Many videos can be easily accessed through different online platforms, among which *YouTube* is the most popular. However, such publicly shared videos are not subject to any review process and are not necessarily required to meet standards of multimedia learning. This pilot study aims to examine the extent to which multimedia learning principles are applied in explainer videos for foreign language instruction and to provide theory-driven criteria for evaluating the quality of video-based learning content. For this purpose, we selected five explainer videos on the use of French past tenses. The analysis was carried out based on qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz 2018) and criteria from relevant multimedia learning theory (Mayer 2022). Our preliminary results show that the potential of multimodal instruction for enhancing learning effectiveness remains underutilized.

Keywords: explainer videos, multimedia learning, YouTube, foreign language teaching, language learning, grammar instruction, French past tenses

1 Introduction

The accelerated pace of digitalization over the previous decades has profoundly transformed the way we access, produce, and share information. In the educational sector, the adoption of digital technologies has enabled access to multiple sources of knowledge and learning environments, thereby changing, for example, interactional practices, structures of learning processes, and learning attitudes (Gloerfeld 2019, 17–19). Therefore, preparing students for successful participation in an increasingly digital society has become a major objective that national governments seek to achieve. In Germany, the strategy paper "Education in a Digital World" was developed by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Kultusministerkonferenz – KMK) as a conceptual framework to face both the chances and challenges of digitalization, to support the integration of digital technologies

in educational institutions, and to promote the cross-curricular implementation of digital media competencies (KMK 2016, 3–4).

This development has also had a significant impact on foreign language teaching and learning, opening new opportunities to encounter foreign languages and cultures beyond the spatial and temporary boundaries of the conventional classroom (Martinez 2019, 151). In particular, those digital technologies that provide visual and auditory stimuli such as explainer videos have become highly popular, especially among new generations. As Cwielong and Kommer (2020, 197) point out, traditional linear texts are being replaced by multimodal sources of information that meet the learning preferences of today's young learners. In fact, recent studies conducted in Germany such as the JIM Study (mpfs 2021, 48) show that 87 percent of students aged 12 to 19 regularly watch videos on platforms like *YouTube*, and almost 20 percent use short explainer videos or tutorials for learning purposes. These results indicate the increasing demand for videos on online platforms like *YouTube* and the important role multimedia content plays in young people's lives.

Nonetheless, there is a lack of research providing insights into how explainer videos for foreign language learning purposes on *YouTube* are designed, how principles of multimedia learning are applied, and how multimodal content is structured to achieve instructional aims. This paper makes an initial contribution to filling this gap by evaluating selected explainer videos available on *YouTube* in which the difference between the French past tenses is explained. The paper is organized as follows: In the theoretical part, we review relevant multimedia learning theories and principles that should be considered when creating explainer videos. In the empirical part, we investigate the most frequent explainer videos on *YouTube* that introduce the French past tenses using qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz 2018). Lastly, we discuss our results and demonstrate how the gained insights can be employed for the development and assessment of explainer videos for instructional purposes in the field of foreign language learning.

2 Theoretical approaches to multimedia learning

Given the wide variety of educational videos that can be found on *YouTube*, it is essential to define the term *explainer video* and distinguish it from other types of videos used for teaching and learning such as tutorials, live broadcasts, video conferences, screencasts, instructional videos, or documentaries. In comparison to other educational video formats, explainer videos are mainly self-produced informative video clips that focus on clarifying and describing abstract concepts, processes, and contents within a short time (Wolf 2020, 17). According to Krämer and Böhrs (2017, 255), some characterizing features of explainer videos are a well-written script with a clearly defined structure, a reduced length, a continuous focus on the subject matter, and the use of storytelling techniques and visual elements to contextualize relevant information. Both authors emphasize the importance of simplifying content, reducing complexity, and using metaphoric imagery to engage the audience and to ensure that the core message is easy to understand. Wolf (2015, 129) points out that the key identifying feature of an explainer video is its multimodal representation, which results from the integration of different medial forms of expression and resources such as spoken and written text, music, sound effects, pictures, animations, graphics, hyperlinks, icons, interactive features, and gestures, among others. Due to this multimodal property, explainer videos constitute a powerful tool to convey knowledge through the auditory and visual senses, creating a holistic learning experience. In this context, some authors have suggested that receiving multisensory input enables the viewers to process more information simultaneously (Schmidt-Borcherding 2020, 63) and that learning effectiveness can therefore be optimized (Mayer 2022, 145; Wengler and Dröge 2021, 3).

In the last decades, different theories in the field of cognitive psychology have demonstrated a positive impact of multimodality on learning. One of them is the *Dual-coding Theory* postulated by Paivio (1971; 1986), which states that human cognition contains two different mental

systems for processing information: a verbal system that processes[1] linguistic material and stores spoken and written language in verbal representation units, and a separate non-verbal system that processes experiences, events, spatial information, emotions, and sensory perceptions in the form of images (Clark and Paivio 1991, 151–52). Both systems can operate independently and differ not only in their cognitive representation structures but also in the way information is organized and stored. Clark and Paivio also argue that the imaging system is much superior to the verbal system since images, as opposed to words, can be processed simultaneously, contain more information, and can be spatially transformed (1991, 152). However, when both systems are activated and referential connections between verbal and visual representations are formed, the information registered is said to be dual-coded. According to Paivio's (1971; 1986) empirical findings, such parallel processing of linguistic and visual material enhances learning, as dual-coded information is more likely to be comprehended and rapidly recalled. Learning effectiveness is by contrast weakened if only one mental system is activated (Schmidt-Borcherding 2020, 64). Due to the combination of verbal information and imagery in explainer videos, it is possible to conclude that using explainer videos in learning contexts is an effective way to activate both mental systems and thus ensure dual-coding.

Another theory that emphasizes the importance of multimodality is the *Cognitive Load Theory* developed by Chandler and Sweller (1991). The underlying assumption of this theory is that human cognition is divided into two embedded levels: working and long-term memory. Whereas the storage capacity of long-term memory is endless, the working memory is a restricted cognitive resource only capable of processing a limited amount of information items simultaneously. Any new information that enters the working memory system "either from long-term memory in the case of previously learned material or as new information via sensory memory" (Sweller 2004, 12) may impose a high intrinsic cognitive load depending on the number of new information properties that must be processed at the same time and the extent to which these

[1] Cognitive processing is understood here as a general term for the mental processes involved in noticing, encoding, organizing, storing, and retrieving information.

elements interact (Chen et al. 2018, 487). When the cognitive demands of a given task or a situation exceed the working memory's capacity and element interactivity is high, overload is likely to occur, and information cannot be effectively transferred to long-term memory (Dähling and Standop 2020, 315). Chandler and Sweller focused their research on instructional settings and concluded that "effective instructional material facilitates learning by directing cognitive resources toward activities that are relevant to learning" (1991, 293). They found out that improperly presented material can generate a high cognitive load and thus lead to an ineffective learning experience. According to both authors, structuring information in a simple and focused way, enhancing schema construction and automation, as well as presenting content in a multimodal format reduce cognitive load on working memory. Regarding Paivio's *Dual-coding Theory*, they also highlight the importance of using visual and verbal material that is interconnected rather than isolated to prevent learners from performing unnecessary mental integrations that impose a heavy cognitive load (Chandler and Sweller 1991, 295–96.). By applying Chandler and Sweller's theory to explainer videos, it is possible to consider these types of videos as a useful resource to relieve cognitive load not only because they convey dual-coded information but also because they are short, logically organized, and have a well-structured storyline focused on the core message aimed at reducing complexity.

Mayer's *Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning* (2001; 2014) unifies both theories exposed above and is also crucial for understanding the positive impact of explainer videos on learning. Consistent with Paivio as well as with Chandler and Sweller, Mayer recognizes that human cognition contains two separate channels for visual and auditory processing and that both channels have a limited storage capacity (2014, 43). However, he complements these theories by including an active processing assumption, which states that performing a certain number of cognitive processes is necessary to increase learning effectiveness, i.e., to successfully construct dual-coded representations of learning experiences. These cognitive processes are "attending to relevant incoming information, organizing selected information into coherent mental representations, and integrating mental representations with other knowledge" (Mayer 2014, 50). The author concludes that learning from words and images rather than from words alone is the best way to maximize the

working memory's capacity and ensure that these cognitive processes are managed effectively – a finding that he calls the multimedia principle (Schmidt-Borcherding 2020, 66). In order to successfully implement this principle in instructional materials, it is necessary "to present corresponding words and pictures together so the learner is encouraged to select relevant words and images, organize them into verbal and pictorial representations, and build connections between them" (Mayer 2022, 145). As a result, he provides the following recommendations on how to design multimedia representations to optimize cognitive load and enable the integration of visual and verbal content into existing cognitive structures:

- Coherence: Extraneous visual and verbal material (e.g., irrelevant words or pictures) should be excluded to prevent learners from wasting cognitive capacity for processing material that is not relevant for building mental representations of learning content.
- Signaling: Important information should be highlighted by using headings, symbols, keywords, overview sentences, changes in color or contrast, stress placement techniques, etc. This minimizes extraneous cognitive load and draws the learner's attention to essential facts and connections within verbal and visual information.
- Redundancy: Adding redundant on-screen text to a narrated animation may create extraneous processing that increases cognitive load and diminishes learning effectiveness.
- Spatial and temporal contiguity: Corresponding verbal and visual information should be presented near each other and simultaneously.
- Segmenting: A narrated animation should be divided up into meaningful chunks that learners can view at their own pace. Segmenting allows learners to engage with small pieces of information and control the flow of new content.
- Pre-training: Learners who are already familiar with key concepts and essential information of the learning material can easily engage with the new content, as the cognitive load required at the time of presentation is reduced in advance.
- Modality: Students learn better from animation and narration than from animation and on-screen text.

- Personalization: Conveying learning content in a conversational tone rather than in a formal style increases learner engagement and facilitates social interaction between learners and instructors.
- Voice: Deeper cognitive processing is likely to occur when the narrated content is spoken by a human voice rather than a machine voice.
- Embodiment: Displaying on-screen agents or pedagogical characters that use human-like gestures, movements, facial expressions, and eye contact, leads learners to engage with the learning material more actively (Brame 2016, 2–3; Mayer 2002; 2014, 63; 2017, 406–07).

Mayer's multimedia design principles can be complemented by motivational aspects, such as those found in Keller's *ARCS Model of Motivational Design* (1983; 2010). This model aims at integrating findings in human motivation research and provides strategies for encouraging and sustaining learners' motivation in instructional settings, especially in online learning environments. Keller identifies four motivational categories that may also be considered key features of effective explainer videos (Wengler 2021, 155–57; Wengler and Dröge 2021, 3). These elements constitute the acronym *ARCS* and stand for *attention*, *relevance*, *confidence*, and *satisfaction*. Capturing the learners' attention either by using sensory and emotional stimuli (perceptual arousal) or by posing challenging questions and problems to be solved (inquiry arousal) is the first step in enhancing learners' motivation. The second step is to focus on the relevance of the learning content. This means that learners should perceive the learning environment as useful and should be able to connect the new information with their own knowledge, personal goals, and past experiences. Confidence is the third motivational category that gives learners the feeling of being able to accomplish the learning task and understand the content. Confidence may be triggered by establishing requirements, providing feedback, and allowing learners to have some control of the learning process. The last component is aimed at increasing learners' satisfaction by promoting a sense of achievement and praise after completing the learning task (Keller 2010, 46).

In summary, approaches to multimedia learning contribute to a better theoretical understanding of the cognitive processes underlying video-

based learning and provide practical insights on how to design explainer videos successfully. As suggested by most theories, the use of multimodal content seems to be the major advantage of explainer videos, but it may represent a great challenge as well since verbal and visual resources have to be effectively integrated to prevent cognitive overload. Furthermore, it is important to incorporate explainer videos in well-designed and organized learning settings to keep learners motivated and encourage deep learning. Considering the continuously growing number of explainer videos and the wide range of target groups that view these videos, it may be reasonable to get teachers and learners acquainted with adequate criteria to assess the quality and effectiveness of video-based learning content.

3 Methodology

3.1 State of the art

There are several studies and didactic proposals that have analyzed the use of explainer videos in the foreign language classroom in German-speaking countries (e.g., Sommerfeldt 2021; Ullman and Hahn 2016; Wengler 2021; Wengler and Nazaruk 2019). Studies in this framework are not only interested in discovering the potential of explainer videos to promote students' language proficiency and cultural knowledge but also in assessing the quality of the videos themselves (e.g., Ade-Thurow 2021; Wengler and Dröge 2021). Particular emphasis has been given to the improvement of audiovisual comprehension skills (Schäfer 2017), the integration of explainer videos as a source of language input inside and outside the classroom (Eigenwald 2021; Ullmann and Hahn 2016), and the development of complex learning tasks (Böing and Conrad 2018; Kräling et al. 2021). Nonetheless, there are only a few studies that analyze whether explainer videos for foreign language instruction on *YouTube* are designed according to multimedia learning theories.

