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Introduction: Face Work and Social Media

The opportunities for social networking offered by numerous online platforms were one of the reasons for the dramatic rise in the use of the internet in private households in the mid-1990s. In addition to simple possibilities of making contact with others via email or chat rooms, another very popular means of communication in the early days was newsgroups – platforms in which users can exchange information and ideas on common interests. This was a first step to a globalised culture of virtual communication that has since then become part of everyday life. Around the turn of the century, the term *Web 2.0* was introduced (cf. inter alia Runkehl 2012) – a reference to the fact that a technical transformation had taken place from relatively static websites to interactive platforms that can be edited and developed by the users themselves without specialist knowledge. On many of these platforms, the focus is on social interaction between the users, which has resulted in the establishment of a further term: *Social Media*.

The use of these two terms side by side does not make clear exactly what they stand for and how they can be distinguished from one another. They are often used synonymously. However, this

leads to the misunderstanding that online media have been social only since the introduction of simplified interaction possibilities, or that only an extended possibility of participation by the users constituted a social medium. For that reason, in this volume we would like to make a clear distinction between the two terms. In our view, Social Media include all online platforms that focus on interaction between the users – regardless of the technical conditions. This also means that we consider online forums, which are not included under the term Web 2.0, as Social Media, as well as the comments function of online newspapers – but not the online newspapers themselves. Social Media also, of course, include social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, which are mainly used for maintaining personal contacts and for exchanging information. Similarly, platforms for the exchange of media contents and discussion relating to them, such as YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest, are, in our view, also covered by the term Social Media.

A key feature of Social Media is the self-presentation of the participants. As a rule, they create a user profile in which they reveal information about themselves in as much or as little detail as they like. However, other users develop a perception of their identity not only on the basis of their profile but also on every individual contribution, every shared piece of content and every comment on contributions and contents provided by other users. It becomes clear that mutual perception plays a significant role in Social Media. We believe that the distinction between online and offline worlds that is still frequently made even today – often also under the labels “virtual world” and “real world” – is not justified, as online interactions are part of real life. This in turn means that users do not usually act as a blank page on online platforms but bring experiences, feelings and their identity with them. Although they can freely decide to a large extent how they want to present themselves to their communication partners as long as they do not

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encounter them in the street, it is nevertheless hardly possible to separate themselves completely from the experiences they have gained in socialisation. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that concepts such as *face* and *identity* are also closely linked online, and users exhibit similar face-related patterns of action as are familiar from other communication situations. For example, they react sensitively to threats against their own face, and the virtuality of the communication space has often little or no mitigating influence on their feeling of having been attacked. Users also accept appreciation in Social Media as *face work* relating to a real part of their identity. Nevertheless, some contradictions initially remain when face theories are transferred to Social Media, and these require a more intensive theoretical examination.

The link between face work and Social Media, which is the focus of this volume, leads to a dialectic field of study, which represents complex challenges for sociopragmatic research. Paradoxically, it is a matter of searching for face or faces in the different communication forms that are characterised as *faceless* and *bodiless* media (cf. Herring 2001: 613). In spite of the anonymity and virtuality provided by technology, Social Media are fundamentally platforms for social encounters. Their elementary function is, therefore, the construction of social presence(s) (cf. Bays 1998), i.e. they generate exclusively a textually performed sociality. In the form of a virtual marketplace, structures, modalities and procedures of everyday interaction are reproduced on the screen in such a way that they literally “embody” social being and social relations in the ongoing communication. Social Media draw their self-conception by reflecting and retracing personality simultaneously on two levels: on the interpersonal level of the mutual exchange in a *community of practice*, and on the demonstrative level of a public communication and its perception by a broad unknown user audience. Even though additional codes have been introduced, enriching the

moves with visual hints to emotions and mood, language still plays the most important role. In these fundamentally text-based forms of communication, identities are implied in the typed written expression. It is often even the case that the typeface re-creates outlines of certain social features, re-constructs projected self-images, lays trails to the acting subject and provides hints at typical characteristics. We, thus, can assume that, in Social Media, faces are communicated fundamentally through language, i.e. that all linguistic strategies of the user involved are essentially face work and, therefore, make visible the “verbal face of face” that is, on the one hand, unconsciously imported into every social encounter, but, on the other hand, consciously enacted and manipulated whenever potential conflict situations are on.