As explainer videos in the context of foreign language teaching are widely used for the explanation of grammatical rules and language structures (e.g., Wengler 2021), we decided to focus our analysis on explainer videos in this area. In order to ensure consistency and comparability between the data, we selected a specific grammatical phenomenon, i.e.,

the aspectual opposition underlying the French past tenses *passé composé* and *imparfait*. Therefore, we gathered the five most viewed German explainer videos on *YouTube* that deal with this topic. We focused our analysis on *YouTube* videos, as *YouTube* is the most visited video platform by German students in secondary education. We examined the following research question: To what extent do explainer videos on *YouTube* rely on principles of multimedia learning for introducing and enhancing effective comprehension of French past tenses (*passé composé* and *imparfait*)?

3.2 Composition of the corpus

For the purpose of the analysis, we built a corpus of the most viewed and, therefore, the most genre-representative explainer videos on *YouTube* that deal with the grammatical phenomenon selected. The linguistic terms of the past tenses (i.e., *passé composé* and *imparfait*) were used as search terms, and the five most viewed videos on the platform were gathered (cf. Table 1). Although the sample size of five videos is very limited, we can assume that the chosen videos are disproportionately often used by and recommended to people who search for explainer videos of that type, as the number of views – besides the number of likes and comments – seems to influence the *YouTube* algorithm (Arthurs et al. 2018, 3). We therefore assume that our video selection represents a large share of explainer videos of French past tenses on *YouTube* watched by German students. However, it should be mentioned that we did not integrate monolingual French and English videos into our corpus as we supposed that German students might prefer to watch monolingual German videos that include French examples, or bilingual videos that give explanations in German and French. Additionally, we were mainly interested in the explanation of the aspectual distinction behind the past tenses. For this reason, we did not analyze videos that only focused on one or the other tense without explaining the underlying aspectual difference between the two. Videos that only deal with the formal construction of the tenses were not considered in the analysis either. In Table 1, we give a short overview of the five explainer videos that were selected for the present study:

No.	Title of the video	*YouTube* channel	Views (as of 08.07.2022)	Length	URL
V1	Unterschied Imparfait – Passé Composé – Grammatik Französisch	SchulArena.com GmbH	184.793	9:19	https://youtu.be/30tfh2SQAI0
V2	Unterschied Imparfait <-> Passé Composé/ Vergleich	Streberfabrik.com	146.674	4:19	https://youtu.be/v0N33b61g3c
V3	imparfait und passé composé: Wann verwendest du welches? – Französisch | Duden Learnattack	Duden Learnattack	95.483	4:21	https://youtu.be/wIkb709FyII
V4	Französisch lernen: Imparfait/ Passé composé im Vergleich	Wissen, einfach und schnell	part 1: 35.588 part 2: 14.094	part 1: 2:29 part 2: 2:12	part 1: https://youtu.be/v6IdsRy23N4 part 2: https://youtu.be/YmxikxN-xS4
V5	Imparfait und Passé Composé richtig einsetzen! Einfach besser erklärt!	Fit für Franze	48.621	5:38	https://youtu.be/DRfIz6gEQsU

Tab. 1: Description of the corpus (explainer videos on the difference between *passé composé* and *imparfait*)

3.3 Definition of the categories prior to data analysis

The corpus was analyzed according to Kuckartz's (2018) framework for qualitative content analysis using the MAXQDA software (VERBI Software, 2021). This method seemed appropriate because it allows for a codified, procedural examination of both evident text content and deeper

meanings that lie below the surface of the text (Kuckartz 2018, 21–22). We therefore followed a concept-driven *a priori* approach (ib., 123–24) by deducing categories in relation to the principles of multimedia learning from the literature (ib., 64–67) and applying them to explainer videos (cf. Table 2).

As summarized in Table 2, we established the multimedia principle formulated by Mayer (2022, 145) as an overall category and focused our analysis on its implementation in the selected videos. The other principles listed in the table are to be understood as subcategories of the multimedia principle.

name of category	**description**	**example**
multimedia principle	instructional content is presented with corresponding visual *and* verbal material	The example sentence ("De 1990 à 1991 j'ai fumé.") is read and presented while a picture of a cigarette is shown at the same time. (V1, [3:34–3:52])
non-coherence	inclusion of extraneous visual and verbal material	A picture of a family watching TV is shown while the example sentence ("Quand j'avais 10 ans, je vivais dans un petit village.") is presented at the same time. (V1, [02:13])
signaling	important information is highlighted visually or by using verbal signals	"Das *Passé Composé* verwendest du […], wenn Handlungen einen Teil der **Handlungskette** darstellen." (V1, [04:22], original emphasis)
spatial non-contiguity	written information is not presented near the corresponding graphic	Verbal information ("Comme tous les matins Minou dormait.") is written in the upper center of the video frame whereas the corresponding visualization (a sleeping cat) is placed in the lower left corner. Another sentence, which is not related to the content, is placed in between. (V5, [01:03])

name of category	description	example
temporal non-contiguity	verbal and visual information is not presented simultaneously	Spoken and written text ("Il y avait du vent.") is presented before the corresponding animation (wind blowing) is reproduced. The written text is no longer visible when the animation starts. (V5, [01:57–02:11])
pre-training and activation of prior knowledge	key concepts are mentioned or repeated before explaining new content; suitable videos are linked	"Wie du *imparfait* und *passé composé* bildest, erklären wir dir in anderen Videos." (V3, [02:51–02:54])
personalization	viewers are addressed directly; a conversational style is used	"Das *imparfait* verwendest du, wenn du über Gewohnheiten oder Erinnerungen in der Vergangenheit berichtest, wenn du über Handlungen berichtest, die zu jenem Zeitpunkt noch nicht abgeschlossen waren […]" (V1, [02:58–03:14])
storytelling elements	learning content is somehow embedded in a story	"Il était une fois une famille au Canada. Un jour en hiver, il faisait très froid, un homme a frappé à la porte." (V3, [00:01–00:09]) […] "So, jetzt aber zurück zum kanadischen Winter." (V3, [03:41–03:45])
attention/interaction	the learners' attention (in the sense of Keller) is captured by using emotional stimuli, posing questions, inviting for interaction or practice	"Machen wir einige Beispiele zusammen. Ich lese dir den Satz vor, du überlegst, welches der beiden grünen Felder jetzt da besser passen würde, also einmal *passé composé* oder dann eben *imparfait*." (V1, [06:29–06:45])

Tab. 2: Definition of categories for qualitative content analysis

3.4 Data analysis

As mentioned above, the data of our corpus was analyzed following a concept-driven *a priori* deductive approach of qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz 2018, 64–72) using the categories presented in Table 2. Although this attribution of text passages to categories is to be understood as an interpretative act, the category system and coding guidelines used ensure transparency and validity (Burwitz-Melzer and Steininger 2022, 279). The length of the coding units was determined by the meaning of the unit and depended on the data as well as on the description of the categories. That is why the different codes could contain longer units, like paragraphs or sentences, or shorter units like single words (Kuckartz 2018, 173).

Our analysis focused on both verbal and visual data, which were represented by the transcript of the spoken text of the video and the video clip itself. Due to the software-given possibility of connecting the transcripts with the corresponding video sequences, verbal material such as single words, sentences, or whole paragraphs was coded within the transcripts, whereas visual material such as pictures or graphs was coded within the video clips. In total, 454 codes for the above-presented categories were assigned and analyzed.

4 Preliminary results

In this section, we describe the core findings of the pilot study and provide the first insights gained from the coding process. We started our analysis by examining the implementation of the principle of multimedia learning before exploring the application of the subordinated categories. Concerning the presentation of corresponding visual and verbal information units, it can be observed that in all videos except for video two and the second part of video four, verbal and non-verbal resources are employed to transmit content. This indicates that most of the explainer videos of our corpus make use of Mayer's (2001, 2014) multimedia principle and convey dual-coded information to certain extents. However, it should be noted that the way words and images are combined into multimodal units differs from video to video and does not always meet the quality requirements of multimedia learning. For example: Most of the multimodal rep-

resentations found in the videos serve to clarify the semantics of lexical items rather than the grammatical rule. In the first video, for instance, several images are displayed to contextualize the example sentences and to provide a visual representation of the sentence or the word's meaning. As Figure 1 shows, the sentence "De 1990 à 1991 j'ai fumé" is illustrated together with a picture of a hand holding a cigarette (V1, [3:34–3:52]), but no visual information about the grammatical rule itself is given:

Fig. 1: Visual contextualization of word meaning (V1, [03:49])

On the one hand, the visualization of the semantic content may allow the viewer to understand and recall the meaning of the example sentence more easily. This may relieve cognitive load so that the viewer can spend more cognitive capacity on processing the explanation of the grammatical rule. On the other hand, the grammatical rule is transmitted only verbally, and an adequate visualization would be desirable.

In general, one can find several instances in which the visual representation is questionable. For instance, a picture of a family watching TV during the explanation of the *imparfait* (V1, [0:35–2:16]; cf. Figure 2) is used for the visualization of the sentence "Quand j'avais 10 ans, je vivais dans un petit village". The visualization does not correspond with the content of the example sentence and it seems that it has been integrated into the video for layout reasons only:

Fig. 2: Non-corresponding visual and verbal information (V1, [01:12])

Consequently, not only the multimedia principle is violated – due to the non-correspondence between visual and verbal material – but also the coherence principle as extraneous load is likely to occur. In fact, the viewer may have to waste cognitive capacity trying to reconstruct a dual-coded representation of the verbal and visual material presented in these sequences.

Another example of the use of the multimedia principle can be seen in the first ten seconds of the third video.[2] This video simultaneously presents the images of a cottage in a snowy forest, an agent reading a story, and animated snowflakes falling softly in the foreground. The viewer is thereby able to process the given verbal information without much cognitive effort and to engage with the content of the video. It is important to note that during this ten-second sequence, no verbal information is displayed in written form (except for the title *Französisch*). Thus, one could interpret this sequence as an example for the implementation of the principle of coherence since cognitive overload caused by extraneous verbal material is not likely to occur.

In the fourth video of the sample, which consists of two parts and utilizes a paper cut-out animation, the multimedia principle is applied

[2] Due to data protection regulations, we refrained from including screenshots in which a person can be seen.

in the first segment by using simple symbols that illustrate the meaning of the words written on the paper cuts (i.e., the alarm clock in Figure 3). In contrast to the videos discussed above, in which images are only used to support semantic comprehension of lexical units, a few symbols in video 4.1 are employed to illustrate the application of the grammatical rule. For example, the illustrations of alarm clocks in combination with the verbal explanation of bounded and unbounded events may provide the viewer with a double-coded mental representation of the difference between perfective and imperfective aspect ("All diese Sachen sind zeitlich nicht begrenzt; anders als beim *passé composé*". V4.1, [01:08–01:16]); cf. Figure 3). This may diminish cognitive load and release cognitive capacity for storage of grammar information units in long-term memory. However, the hand-drawn symbols are quite small and the direct spoken reference to the symbols is kept short. Additionally, from an applied linguistics perspective, it is questionable whether the alarm clocks are adequate symbols for the visualization of (im-)perfective aspect.

Fig. 3: Paper cut visualizations of the application of the grammatical rule (V4.1, [01:43])

The fifth video implements the multimedia principle by displaying not only static but also animated images that visualize verbally transmitted

content. As in the previous videos, the tendency in this video is to provide corresponding verbal and pictorial material mainly when it comes to contextualizing examples of language use and ensuring semantic comprehension of lexical items. Only some short sequences could be assessed as an attempt to provide a dual-coded representation of the grammatical rule. For instance, in Figure 4 a picture of a sleeping cat (Minou) appears together with an example sentence in the *imparfait*: "Comme tous les matins Minou dormait" (V5, [00:26–00:30]). This image primarily ensures a semantic understanding of the sentence. However, the sleeping symbols emanating from the cat's head may encourage comprehension of imperfective meaning as well. Suddenly, a phone rings and a corresponding image appears with a sentence in *passé composé*: "Tout à coup le téléphone a sonné" (V5, [00:30–00:40]). The combination of visual and verbal material enhances not only a double-coded mental representation of the sentence's meaning but also the understanding of perfective meaning underlying the *passé composé*. The motion lines surrounding the telephone emphasize the effect of a sudden action interrupting the temporally unbounded event of the cat sleeping. Similar attempts to apply the multimedia principle can be seen throughout the video, since each example of language use is accompanied by static or animated pictorial representations. However, it is important to note that corresponding visual and verbal material primarily supports dual-coding of lexical items and only to a certain extent dual-coding of the application of the grammatical rule (cf. Figure 4).

Having analyzed the implementation of Mayer's multimedia principle, we now proceed to examine further multimedia criteria according to our category system. Signaling, for instance, appeared to be a relevant principle in all videos. Especially visual signaling can be considered a frequent means of guiding attention on significant aspects. It was provided in the form of typography settings (bolding, italicizing, underlining, colored text, etc.) and dynamic visual effects such as animated objects, arrows, symbols, signs, diagrams, graphics, etc. However, in some cases, the means of visual signaling were overused (cf. Figure 5), and too many signaling techniques were applied at the same time. This may have the consequence that it remains unclear to the viewers which information is most important:

Fig. 4: Images used for semantic understanding of the sentence (V5, [01:03])

Fig. 5: (Over-)Use of signaling techniques (V1, [02:56])

In contrast, drawing attention to important information by using verbal resources rarely occurred. Only a few examples could be found, in which the narrator invites the viewer to focus on relevant aspects, for example in the sentences "bei speziellen, einleitenden Formulierungen. Die muss

man sich gut merken". (V1, [02:19–02:24]) or "ganz wichtig sind dafür nämlich immer die Signalwörter" (V5, [03:40–03:44]).[3]

Corresponding visual and verbal content was mostly placed next to each other or displayed simultaneously such that the principles of spatial and temporal contiguity were mostly fulfilled.

As described by the principle of pre-training, activating prior knowledge needed to comprehend the video's content may be one possibility to introduce information while reducing cognitive load. However, this aspect could only be observed partially in one video of our sample, in which the narrator mentions a related video in which the formation of both tenses is reviewed *(*"Wie du *imparfait* und *passé composé* bildest, erklären wir dir in anderen Videos."; V3, [02:51–02:54]). Further examples of pre-training were not found. It should be noted, however, that this aspect is difficult to implement in isolated *YouTube* videos and is more applicable in digital learning environments (e.g., Moodle) by using H5P, or within a specific teaching setting such as flipped/inverted classroom scenarios.

With respect to the verbal means of enhancing interaction with the audience or capturing the viewer's attention, it can be concluded that all videos provided information by using an informal speech style and addressing the viewer directly. Another way of improving the interaction is by posing questions and inviting the audience to practice. Videos one, three, and five make use of this strategy and thus generate greater engagement with the learning material than the other videos. However, most of the questions are intended as rhetorical questions and all tasks given are proposed as closed-ended exercises. In some cases, the videos intend to increase the learners' satisfaction by promoting a sense of achievement as implied in Keller's (1983; 2010) model by using, for instance, motivational phrases like "Die richtige Zeit zu finden ist gar nicht so schwer" (V5, [03:37–03:40]). Another technique of encouraging the audience to engage with the video's content is emphasizing the subject's relevance. This was noticed, for example, in the third video, in which *passé composé* and *imparfait* are presented as essential grammatical resources for telling

[3] It should be mentioned here that prosodic features of speech such as stress, intonation, rhythm, etc., which may be a means of verbal signaling as well, were not coded in the sample.

a narrative in the past (V3 [00:00–00:20]). Furthermore, the narrative frame built around the Canadian winter in this video (V3 [00:00–00:10], [03:42–03:45]) can be counted as a faint attempt to use the storytelling approach. However, the middle part of the video lacks any reference to the insinuated story so that the potential of the approach is not being exploited sufficiently.

In sum, it can be stated that most videos make use of the means of multimodality in order to represent information verbally and non-verbally. Nevertheless, the quantity of non-verbal representations such as animations and pictures could be increased. Additionally, double-coded content should be focused specifically on the main issue that the video intends to clarify (i.e., the difference between *passé composé* and *imparfait*) in order to implement the multimedia principle properly. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrated that visual signaling is a frequent means of enhancing multimedia learning. However, it should be noted that most videos tend to overuse this principle, possibly generating extraneous cognitive load. The use of verbal signaling was rarely found in the selected videos. It may be recommendable to increase the frequency of their use. The videos are mostly in line with the contiguity principle, especially from a temporal perspective. Spatial contiguity was also generally fulfilled. Pre-training and activation of prior knowledge as well as interaction seem to be the most difficult principles to implement, possibly because of the limited technical possibilities of the *YouTube* platform in establishing interaction with the viewer.

5 Discussion and concluding remarks

Regarding the theoretical approaches to multimedia learning (cf. Chapter 2), all of the analyzed explainer videos make use of the possibility of multimodal representation, which is provided by the combination of picture and audio and can be seen as the key feature of explainer videos (Wolf 2015, 129). However, the advantages of this combination come into play especially when non-verbal representations related to the teaching content, such as corresponding graphics, pictures, etc., are used in addition to verbal representations. Speaking in terms of Paivio's (1971; 1986) theory, information is then dual-coded. Some of the analyzed videos

tended to show only written text in addition to the spoken text without non-verbal representations. In contrast, other videos tended to use the multimodal potential of explainer videos to support the understanding of example sentences in the target language by clarifying the semantics of lexical items. However, they mostly failed to provide multimodal representations of the main subject of the video, i.e., the explanation of the underlying aspectual opposition of the French past tenses. Furthermore, some videos tended to include extraneous visual material that increased the cognitive load and violated the coherence principle. Consequently, the potential of multimodality should be further developed in all videos in order to ensure a high level of learning effectiveness (e.g., Mayer 2022, 145). However, it must be noted that the visual representation of abstract topics such as grammatical rules is more difficult to realize than for topics dealing with more practical processes such as, for example, the functioning of a car's braking system (as exemplified by Mayer 2022, 146). Nonetheless, visualizations of aspectual meanings are not impossible and could be integrated into the videos by relying on examples as proposed in the framework of cognitive grammar (e.g., Eibensteiner 2021, 319–23). Furthermore, Roche and Suñer (2017) illustrate how the integration of principles of cognitive grammar in short, animated videos can be used fruitfully for foreign language instruction.

Techniques of visual signaling are used in almost every video by highlighting headlines or bolding keywords, for example. In contrast, means of verbal signaling were rarely used. Developing this aspect by using different prosodic features of speech such as stress, intonation, and rhythm to attract the viewer's attention could reduce cognitive load and maintain the focus on relevant information (Fiorella and Mayer 2022, 189). Categories concerned with Mayer's criteria of visual and temporal contiguity were only rarely violated. Producers of explainer videos on *YouTube* seem to be aware of these two principles.

This is also true for the principle of personalization. In all videos, content was presented in a conversational style that provided the feeling of being involved in a social setting. This allows the viewer to get engaged with the video easily and thus increases learning outcomes. Applying the personalization principle also allows for possibilities for interacting with the viewer and enhancing participation in language practice. However, *interaction* was mostly achieved in the analyzed videos just by posing

rhetorical questions. Nowadays, there are several possibilities for including interactive exercises and tasks with automated feedback in explainer videos such as H5P. Exploring this aspect may yield new insights into the field of multimedia learning.

The pre-training criterion was rarely observed in the analyzed videos. However, despite the technical limitations of the *YouTube* platform, there are several possibilities to activate the learners' knowledge in the sense of a pre-training unit. For instance, videos could make clear what kind of prior knowledge is required to understand the video's content by, for example, reviewing unknown but presupposed concepts at the beginning of the video (Mayer and Fiorella 2022, 243). Considering the technical possibilities of *YouTube*, it is also possible to create an introductory video to explain basic knowledge and to link it to the main video by establishing a playlist of related videos or by using timestamps to add chapters. Ullmann (2018, 108–09), for example, recommends integrating an explainer video in the out-of-class phase as a linking bridge between a text-based input unit and an application task. In such a scenario, it can be assumed that the prior knowledge required to understand the explainer video is reviewed in the text-based input unit before watching the video.

Having discussed the results of the study, we now proceed to discuss some limitations of the methodology used. During the coding process, we noted that the definition of our categories was not always clear enough to ensure an unambiguous assignment of categories and data. In the qualitative research paradigm, however, such limitations need not be a sign of insufficient prior planning but can rather be seen as a consequence of working with empirical data (Aguado 2013, 122). Another limitation was the applicability of the method to multimodal data, since qualitative content analysis is prototypically used for written texts. For this reason, we slightly modified the codified process, extending the scope of the method to non-transcribed audio-visual data.

Although our study is based on a small-scale corpus, we think that the results give some first insights into how explainer videos should be produced and could be ameliorated by integrating principles of multimedia learning. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to expand the corpus to monolingual French videos as well as to other Romance languages such as Spanish, and to compare the results with those presented in the pre-

sent article. Further research should also deal with the explainer videos produced by educational publishing houses and compare the learning effectiveness of videos that fulfill the mentioned criteria of multimedia learning in comparison to videos that do not.

Finally, our analysis only focused on whether explainer videos considered the principles of multimedia learning or not. We did not look at the pedagogical implementation of the videos; future studies should therefore analyze how these videos are actually used and embedded in practice and how teachers and learners evaluate them.

Overall, we would like to emphasize that explainer videos on *YouTube* remain an important tool for learning a foreign language. Some of them are created with a lot of effort by teachers during their stressful daily school routine (especially in pandemic times). However, teachers and learners (as well as other producers of explainer videos) should critically reflect on how the videos should be used, and how they could be updated to the state-of-the-art of multimedia learning.

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Potential of *YouTube* Explainer Videos in Learning and Teaching Portuguese as a Foreign Language

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the advantages of including *YouTube* explainer videos in the teaching and learning of Portuguese as a foreign language (L2 or L3) (*Português Língua Estrangeira*, PLE) in Germany. After showing the advantages and limitations of using *Youtube* videos for foreign language teaching and learning, we will focus on two explainer videos for Portuguese and we will analyze their pedagogical potential and develop some worksheet-based activities that could be used to support the learning process. The learning goals of these activities are the development of intercomprehension skills and receptive variety competence (European vs. Brazilian Portuguese).

Keywords: YouTube explainer videos, Portuguese, third language, intercomprehension, pluricentricity

1 Introduction

As global society has become increasingly shaped by migration and worldwide economic interconnection, foreign language didactics and intercomprehensive didactic approaches have steadily gained in importance. In Germany, children acquire their first foreign language (L2), usually English, at a very early age and often go on to learn additional foreign languages, the so-called *third languages* (in our terminology: L3). Portuguese is typically chosen as a third language because it is often acquired after English and at least one other Romance language. The pupils or students (called *learners* in the following) thus draw on the explicit knowledge they have acquired in at least two other foreign languages (intercomprehension).

This article seeks to examine the possibilities of using *YouTube* explainer videos in support of the teaching and learning of Portuguese as a foreign language in German public schools, where it has been taught casually as L3 (cf. Reimann 2014; Melo-Pfeifer 2016; Reimann and Koch

2019).[1] We note that intercomprehension is very helpful in learning a new foreign language, especially when the languages belong to the same language family.

As a freely accessible platform, *YouTube* provides a large quantity of diversified teaching material. We want investigate some examples of explainer videos relevant to learners of Portuguese and show how they can enrich foreign language teaching. However, before analyzing individual examples, we will discuss the usefulness of *YouTube* for foreign language teaching in general, differences between L2 and L3 learning, and teaching Portuguese, a pluricentric language, as a foreign language.

2 The Advantages of Using *YouTube* for Foreign Language Learning and Teaching

YouTube is a Web 2.0 site primarily focused on sharing, commenting, and viewing videos (Brook 2011, 38). The format and structure allow peer feedback, which might have a positive effect on the quality of the videos and allows asynchronous interaction.

YouTube is highly relevant to teenagers and young adults, as they are usually familiar with the medium and regularly consume videos on the platform. According to the 2021 JIM Study, which studied youth media consumption, 95 % of leisure media use is dedicated to internet activities (mpfs 2021, 13 & 15), with *YouTube* being the third most important source of information for young people (ib., 53). Knowledge formats and tutorials are important contents for young people (ib., 67). Ideally, the language learning process can be linked to the learners' usage of *YouTube* in their free time by means of suggestion from a teacher. Presented channels can then be integrated into informal learning contexts. A great advantage of the platform is the wide range of videos on offer: depending

[1] Explainer videos are self-produced short films in which content, concepts, and contexts are explained with the intention of achieving understanding in the viewer or triggering a learning process (Wolf 2015, 123). However, whether the videos examined here can be considered as learning or explainer videos depends on the definition used. In our opinion, the videos considered here could be classified as both with regard to the definition by Wolf (2015).

on which genre of videos the learners prefer, many different examples can be found in the target language.

YouTube has been incorporated into language classrooms in different ways, including viewing video clips and discussing them in order to supplement textbook materials, promoting listening comprehension skills in the target language and creating speaking opportunities (Grünewald 2017a, 244), and allowing classes to create and share their own didactically structured videos (Brook 2011, 40). Specifically, *YouTube* can complement textbook learning by exemplifying authentic language use in different communicative contexts or by introducing grammatical phenomena such as the difference between *ser* and *estar* ('to be') or phonetic particularities. At more advanced levels, learners can develop a sense for the use of discourse markers, conversational words, and expressions of modality (Gerards and Meisnitzer 2017). Through *YouTube*, learners receive input from other native speakers in the foreign language in addition to language input from their teacher. This allows for the acquisition of cultural and linguistic knowledge from an ever-widening pool of new foreign language teaching videos, which in turn allows the learners to promote their conversational skills. Authors such as Malhiwsky (2010) and Pong (2010) have found that the use of *YouTube* in its various forms also improved learners' aural and writing skills.

With respect to comprehension and perception, using *YouTube* videos in the foreign language classroom enables learners to develop receptive variety competence (in the sense of Reimann and Koch 2019, 11) by providing access to different registers and authentic communicative situations as well as to information on the historical development of the studied language (Jones and Cuthrell 2011). Finally, the integration of *YouTube* videos in foreign language classrooms allows learners to develop self-determined learning skills and to autonomously research a topic.

From a pedagogical point of view, the use of *YouTube* in foreign language classes may have positive learning effects because learners can connect to the community of the target language. This might create a feeling of relatedness: a competence which is developed by effective communicative interaction and autonomy through the independence of actions (Alm 2006, 31). Independence of actions is often especially difficult to achieve in traditional foreign language classes where the use of

the language is mainly restricted to the space of the classroom and where the language is used primarily for learning the language itself. *YouTube* can help learners to overcome the boundaries of foreign language classrooms and to connect to the community of the target language.

A central premise in computer-assisted foreign language teaching is the relation to the learners' life reality. Due to the diversity and heterogeneity of the material on *YouTube*, the platform offers a very fertile pool of authentic material. Of course, a reflexive and critical approach to media remains the basis for a meaningful integration of *YouTube* videos into the classroom (Grünewald 2017b, 245). In the case of L3 learners, different teaching methods must also be considered to complement already adopted learning strategies.

3 Particularities of the Acquisition of Portuguese as an L3 and the Intercomprehension Approach

When students and pupils learn Portuguese in the German-speaking world, they have normally already learned English and another foreign language (often a Romance language). In these cases, Portuguese is therefore an L3. According to Hammarberg (2010, 97) the "term *third language* (L3) refers to a non-native language which is currently being used or acquired in a situation where the person already has knowledge of one or more L2s in addition to one or more L1s". The definition of L3 is therefore to be understood as an extension of the L2 category. The learners have another language to fall back on as a transfer basis about which, as a rule, more explicit qualitative and quantitative knowledge is available due to the acquisition process (Eibensteiner 2021, 71–72).

3.1 Particularities of L3 Acquisition

Language learning is a highly complex and dynamic process that is influenced by factors such as frequency, salience, and prototypicality (ib., 72). Declarative procedural models of language acquisition (Ullmann 2001; Paradis 2009) assume that L2 and L3 acquisition, in contrast to L1 acquisition, is mainly based on the declarative memory system, especially with regard to the acquisition of grammatical phenomena. During L2

acquisition, representations of explicit grammatical knowledge are built up in the declarative memory. L1 acquisition, in turn, is mainly based on implicit mechanisms provided by the procedural memory system. In the acquisition of an L3, learners can draw on explicit knowledge representations of the L2 in addition to the foreign language-specific factors (Hufeisen 2010, 204). Consequently, other didactic approaches are necessary for learning an L3.

3.2 Advantages of Multilingual Didactics

Plurilingual didactics builds on the insights of L3 acquisition research and advocates the use of the learner's entire linguistic repertoire in the acquisition of an L3. According to Meißner (1998, 46–50), the process of acquiring an L3 can be described as follows: after a brief phase of first impressions of decoding the new language to be learned and adapting the language production apparatus, the learner begins to scan the new language system for transfer bases by decoding meaningful lexical material as well as linguistic regularities (ib., 46–50). The learner creates hypotheses based on linguistic structural similarities regarding their function in the target language (Eibensteiner 2021, 89). Learning strategies which have been applied during L2 acquisition can also be transferred to L3 acquisition (Hu 2017, 247). In addition, multilingual speakers manifest increased language awareness (ib., 247).

In the case of Portuguese, which is usually acquired as an L3 after learning another Romance language (typically French or Spanish), both learning strategies and linguistic knowledge from the L2 can be transferred. An intercomprehensive approach to the L3, at least one that favors receptive language competence through cross-linguistic similarities, can therefore be useful. *Intercomprehension* is the ability to understand foreign languages or varieties without having formally learned or acquired them in their natural environment (Meißner 2017, 146). The intercomprehension approach plays an important role in the acquisition of an L3 because the awareness for similar linguistic phenomena in different languages within the same language family (in our case, the Romance languages) leads to interlingual transfer, which in turn favors the language acquisition process (Hu 2017, 247). According to Meißner (2017, 146), intercomprehensive learning and communication have proven to be suc-

cessful in several Romance languages (e.g. Spanish–Portuguese; French–Spanish; French–Portuguese; Italian–Romanian among others).

In intercomprehension-based learning, learners whose L1 does not belong to the same language family – as in the case of German-speaking learners of Portuguese – benefit from the prior instruction in an L2 from the same language family as functional and formal similarities between the Romance language can facilitate the acquisition process. This can be seen in the example of the Portuguese synonym pair *compreender* and *entender* ('to understand') and the French equivalent *comprendre* (cf. worksheet "Portuguese with Leo" in Section 6.1). The intercomprehensive approach makes it possible to expand individual multilingualism quickly, efficiently, and cost-effectively in favor of receptive competence in numerous other languages (Meißner 2017, 147). Consequently, learners can take advantage of this special quality of L3 acquisition and can consolidate meanings and grammatical rules more quickly through intercomprehensive linguistic comparative considerations.

When learning Portuguese as an L3, the use of *YouTube* explainer videos can be fruitful, because the learners might be able to globally understand Portuguese with no prior Portuguese knowledge. In this sense, *YouTube* videos provide authentic language use that might enrich Portuguese classes but can also be used in informal learning contexts. Explainer videos allow for an individually tailored, lived multilingualism in the classroom, as we find, for example, for Portuguese videos in the *YouTube* series "Portuguese with Leo"[2]). These videos promote and can be used as part of an intercomprehension approach.

4 Pluricentric Languages like Portuguese as a Challenge for Foreign Language Learning and Teaching

When learning and teaching Portuguese, it is important to note that we are dealing with a pluricentric language with different standard varieties (cf. Meisnitzer 2019). According to Clyne (1992), pluricentric languages are characterized by the existence of several normative centers for a his-

[2] https://www.youtube.com/c/PortugueseWithLeo.

torical language.[3] Meisnitzer argues for a consideration of both Brazilian (BP) and European Portuguese (EP) in Foreign Language Teaching, partly because of the considerable gap between the two varieties and due to the advanced consolidation of a prescriptive standard of BP (cf. Meisnitzer 2019, 20–23). The emerging non-dominant varieties of PALOP countries (*Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa* 'African Portuguese Speaking Countries') should also be considered, at least regarding receptive variety competence (ib., 23–24).

Receptive variety competence requires not only that learners master the norm of a variety and orient their language use accordingly, but also that they understand other diatopic standard varieties of that language (Reimann and Koch 2019, 11). Here, it is particularly important to stick to one variety in the beginner levels (cf. Leitzke-Ungerer 2017), i.e., either EP or BP, in order to avoid interferences (e.g. position of clitics in EP vs. BP). By beginning with one variety, the learners will learn one system and acquire an authentic performance in the foreign language, which is not given or at least endangered in the case of a mixture of varieties. This favors the learning process and the linguistic performance of the speakers.

Concurrent to one or more varieties being at least receptively mastered (Reimann and Koch 2019, 12; cf. Fig. 1), the learners develop a language awareness and listening comprehension for different varieties. This is particularly important at more advanced levels given the profound differences between the two varieties, as unfamiliarity with these can jeopardize understanding of the other variety, and Portuguese is learned with different goals in terms of usage. Sensitivity to different varieties is also essential in the context of intercultural competences.

[3] Regarding a definition of *pluricentric languages* cf. also: Arden and Meisnitzer (2013: 19–22); Bierbach (2001); Greußlich (2015); Krefeld and Pustka (2010), Oesterreicher (2001), and Soares da Silva (2016).

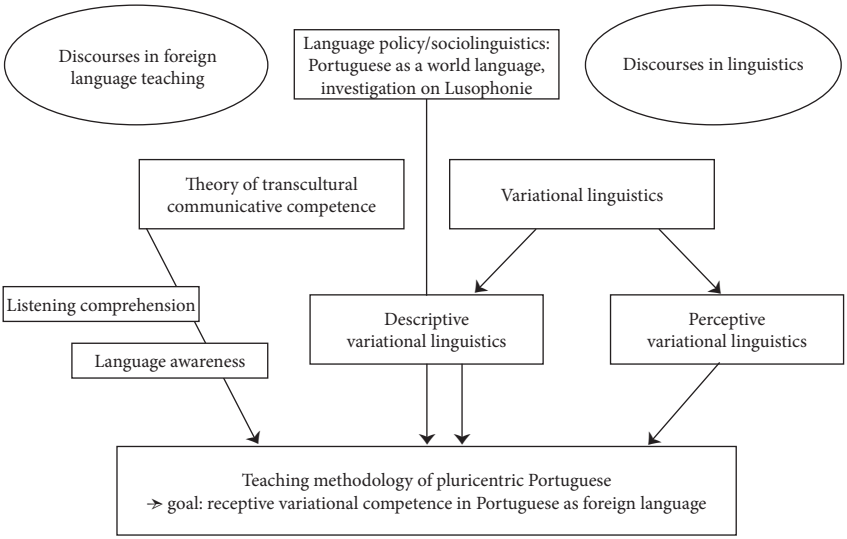

Fig. 1: Teaching Portuguese as a pluricentric language (Reimann and Koch 2019, 12; translated for this paper by LF & BM)[4]

Receptive variety competence expects the learners to understand the other variety/ies, develop language awareness of it, and to develop communicative inter- and transcultural competences (cf. Fig. 1). Additional varieties should be introduced gradually after the basic knowledge of the language learned in one selected variety has been consolidated (after Level A2 at the earliest) (Reimann and Koch 2019, 12). Thus, it is not a matter of the learner actively mastering both varieties, but of successively becoming more familiar with the different varieties of the language through controlled identification of differences. It is therefore important to provide access to standard Brazilian Portuguese, even if the variety learned is the European one. Given the profound differences between the two varieties on the phonetic, morphosyntactic, and pragmatic level, it makes sense to resort to authentic linguistic material from the internet

[4] For *perceptive variational linguistics*, cf. Krefeld and Pustka (2010).

in order to guarantee authenticity of the linguistic input (cf. examples in Meisnitzer 2019, 33–39).[5]

On the *YouTube* channel "Portuguese with Leo" (cf. Section 5.1.), we can see that explainer videos might help to raise awareness of linguistic peculiarities and allow the learner to develop receptive variational competence in different varieties of Portuguese (cf. Fig. 2).[6]

Fig. 2: Opening page of the videos on peculiarities of Portuguese in S. Tomé and Príncipe, Angola, and on phonetic peculiarities of Brazilian Portuguese (https://www.youtube.com/c/PortugueseWithLeo, 16/6/2022)

At the same time, different degrees of immersion in the foreign language can be reached by examining the series "Speaking Brazilian Language Portuguese", for example (cf. Section 5.2). Here, one can find, in addition to the basics of BP, videos on language history, on varieties of BP, and on different topics such as "Perfect or Imperfect" or "Coffee Vocabulary used in Brazil", among others. The videos are suitable for learning Portuguese in its Brazilian variety, but also for raising awareness of linguistic peculiarities that often complicate intercomprehension between varieties for both L1 speakers of BP and for learners of Portuguese.

In this case, suitable videos should be selected and the learning process should be guided by practice sheets like the one we propose in Section 5.2. In our example, we focus, among other things, on the abbreviations in the spoken language typical for BP. An approach based on the visuali-

[5] As an example of an explainer video for pronunciation cf.: "Brazilian Accent: How to sound like a native speaker?" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ITJf-CFPCU, 15/06/2022) (cf. Section 5.2).

[6] Examples from the channel are "Sotaques e expressões típicas de São Tomé e Príncipe", "Português de Angola: Palavras típicas e influências", and "Portugal VS Brasil: Diferenças fonéticas".

zation of the writing of these abbreviated forms has the advantage that the learner internalizes the forms more rapidly and then understands them more easily when they occur in other spoken communicative contexts (Exercises 1 & 3 in Section 5.2).

In order to make the language lessons more authentic, it makes sense for the teacher to work with didactically prepared, authentic audiovisual material. Here, too, *YouTube* offers a rich trove.

5 *YouTube* Explainer Videos in Portuguese Classes

As previously stated, *YouTube* is one of the most-used online platforms and provides a wide range of material for language classes. In the following, the curriculum for Portuguese as a late foreign language in Bavaria (federal stat in Southern Germany) is used to exemplify how explainer videos can be used in classes and to improve skills in a foreign language. Modern means of communication and videos are part of the curriculum (LPF 1994, 11). Therefore, two exemplary *YouTube* channels with self-produced videos for learners of Portuguese will be presented, and the potential of each selected video for foreign language teaching will be discussed.

In the following two sections, we will provide two examples of *YouTube* explainer videos which could enrich Portuguese classes. We will also present worksheets that we have developed and that are suitable for learning Portuguese as an L3. We thereby consider Portuguese's pluricentric nature and the fact that most learners have already acquired another Romance language when they start learning Portuguese as an L3 (intercomprehensive approach).

For this reason, we selected videos that fit the two focal points of this article: the role of intercomprehension in the acquisition of Portuguese as an L3 and linguistic features of Brazilian Portuguese in light of the need to promote receptive variety competence in BP when EP is the learned variety.

The learners' proficiency level (especially their oral and visual competences) as well as their media literacy are the most important criteria for the selection of *YouTube* videos to be used in or as a supplement to foreign language classes. Additionally, it is important to verify the vid-

eos' quality (e.g. whether the teaching content is correct or not), since there is no quality control on *YouTube*. For the examples provided here, it was verified that the videos provide the necessary semantic aids (in the form of subtitles, superimposed explanations, or visualizations that help to understand the video) and that the speech and articulation are appropriate for the learners.

5.1 Portuguese with Leo: Intercomprehensive Approach

"Portuguese with Leo" has been active on *YouTube* since July 22, 2020, and has 137,000 subscribers. The channel consists of a total of 84 videos in Portuguese, which have already been viewed eight million times as of May 8, 2022. It is aimed at people who want to learn more about Portuguese culture and language. The videos, which are up to 25 minutes in length, have an appropriate speech rate for learners. The channel's English name already signals that it is aimed at international viewers. For the production of the videos, the channel operator also collaborates with other French, Spanish, and Italian *YouTube*rs as well as people from the Portuguese-speaking world. Differences to other Romance languages are also highlighted.

In the video "Falei PORTUGUÊS em Paris e aconteceu isto… com @ French mornings with Elisa"[7] (cf. appendix for the corresponding worksheet), the protagonist Leo speaks Portuguese with people he meets on the street in Paris. Due to the existing linguistic similarities between French and Portuguese, the people interviewed manage to understand the questions and answer them in French. In general, Leo has a very clear pronunciation and chooses a reduced pace of speech in his videos. The responses in French are shown as translated subtitles in Portuguese. Depending on how well Portuguese is understood, there are repetitions, supporting impulses, or translations. The sequencing function of the video facilitates the quick selection of desired scenes.

The aim of the unit is to raise awareness for the importance and benefits of intercomprehension in the acquisition of an L3 and to show the learners how it works. The learning unit deals with the topic "Portuguese in France" and takes the intercomprehension between the two Romance

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9tnlHzPD-4&t=610s.

languages into account, as well as the role of stereotypes on the level of intercultural competences and communication, based on the fact that Portuguese people mostly came to France as guest workers.

In the first step, the learners reflect on the thumbnail of the video in the pre-phase (cf. worksheet, Exercise 1). After that, when watching the video for the first time, the focus is on the communicative and intercomprehensive strategies used by the protagonist: the learners will observe how the YouTuber proceeds in order to make it possible for his interlocutors to understand Portuguese without having learned it before. Afterwards, the focus is explicitly shifted once again to the introductory question (0:35 *Percebem o que estou a dizer?* 'Do you understand what I am saying?'), and Leo asks the people on the street if they understand what he is saying in Portuguese. At first, he deliberately uses the verb *perceber* ('to understand'); he uses the synonyms *compreender* and *entender* only if his interlocutors do not understand him. Since the synonyms are also found with their respective equivalents in French, the interview partners manage to decode the utterance. Leo then explains that the use of cognates (i.e., lexemes that have an equivalent in the other language) significantly facilitates comprehension (Kabatek and Pusch 2011, 189). When viewing the video, learners can first observe how the conversation is structured and then describe and analyze the process of intercomprehension before the explanation is shown. Overall, the video provides several examples of semantic strategies in authentic situations, such as the use of *lentamente* instead of *devagar* ('slowly') (cf. French *lentement*).

In the last part of the video (from 10:06), the two interlocutors are asked about stereotypes towards people from Portugal. After completing the second[8] and third tasks[9], the sequence on stereotypes can be played and explored by the learners (Exercise 3). The topic of stereotypes and their origins should also be addressed in foreign language teaching as part of the development of skills in intercultural learning (cf. Decke-

[8] In the second task, the learners are asked why the people in France do not understand Leo when he uses *perceber* instead of *compreender* or *entender* 'to understand' in his question.

[9] The second task consists of a listening comprehension task in which the learners have to find out in which sector most Portuguese migrants in France work and why.

Cornill and Küster 2015, 222–23; Vatter 2019, 188–92). The situation in the video shows a confident handling of stereotypes. Especially the historical breakdown of the stereotype towards the occupational fields of Portuguese people, with reference to another video, is very precise. Through the man with a Portuguese mother and the waiter with Portuguese neighbors, the viewers get an impression of the migration of Portuguese men and women to other countries in Europe as an important learning aspect to build up an unprejudiced and positive exchange (LPF 1994, 21 & 25).

Further on, the learners can use the interview questions or questions they have created themselves and ask them to people from other foreign language classes or passersby (cf. worksheet, Exercise 5). In doing so, they try out the strategies themselves and investigate how prior knowledge of other languages facilitates comprehension. Depending on the school's language profile, an interesting exchange between learners can be arranged. By applying the learning strategies derived from the video, the students learn that one's language skills can be used to communicate successfully with speakers of other languages.

Street surveys are a popular format on *YouTube* because different characters have their say and the reactions are unpredictable. In the video, ten people are interviewed, some of whom have already been to Portugal, had Portuguese lessons, or learned other related languages. Referring to the question of why they understand certain expressions, words, or statements/questions, speakers of at least one Romance language stated: "[…] ça va, parce que ça ressemble au français et l'espagnol" (1:44) ('That works, because it is similar to French and Spanish'). The fact that many learners acquire Portuguese as an L3 favors intercomprehension as addressed in the video. In this way, the viewers of the video observe authentic communicative situations in which multilingual interactions between speakers of related languages take place. For example, the two women interviewed (9:43) are able to understand Portuguese without having learned it before thanks to their additional knowledge of Romance languages. It is precisely because of the multilingual context in the videos and the medium's high relevance to the learners that these videos are suitable for integration into foreign language teaching.

5.2 Speaking Brazilian Language School: Receptive Variety Competence

The channel "Speaking Brazilian Language School" specializes in Brazilian Portuguese and has a reach of 140,000 subscribers. The uploaded videos include grammar, pronunciation, and lexis, but also regional culture and learning strategies. They are subtitled in both English and Portuguese, making it easier for learners to understand. The channel has been active since August 8, 2017 and has 234 videos with over 9 million views as of May 8, 2022. In her video productions, the channel operator interacts with people from the Portuguese-speaking world as well as with Portuguese learners. For example, in the video "BRAZILIAN ACCENT | How to sound like a native speaker" characteristics of spoken BP are addressed.

Fig. 3: The opening page of the video "Brazilian Accent: How to sound like a native speaker" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ITJf-CFPCU, 15/6/2022)

On one hand, the phenomenon of lexeme reduction (*reduções*) in spoken language is taken up, and on the other hand, connections (*ligações*) come into play in speaking. In the case of *reduções*, common abbreviations of the spoken language are presented (*cê* < *você*). In the case of *ligações*, several phenomena are explained (*morrendi* < *morrendo de*, cf. Exercise 1 of the practice sheet for both examples). These include vowel reduction when the following word begins with the same vowel (*tod*[**o:**] *mundo* < *tod**o o** mundo*), sonorization in intervocalic position [z] as a connection between words (*todo**s** os dias*, cf. Exercise 2 of the practice sheet), and the syllabic division of a word that ends in a consonant and is followed by a word that begins with a vowel to ensure the ideal syllable structure

(cv-cv). The *YouTube*r shows several examples and simulates a telephone conversation with her husband, which is also taken up in the tasks.

Depending on the focus in class, the video can be used in BP and/or EP classes with a receptive and/or productive character in order to foster awareness and openness towards other varieties of Lusophone language, since fostering such receptive variety competence is an important part of teaching practice. Additionally, the heterogeneity of languages and regional pronunciations (*sotaques*) should also be emphasized. It is always important to note that there is no hierarchical relationship between the different *sotaques*. Learners do not have to productively master several *sotaques*, but they will come into contact with different speakers who use them. Furthermore, the perception of linguistic peculiarities is trained, and an improvement of the pronunciation of *ligações* is stimulated.

In the first part of the teaching sequence (cf. practice sheet in the appendix), the teacher shows the title of the video and asks the learners what expectations they have of the video and which linguistic phenomena are crucial to achieve near-native pronunciation. After the exchange of ideas, the first sequence of the video (1:47–6:26) is played until the exercise concerning the reductions is resolved. The learners are asked to write down the reduced forms they are able to identify. In the next step, they are asked to 1. decipher the reduced forms of the telephone conversation themselves and to write down the full equivalents of the given reduced forms typical for spoken language, 2. check them (6:26–7:09), and 3. think up Rob's messages/answers in a given phone conversation with Virginia. While Virginia's questions are given, the replies given by Rob have to be filled in (by using the previously discussed reduced forms). As the video continues (7:09–9:51), the phenomenon of *ligações* comes into play, which should be highlighted with a color reproduced in full form in a given list while watching the video. Further on, such positions can be marked in edited text passages in order to focus on the connections during pronunciation.

In the post-phase, the learning group should assess the potential for itself. Depending on the main area of language application, various attitudes can arise here. Similarly, the teacher should emphasize that no native-like level can or needs to be reached when the phase for acquiring an L1 is completed (Roche, de Bot, and Uth 2019, 307). Every person

has their own way of speaking and learning foreign languages, and previously acquired languages have an effect that forms part of one's own identity.

6 Conclusion

In our paper, we showed that *YouTube* is an ideal complement for foreign language teaching because of its ease of use and the fact that most people are familiar with it. *YouTube* videos can be integrated into the classroom to explain problematic areas of Portuguese grammar, pronunciation, etc. using specific examples of L1 speakers. The videos can also be used to train receptive variety competence (i.e. training the rules of a particular variety of Portuguese as well as intercomprehension competence. This was exemplified in Chapter 5, in which we used two sample videos to show how these two competences can be fruitfully used in teaching Portuguese as an L3, and how other varieties can be made accessible to advanced learners.[10] The chosen videos are particularly suitable, since Portuguese is almost invariably an L3 when learned in Germany (except for teaching as a heritage language).

All in all, the *YouTube*-based activities should be used much more actively in the foreign language classroom, as they offer authentic language material from L1 speakers – which is very useful, for example, when considering varieties. Intercomprehension and awareness of L3 learner strategies is also central to teaching Portuguese, since learners in Germany have acquired at least one foreign language beforehand (English), but usually even a second foreign language – most of the time a Romance language (usually French or Spanish, sometimes Italian). Here, too, *YouTube* offers quite a bit of material.

[10] This is important because there is quite a demand for BP, although still a considerable proportion of teachers are L1 speakers of EP Portuguese, partly because of the funding and promotion of Portuguese teaching mainly by the Portuguese Instituto Camões for Language and Cooperation.

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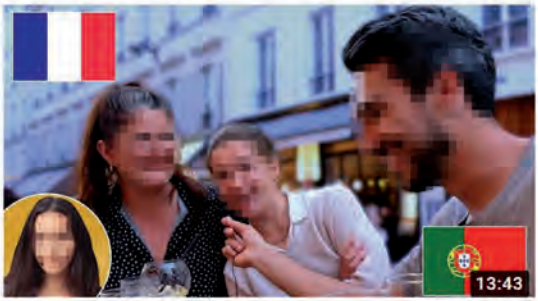
Falei PORTUGUÊS em Paris e aconteceu isto...

1. Antes de assistir, observa a miniatura do vídeo. Qual poderia ser o tema?



2.a) Assiste à sequência até ao minuto 2:14. O que é que Leo faz para que as pessoas em Paris o compreendam? Que estratégias utiliza?

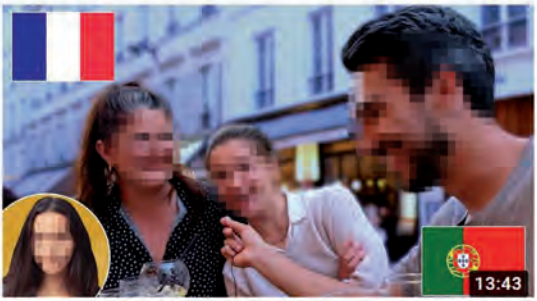
2.b) Porque é que as pessoas não compreendem a pergunta: *Percebem o que estou a dizer?* Porque é que Leo depois utiliza um verbo diferente?

3. Assiste ao vídeo desde o minuto 09:24. Em que setor trabalham muitos portugueses que emigraram para França? Qual o motivo mencionado por Leo?

4. Formula as perguntas do Leo para alunos de outra língua na tua escola ou pessoas na rua. Usa as estratégias e os conhecimentos prévios de outras línguas.

Falei PORTUGUÊS em Paris e aconteceu isto...

1. Antes de assistir, vê a miniatura do vídeo. Qual poderia ser o tema?



2.a) Assiste à sequência até ao minuto 2:14. O que é que Leo faz para que as pessoas em Paris o compreendam? Que estratégias utiliza?

- utiliza gestos
- emprega antónimos
- recorre à reformulação, à repetição, marca a acentuação
- fala devagar

2.b) Porque é que as pessoas não compreendem a pergunta: *Percebem o que estou a dizer?* Porque é que Leo depois utiliza um verbo diferente?

- Porque o verbo *perceber* não existe em francês. Depois utiliza o verbo *comprender*, que é muito semelhante ao *comprendre* em francês. Devido à semelhança formal, as pessoas agora compreendem Leo.

3. Assiste ao vídeo desde o minuto 09:24. Em que setor trabalham muitos portugueses que migraram para França? Qual é motivo mencionado por Leo?

- Nas décadas de 60 e 70, muitas pessoas emigraram de Portugal para outros países por causa do regime de Salazar. Devido ao elevado analfabetismo entre a população, muitas pessoas tiveram de aceitar empregos que não exigiam muitas qualificações.

4. Formula as perguntas do Leo para alunos de outra língua na tua escola ou pessoas na rua. Usa as estratégias e os conhecimentos prévios de outras línguas.

BRAZILIAN ACCENT How to sound like a native speaker

1. Escreve as frases completas.

1 Oi Rob! Ond cê tá? _____

2 Cê tá cum fome? _____

3 Eu tô morrendi fome. _____

4 Cê qué saí pra comê alguma coisa? _____

5 Ond cê qué fi? _____

2. Que dois fenómenos descreve a Virginia? Assinala com uma cor as partes das palavras que são realizadas de forma diferente pela sua posição.

Todo o mundo todos os dias vender uma casa

3. Completa a conversa com as mensagens de Rob.

Rob	Virginia
	Oi Rob! Ond cê tá?
	Cê tá cum fome?
	Eu tô morrendi fome.
	Cê qué saí pra comê alguma coisa?
	Onde você quer ir?

4. É útil compreender e ser capaz de realizar os aspectos temáticos da língua falada?

BRAZILIAN ACCENT How to sound like a native speaker

1. Escreve as frases completas.

1	Oi Rob! Ond cê tá?	Onde você está?
2	Cê tá cum fome?	Você está com fome?
3	Eu tô morrendi fome.	Eu estou morrendo de fome.
4	Cê qué saí pra comê alguma coisa?	Vamos sair para comer alguma coisa?
5	Ond cê qué í?	Onde você quer ir?

2. Que dois fenómenos descreve a Virgínia? Colore as partes das palavras que são realizadas de forma diferente pela sua posição.

A redução e a ligação

Todo o mundo todos os dias vender uma casa

3. Completa a conversa com as mensagens de Rob.

Rob	Virginia
Oi Virginia! Tá em casa	Oi Rob! Ond cê tá?
Tá cum fome. Cê também?	Cê tá cum fome?
	Eu tô morrendi fome.
Tamos os dois	Cê qué saí pra comê alguma coisa?
Seria ótimo	
Ao restaurante italiano na esquina	Onde você quer ir?

4. É útil compreender e ser capaz de realizar os aspectos temáticos da língua falada?

Anne-Marie Lachmund (Potsdam)

Grande Littérature Meets Social Media: Transmedial and Transcultural Approaches to Fostering Sustainable Reading Motivation and Digital Discourse Literacies

Abstract: The 21st-century foreign language learner is a media-competent learner who increasingly comes into contact with culture via virtually shared pictures and practices (OECD 2021). The learner perceives a cultural artefact and is able to decode and interpret it inter- and transmedially in consideration of its relevance for the cultural memory, as well as to respond to it in a subjective-aesthetic manner. Taking literary classics as an example, this contribution presents an approach connecting the entertainment and communicative functions of a social media platform: users spend free time while gathering information using authentic, user-generated, image-based materials that document reading activities in a creative, global, multilingual and highly subjective way. With the help of "hashtag analysis," the article shows how reading motivation and interest in (classic) literary works and authors can be fostered by simultaneously stimulating digital discourse literacies.

Keywords: social networks, Instagram, hashtag analysis, literary classics, reception aesthetics

"La lecture est une amitié." (Marcel Proust)

1 Introduction

Since social media has become increasingly omnipresent in everyday life[1] (JIM study 2022), its presence in schools – visible or invisible – is inevitable. In anticipation of a growing trend, foreign language teachers[2]

[1] The results of the 2022 JIM study, an empirical investigation into media usage of teenagers from 12 to 19 years of age, show that 84 % of German teenagers spend time on the internet daily (and 92 % using their smartphones every day), with an average of 204 minutes (compared to 2021: 241 minutes, 2020: 258 minutes). Their most important app is *WhatsApp* (79 %), followed by *Instagram* (31 %), *TikTok* (24 %) or *YouTube* (23 %). Other social media sites like *Snapchat* rank lower.

[2] The following article focuses on German-speaking teaching and learning contexts.

are well advised to explore the potential of social media. While there is indisputable value in seeing the outputs of social media that foster functional communicative competences as both a "language didactic through social media" and a "didactic of social media-mediated language" (Brocca 2020, 11), the field of foreign language didactics offers the opportunity to develop social media literacy within subject-related topics that goes beyond linguistic objectives. Indeed, technologies of social media can simplify the didactic settings that advocate educational and didactic principles like learner-orientation (Surkamp 2017), action-orientation (Bach and Timm 2003) or constructivism (Dron 2014, 34–42).

Fundamentally, social media present an opportunity to "merge formal and informal learning approaches and thereby integrate components of daily social interaction into the learning process" (Brocca 2020, 14). Taking into account this very specific but basic condition of social media as an informal learning setting, I would argue that this advantage should be exploited to tackle one of the most formal teaching objectives that is most likely to be achieved in traditional settings[3]: Reading (and understanding) literature is one of the most difficult,[4] but also most prestigious, highest-rated goals when learning a foreign language. Learners of French as a foreign language particularly struggle with reading long, sometimes historical narrative texts (Hertrampf 2018, 42; cf. also Steinbrügge 2016). Todorov (2007, 87) argues that one reason for students' reading aversion can be found in the teaching of literature itself with its restriction to traditional approaches and its focus on textual analysis. He therefore calls for a multidimensional approach to literary texts that frees itself from purely *classical* textual analysis and interpretation. Another reason

[3] Methods belonging to the fields of literature studies and German philology, which focus on the development of the intellectual reader, have had a strong impact on teaching literature in a foreign language in German schools, privileging analytical methods in comparison to more creative, open ones (Lütge 2019, 3; Steinmetz 2018, 4).

[4] According to the 2021 PISA special report on 21st-century readers, Germany takes a leading position in the decline of reading pleasure among schoolchildren between 2009 and 2018. Only two other countries recorded a similarly sharp decline (Finland and Norway). Germany was one of the PISA participating countries with the largest gender and socio-economic differences in reading pleasure in 2018 (OECD 2021, 2).

can be detected in the reading selection, which is far too often oriented toward the *great* classics of elitist literature: As Gabathuler (2016) was able to show in her empirical study *Apprécier la littérature. La relation esthétique dans l'enseignement de la lecture de textes littéraires*, literature classes that deal with canonical texts tend to be teacher-centered, formal, passive and – from the viewpoint of the students – *boring*.

Canonical literature in particular has a hard time legitimizing its relevance in the context of output-orientations and youth advocacy (Hethey 2015, 17). Not only from a content-based or age-appropriate standpoint has the study of canonical literature been criticized; above all, the more difficult accessibility to it arouses feelings of (primarily linguistic) overburdening and a certain mode of elitist *Otherness*. However, a classic work is attributed a special status in a nation's canon reflecting its values and collective identity, which goes hand in hand with increased representativeness on a literary, poetic and linguistic-aesthetic level. Classics are also valuable because of their extemporal, timeless character, which is why themes, issues and conflicts are not bound to a particular epoch (and audience), but can be comprehended also by contemporary readers (Voss 2014, 2). Nevertheless, this particular potential of a classic is often opposed to assertions of its obsolescence, carrying the burden of being *outdated*. One conclusion of this observation is often a redefinition of the canon (e.g. Hertrampf 2018, 53): By choosing contemporary literature with a connection to young people's everyday lives or expanding the types of texts to include comics, graphic novels or rap, a *replacement* of the canon may lead to the suppression of certain literary works that are vitally important for (especially) French culture.[5]

When there is a lack of practice reading literary classics, a lack of role models within the peer group might particularly increase the lack of interest in a classic itself. Furthermore, teachers of foreign-language literature have to deal with the question of how to facilitate access to

[5] The cultural life of a country (here, France) depends on familiarity with its canon, obtained in the language classroom. French education attempts to encourage the development of a 'good style.' Some word meanings, idioms or phrases can only be recognized with literary (background) knowledge, which is then part of everyday culture. Furthermore, long lists of *must-read* works can be found online, including by authors like Balzac, Camus, Molière, Proust.

important literary works in order to enable an intensive and aesthetic understanding rather than cutting[6] classics from the curriculum due to their linguistic difficulty. In addition, the modified, and thus contemporary goals of a rather global understanding, namely the discursive negotiation and transcultural relevance of a literary artefact, should be reflected on. In search of new approaches to meet these contemporary goals, a radical and consistent reception-aesthetic approach[7] seems to be a privileged access code that needs to be formulated as a preliminary stage of the actual reading process (Lachmund 2021). In the course of this process of reflection and (re-)navigation, traditional beliefs around foreign language literature teaching are challenged, which deal with the questions of what foreign language readers should be able to do (and read),[8] what needs to be understood (at what level) and how this is in line with 21st-century reading skills.

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[6] Hertrampf (2018, 48) mentions a vicious circle in which students' negative basic attitude toward literature classes (which often results from bad experiences in L1 classes) results in avoidance strategies that ultimately lead to a reduced reading of literary texts in general.

[7] Cf. Winko and Köppe (2008) focus on, among others, Eco's 1998 *Lector in Fabula*; Burwitz-Melzer and Bredella (2004) transferred the concept to teaching approaches with regard to TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language).

[8] In this regard, I strongly agree with Hertrampf (2018, 48), who questions the belief that students should perform the same literary and aesthetic reading objectives in the foreign language as in their mother tongue, where the most profound reading comprehension results in the formation of the *intellectual reader* (e.g. cf. Florio-Hansen 2012). Especially canonical texts are associated with the formation of the so-called *intellectual reader*: "(ein) kompetenter Leser also, der die Texte in ihrer spezifischen Funktionsweise als fiktionale, poetisch geformte und mehrdeutige Gebilde durchschaut. Es geht um einen Leser, der über ausreichend Wissen verfügt, um intertextuelle Bezüge zu erkennen und verstehensrelevante Leerstellen zu füllen, der symbolische und motivische Verdichtungen erkennt, intratextuelle Verweisungszusammenhänge entflechtet und auf das Spiel mit Erwartung und Erwartungsbruch achtet" (cf. Kämper-van den Boogaart and Pieper 2008, 47, cited in: Steinmetz 2018, 4; '(a) competent reader, then, who sees through the texts in their specific mode of operation as fictional, poetically formed and ambiguous entities. It is about a reader who has sufficient knowledge to recognize intertextual references and to fill in gaps relevant to understanding, who recognizes symbolic and motivic condensations, disentangles intratextual

The present article cannot answer as to whether classic texts should be replaced by contemporary ones or whether reading didactic, and thus shortened versions of *grande littérature* are better than reading the integral, and thereby authentic texts, but it does offer a new perspective on *reading* world literature without focusing on traditional reading goals like intensive reading comprehension. Instead, it aims rather to suggest a way to reconcile the various functions of social media as a platform not only for spending free time, but also for seeking communication, information or entertainment and encountering authentic materials that could stimulate reading motivation and foster interest in (classic) literary works and authors. The advantages of a social network like *Instagram* may outweigh the aforementioned drawbacks in terms of students' engagement with world literature and enable transcultural sustainable approaches to teaching the classics. In this way, the status of a literary work can shift from *elitist* to a *normal* part of culture and its image as a particularly *difficult* symbol of the educated can be democratized. The teaching method proposed here demonstrates that by enabling a connection and interaction with the real world – which also means leaving the integral literary text behind in order to explore transmedial, that is, paratextual phenomena – social media might offer the opportunity to work within a constructivist framework beyond encouraging digital discourse literacies.

2 Social media and its potential for the literary foreign language classroom: from translocal to transcultural and beyond

Especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, teaching through and with digital media has become more important. Data that might answer the question of to what extent the use of social media has shaped the new

contexts of reference, and pays attention to the play with expectation and the breach of expectation'). With a basic and more relativized view on possible communicative goals that can be achieved in school settings, reading literary texts in a foreign language should always be considered within the foreign language didactic context and therefore question the (possibly achievable?) formation of an intellectual reader.

learning environments in homeschooling settings are under-reported. However, the debate about digitization in schools is an ongoing one in German popular media, leaving the public opinion polarized: Some perceive social media as a potential threat, stressing the dangers and pitfalls, while others see it as largely beneficial to modern learning environments (e.g. Kohlmaier 2017; Lehrer-Online 2020). Skepticism on the part of German educational institutions toward social media remains dominant, reducing too often the institutional engagement with the networks regarding issues of internet security, personal data protection regulations and critical literacies that should enable students to competently brave the pitfalls (e.g. misinformation, hidden advertising, bullying) of virtual communities (Brocca 2020, 12). Hence, students' media-related activities in their leisure time and at school usually have little to do with one another. Unfortunately, students' media preferences are too often ignored, and their skills acquired in the context of informal information gathering are not taken into account (Kammerl and Mayrberger 2011).

Before we can outline how social media may enhance language learning in institutional settings and how its potential can be exploited, we should take a closer look at contemporary digital practices to understand the vast systematic changes that come along with digital and social media cultures.

Manuel Castells coined the term *network society*, in which the transformation of the "social structure resulting from the interaction between the new technological paradigm and social organization at large" takes place (Castells 2005, 3). The so-called "hypersocial society," which contrary to polarized voices is "not a society of isolation," proves that "people fold technology into their lives" to create a "networked individualism" (Castells 2005, 11) that is at the same time global and local (= *glocal*). The patterns of this new media culture are structured around membership and daily unlimited communication, where needs for belonging and demarcation are satisfied (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008). Social media have become today's most important platform for teenagers to find resources to actively deal with the challenges of everyday life and to communicate about a past or present situation. It is a space where values, attitudes and lifestyles are negotiated and role patterns and life plans are presented, tried out and evaluated (boyd 2014). Users of social media share a translocal and transcultural *desire* to become a *microcelebrity*,

which according to Marwick (2015, 138) is a "mind-set and a collection of self-presentation practices endemic in social media, in which users strategically formulate a profile, reach out to followers, and reveal personal information to increase attention and thus improve their online status." These practices of self-presentation are shared globally, and it is indeed this desire that unfolds the didactic potential of social media in the transcultural language classroom: According to Hepp (2009, 2), traditional media cultures are unquestioningly interpreted as *national* (i.e. TV), although contemporary digital media landscapes are characterized by greater complexity, making the digital space transcultural and multilingual through the sharing of participatory needs and desires for entertainment, aesthetics and communication all at the same time. Whereas territorial concepts of culture are internally oriented and endogenous, translocal concepts of culture are external and exogenous, focused on hybridity, translation and ongoing identification (Hepp 2009, 5). By analyzing cultural patterns, comparing them in different ways and critiquing them from multiple perspectives, a consumer of social media can become a researcher. The analysis that can be carried out is interesting on two levels: first, the socially constructed level of everyday meaning production through practices and, second, the textual level itself, i.e. the discursive formations according to Foucault, which result in patterns of thought, discourse, practice and thus representation. The need for the connectivity that social media offer emerges, for example, through a shared hashtag that connects the translocal with the transglobal. This need formulates modified objectives such as "the importance of contextualisation" (Woolgar 2002, 14–19), fostered by a digital discourse literacy that renders inter- and transmedial as well as inter- and transcultural references visible and comprehensible. Because social media are not reducible to limited use contexts as they combine practices of social participation with phenomena of individual communication, cultivation of relationships and even monetary incentives by various entities from political groups to companies and organizations, there is an ongoing construction of meaning, identity and culture (Couldry 2008, 3).

The digitization of media culture has not stopped at the field of literature. The new possibilities for design and publication are also changing the reception of literary texts: Read online thousands of times, disseminated as retweets and accessed digitally, electronically published litera-

ture has profound effects on the literary market, on buying and reading habits (Meyer 2019, 9). From formal to more informal reading, *distant reading*,[9] a term generally attributed to Moretti (2000), now includes works outside the established literary canon ("the great unread"; ib., 55) and reception styles outside the traditional field of literary studies and analysis. From e-books to e-mail novels, audiobooks and *twittérature*, new literary genres[10] have found their entrance into everyday reading, but especially the literary discourse on Instagram offers several benefits that can be exploited for foreign language learning purposes.

2.1 The #bibliophiles on #bookstagram

Instagram, the biggest image-based social network, was launched in 2010 as an app for iOS, and in 2012 for Android. In 2011 Instagram already had 10 million users, in 2012 80 million and in 2018 500 million (Statista – Dossier Instagram 2018). In 2012, the company was taken over by *Facebook*. Every day, the number of users and uploads grows; there are currently around 500 million monthly active users worldwide. The majority are between 13 and 29 years old and the community uploads 95 million photos and videos per day (Schreiber 2020, 91).

The *Instagram* user profile is reduced to a small amount of information (one user picture and 150 characters of text). From the beginning, the app was designed and optimized for use with a mobile device, making uploading only possible via smartphone. After pictures have been created or uploaded from the gallery, the user has to pass the menu called *Aesthetics*, which certainly highlights the ambitions of *Instagram*: The social network is well-known for its filters to change the contrast, color and saturation in different ways. Especially in early versions of the app, the filters were characterized by strong retro-aesthetics (Jurgenson 2011), which make the smartphone photos look like photographs from

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[9] *Distant reading* as opposed to the traditional *close reading* challenges the Western approach to the small group of literary texts that are part of a canon. Distant reading privileges new approaches to textual analysis with the help of computational science and empirical methods to, among other goals, investigate a large collection of texts vs. an individual one (Moretti 2000).

[10] This article cannot take into account topics such as *digital poetry* (Naji 2021) or *Twitteratur* (Meyer 2019), since it would exceed the scope of this paper.

earlier decades. Even if one does not select any editing, *Instagram* forces the users to scroll through the filter menu before they are able to send the image (and make it visible to everyone or restrict it to followers). One of the possible metadata operators is the hashtag (#), which transforms words and word creations into a link. This more thematically oriented form of linking permits filtering and bundling of content in order to contextualize a social media phenomenon or trend. The analysis of pictures and posts linked via hashtag allows researchers to investigate discursive practices, codes and norms. The digital experience space enables a global understanding, an overview, a (local) comparison with worldwide enthusiastic readers. The multi-layered movements that are embedded in a complex process of interpretation and construction can be retrieved, joining countless elements into an organized discourse of affiliated users.

On Instagram, #bookaddicts, #booklovers and #bookaholics, altogether the so-called *bibliophiles*[11], share their reading experiences, reading choices and recommendations via hashtags. They ask the community for reading advice (e.g. "QOTD [Question of the day, AML]: What series do you hope to start reading this year?" or "What do you plan to read over the weekend?"[12]), keeping their followers updated on their reading goals and plans and often act as literary critics on a very personal, subjective-aesthetic level. In many cases, the post is combined with favorite sentences, mostly quotes from the original text or its author, enabling a very individual insight into another person's reading experience. However, the transformation of the literary texts into an Insta-post is interesting not only from an intertextual point of view; the reader also has to pick a picture to accompany the posting. The #bibliophiles prefer to show the covers of the books they are talking about (ones they are reading at the moment, are attempting to read, have just purchased, etc.), products/places/things they associate with the read, or the pose of the

[11] Only on *Instagram*, a total of 16.3 million entries by passionate readers and book lovers assemble under the hashtags #bibliophile, #bibliophiles and #bibliophilelife, where they share their favorite reads, and their reading experiences and recommendations, with the global web community [retrieved on June 30, 2023].

[12] Instagram account "the.eworm – Book enthusiast & Collector," https://www.instagram.com/the.eworm/, who uses the QOTD-format in nearly every post.

reading performance in an aesthetic way. Sometimes they photograph themselves while doing (and feeling) something that is somehow connected to the read (cf. Fig. 1).

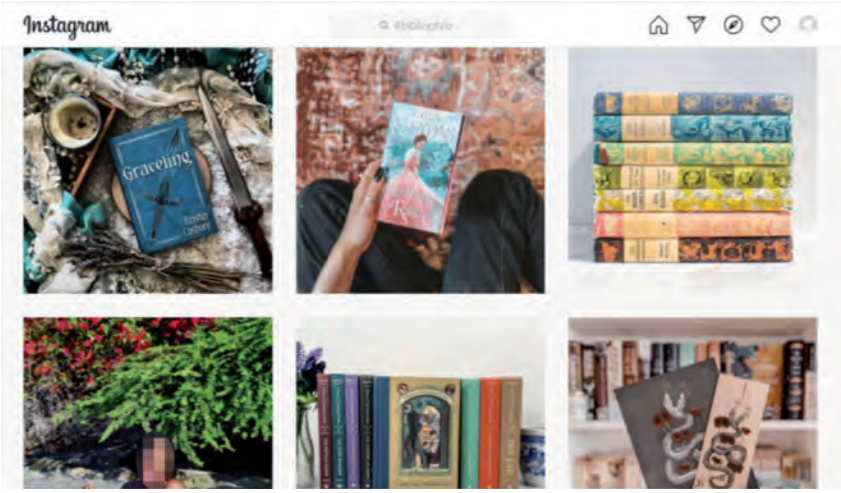

Fig. 1: "Top posts" for #bibliophile, retrieved on July 23, 2022, screenshot: https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/bibliophile/

A search for a work- or author-related hashtag demonstrates the relevance of the reading piece for a contemporary public. By posing questions like "Why do readers of today choose to read this or that work? What do they take away from it? How do they translate it into images?" a shared experience can lead to new insights and peer connections. The reading process is communicated through hybrid, transmedial, translingual and transcultural means, emphasizing the democratic *need to belong* rather than exclusivity and separation. This amount of connectivity conveys authentic materials that could function as input for further language production and analysis.

2.2 Following #Proust: the discursive practice of hashtag analysis

To conduct a hashtag analysis in answer to the questions mentioned above, a canonical literary work that is mostly perceived as *elitist*, *difficult to read and understand* and *outdated* has been chosen here. Mar-

cel Proust's collection of novels *À la recherche du temps perdu* (English translation: *In Search of Lost Time*) that is now over a hundred years old is widely known for both its length and its theme of involuntary memory; the most famous example of this is the *episode of the madeleine*. It has had great influence on twentieth-century literature and writers, arousing respect but also contempt.[13] Nevertheless, it is granted the status of being part of the canon (cf. entry *Kanon*, in Winko 2008, 344), which is why one might assume a special presence in National Libraries and classics sections of bookstores, but there is also a great response to be noticed in popular culture, which confirms a cultural climate that promotes the dissolution of segregation between high and popular culture: "For few canonical modernist writers certainly, [sic] have provoked such response in popular culture as Proust, whose proliferating presence in jokes, puns, cartoons, advertisements, magazine articles, and the newspaper columns of Russell Baker has made him something of a media cliché" (Gray 1992, 152).

Social media users' interest in transforming this canonical text can be detected in Proust's presence not only on *Instagram*, but also on other social networks such as *Twitter*. Patrick Alexander created "Proust on Twitter," a rewriting of all seven volumes of Proust's novel in a series of daily tweets.[14] With his twitter account, he recognizes that Proust was and is a celebrity, obsessed with the small details of his own and his aristocratic friends' daily activities. He answers the question of how Proust might have expressed himself in the age of *Twitter*, offering a new approach to getting in touch with a great author with the help of daily short doses of everyday language that become the basis for discussions in the comment columns.

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[13] Not only today's readers of Proust report their difficulties just as Rottler (2018), Zschokke (2017) or Küveler (2016) did (who put Proust on his list of unreadable novels); already during Proust's lifetime authors complained about it: "J'ai commencé le livre avec enthousiasme, puis j'ai fini par le laisser tomber avec effroi, comme on refuerait de boire un soporifique" (Rachilde in *Mercure de France*, January 15, 1914, cited in: Benhaïm 2009; 'I started the book with enthusiasm, then dropped it with dread, like someone who refuses to drink a sedative'). The foredoomed read has ever since been a fertile basis for the production of readers' own texts (cf. *Schmidt liest Proust* 2010, which originated from a blog).

[14] 17,749 tweets on June 30, 2023 and counting.

Turning back to the world's largest image-based social media platform *Instagram*, a total of 246,441 posts are gathered under the hashtags #Proust and #MarcelProust.[15] Other related hashtags are #madeleinedeproust with 31,478 posts and #alarecherchedutempsperdu, which lists comparatively fewer posts (21,673).[16] The media presence is also lower under the hashtags #insearchoflosttime (11,104 posts) and #aufdersuchenachderverlorenenzeit (996 posts), but the results cannot confirm a certain (under-) representation since the usage of hashtags certainly favors shorter, but multiple items (this is why also #losttime could be used to tag Proust's novel). Under the hashtags #recherche or #larecherche, as Proust's work is called particularly in the academic world, no Proust-relevant content can be found. The practice of hashtags certainly privileges name tags over book titles – a work can therefore be found by its writer. In comparison to other French canonical authors, the number of posts vary: #Camus + #AlbertCamus takes the lead position with a total of more than 660,000 posts, followed by #Balzac + #HonoredeBalzac with approximately 170,000 posts and #Molière + #Moliere with 148,000.[17]

When searching for #Proust, an *Instagram* user[18] is confronted with a vast universe of pictures and posts, such as quotes in many different languages. What the users see changes with every search, making the results ephemeral and instant. Nevertheless, all posts have something in common, which has to be detected by clicking on it. The caption and its related hashtags are then associated with the photo, comments and reactions are contextualized, and perhaps the post will be *saved* for later

[15] All data retrieved on June 30, 2023 via https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/proust/.

[16] A sudden increase in the number of posts was registered during the first Covid-19 lockdown in spring 2020, when many people stuck at home started reading to pass the time (e.g. Munday 2020, who reports his "epic quarantine reading project" by "tackling Proust's famously massive work").

[17] These authors have been chosen for comparison only because they are mentioned in Hertrampf (2018) and Hethey (2015) as exemplary canonical authors relevant for teaching French as a foreign language in Germany.

[18] To perform a hashtag search, creating an account is not a necessary prerequisite, however, the platform quickly prompts you to proceed with a signup. This condition must be taken into account if the hashtag analysis is to be used in the classroom.

(which is necessary, since social media content is hard to find again). Clicking on posts is therefore extremely taste-related and very subjective in connection to previous knowledge. Every search is therefore highly curiosity-driven, since it permits an insight into people's beliefs, practices and intimacy (Fig. 2–3).

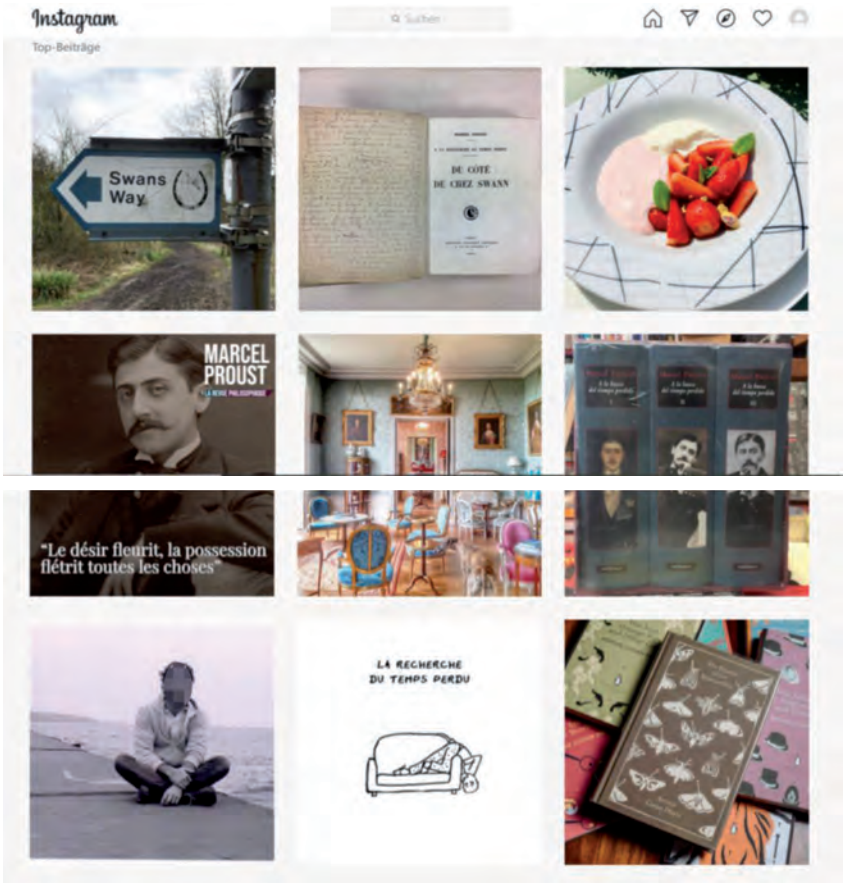

Fig. 2–3: Top posts for #proust, retrieved on July 23, 2022, screenshot: https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/proust/

This act of cyber-wandering is discursive itself, since the fragments construct a deterritorial space of the global *network society* (Castells 2005) in which individual practices and society structures are mutually articu-

lated. By analyzing the hashtag results, a user tries to contextualize a post to find a pattern in its connections, in this case the connections to the author and the work, e.g.: What do strawberries have to do with Proust? One possible answer to this question might be that they are someone's personal *madeleines* because they remind them of childhood summers (subjective-aesthetic quality), or it could be a reference to the narrator's favorite dessert (intertextual, intermedial qualities). It is indeed the interplay between text and image that can be used both to hypothesize about the intention of the post and to reduce the complexity of the novel when students have to produce their own captions, write comments and reply to them.

By carrying out a hashtag analysis, students are confronted with a major difficulty of discourse analysis on the web in general: The number of results makes it barely manageable and they have to filter out discourse fragments that do not address the topic as desired. Additionally, due to the highly dynamic environment, it is not subject to any fixed periodicity and eludes standards (Zeller 2017, 389). Based on this huge amount of data, therefore, only an overview of the recurring motifs associated with Proust and his work on *Instagram* can be offered here: In addition to images documenting readers' visits to Proust-related pilgrimage sites such as *Illiers-Combray*, *Cabourg* or Proust's grave at the *Père Lachaise* cemetery, poetic landscapes and architectural photographs appear that are reminiscent of places and monuments from the Proustian universe, often subtitled with matching quotes from the *Recherche*. Quotes are usually restricted to one or two sentences and reflect the social network's common topoi: travel, food, (love) relationships, memory.

However, most common are photos of book covers in its various editions, usually staged on coffee tables next to a cup of tea and a pastry – preferably a *madeleine* – as well as handwritten quotes or people reading the book in places like train stations, on trains or in gardens. The #booklovers and #bibliophiles stage themselves as readers who endure the slow narration and long sentences, as the comments under the pictures suggest. They are admired as role models for their intention and perseverance to finally begin or complete the long-planned reading project. Moreover, Proust serves as a source of inspiration for street art, sketches and graffiti incorporating the famous author's face, which is unmistakably recognizable thanks to the moustache and pose.

The transcultural and subjective-aesthetic mode of consumption is demonstrated when, for example, a trending internet phenomenon such as #pridemonth[19] is associated with Proust (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Post from Testeduovo on June 21, 2021: https://www.instagram.com/p/CQYlurhH8Ze/

The readers take from the novel what is relevant to them by filtering motifs and topoi, which can be a fertile starting point for questions such as: *What are the main topics of the novel? How do readers experience the reading process? What image is attributed to the novel/author? How do readers of the novel want to be perceived?* Besides eliciting declarative statements about the author, the historical background or the story itself, a critical discourse competence can be fostered too, making the semiotic and iconic strategies of social media visible (cf. Bohnsack 2017).

[19] Pride Month celebrates gender diversity in June, but is rather known as *Christopher Street Day* in German-speaking countries. It dates back to June 28, 1969, when a police raid on the New York gay bar *Stonewall Inn* located on Christopher Street resulted in street battles with the police. African Americans were particularly affected by abuse and violence. The uprising and protests marked a turning point in the modern LGBTIQ+ rights movement. Since then, millions of people around the world demonstrate for the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Especially regarding multilingual matters, *Instagram*'s hashtag survey (carried out in different languages for the sake of comparison) can be used to demonstrate global understanding by skimming and scanning posts in unfamiliar languages.[20] The students might then be asked to collect favorite quotes (in whatever language), pictures or posts that were surprising, funny, criticized, etc. and to justify their choices. In doing so, they could be asked to translate their favorite quote/post into French to make it *available* to their peers, applying sociocultural knowledge as well. This student-oriented approach allows for creative and communicative prompts that can be compared and discussed among peers, but on a more general level this procedure may arouse curiosity and increase reading motivation, paving the way for future consistent readers of literary classics.

3 Conclusion

Social networks and digital practices are embedded in different digital and algorithmic cultures (Seyfert and Roberge 2016), which are marked by economic, political and sociocultural relations made visible via discursive hashtags or trends. Particularly for learning objectives whose achievement through social media may not seem obvious at first glance, an innovative approach to combining literary studies and digital discourse literacy is suitable and may foster sustainable 21st-century reading skills (OECD 2021). To do so, the literary classic must be rediscovered, since a contemporary audience exists which expresses literary practices through informal means, connecting entertainment, leisure and reading motivation. Model readers within the peer group can be found, and transcultural knowledge can be conveyed with the help of social media. Not only does engaging with literary texts via social media as described above function as a *preliminary stage* for further elaborated and sustain-

[20] *Instagram* increasingly adds languages which are translated automatically. The user is invited to click on the button *show translation*, which must be taken into consideration when using authentic Instagram posts for foreign language teaching purposes.

ably motivated reading, there is also a potential for the integration of classics above or below the B1+/B2 level of language proficiency.

The present article has suggested here a way of thinking that truly *mediates literature*, according to Dawidowski (2016, 21) one of the veritable intentions of the science of literature didactics. It also challenges the notion of the intellectual reader as the main target of foreign language teaching by instead presenting the media-competent learner who, in the sense of lifelong learning, perceives and understands a cultural artefact and is able to decode and interpret it inter- and transmedially in order respond to it in a subjective-aesthetic, possibly creative manner and internalize core aspects of the cultural artefact in the sense of a cultural memory.

Based on Proust's dictum *La lecture est une amitié* ('Reading is a friendship') cited at the beginning of this article, social networks can certainly be exploited for foreign language teaching with a focus on the pleasure of (informal) reading and of sharing reading impressions with networking bibliophiles from all over the world.

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