The difficulty now lies in making face work empirically tangible. The fact that communicative conflicts are generally prevented or defused for social reasons, turns out to be the key area for socio-pragmatic theories, viz. what is understood as face work should possibly be identified in conflict-aware speech acts. The term face work is, therefore, a theoretical bridge that enables analysts to reach the faces involved through and in certain forms of communication. It is this bridge concept that assigns two sides to the abstract notion of face: a non-material inner side and a material outer side. While the first is hypothesized in terms of values and claims, the second should be empirically graspable and could actually lead to a phenomenological categorisation.

Hence, two different theoretical issues have developed: on the one hand, there are the worldwide approved and discussed issues of politeness theories based on everyday interaction moments where personal claims are in danger. In order to prevent conflicts and to guarantee interpersonal cooperation and communicative efficiency, these moments should be verbally counteracted in a situationally appropriate way. By postulating so-called *face-threatening acts*

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(FTAs), face is tightened to various methods of conflict prophylaxis and, based on the pioneering work by Brown and Levinson in 1978/87, is initially equated with politeness as the strategic satisfaction of anthropologically universal wants and claims. This narrow view, which Watts identifies as “ethically positive behaviour” (Watts 2003: 130), will soon be further expanded to the necessary *relational work* with a largely neutral status as well as being opened up to form a continuum between the evaluative poles, *politeness* and *impoliteness*. The face negotiation theories, on the other hand, see conflicts as a communication clash between different cultural habits and determine face work as necessary ‘enlightened’ *rapport management* (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2000). This would involve the prevention of intercultural misunderstandings by a context-sensitive balancing of face-wants between autonomy vs. integration.

Communicative conflicts – no matter what type they may be – are, thus, seen by analysts as a theoretically secure area to trace face in face work, viz. to describe the nature of face on the basis of certain, above all linguistic, strategies. However, how this is actually done and which communicative categories, functions, structures and forms are applied, still remains difficult to define and can merely be determined as tendencies based on certain thematic occasions, speech acts or communicative events that infringe on the general code of behaviour and the social expectations implied. As before, the difficulty lies in converting the concepts, which in the meantime have been well differentiated, into real data. Even if Social Media construct presences primarily socially, it still remains largely unclear which *frames* and *lines* or which symbols and devices can be seen as presence-shaping and how faces actually emerge from the linguistic data and what type of faces they are.

These still unsolved problems are due above all to the unbroken fuzziness of the face concept itself, which, in spite of its concrete semantics, can hardly be used as a *tertium comparationis* for the

analysis of linguistic surface categories. As we know, Goffman in the 1960s was the first to apply the notion of face for the socially acquired and internalised values of a person. There are different culturally specific levels of awareness and implications, similar to terms as dignity or honour. Goffman subsumes them in the general definition as the “public self-image” and, ascribing it common ritual, theatrical and sacral characteristics, turns it into the normative centre of reference for any social interaction. As a result, the notion of face changes from a physiologically anchored lay concept to a model-theoretical construct, and becomes the key concept of sociopragmatics. In spite of its subsequent overuse in the various disciplines of cultural and social sciences, face still remains a multi-layered phenomenon which is difficult to define, continuously revealing new “faces” because of its non-material and material nature (cf. “the many faces of face”, Tracy 1990: 221).

Doubtlessly this is due to the interface position of the term between semantics and pragmatics. As ‘face’ originally means and stands for that central part of the body where the senses are actively concentrated (lat. FACIES) and the unmistakable individuality is “visible” (lat. VISUS), in their cognitive approach Lakoff/Johnson (1980) assign it the role of a “radial category”, which challenges both, metonymic extensions and metaphorical re-interpretations (cf. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010: 32f.): the semantic path leads from the *inner self* to the *outer self* and, thus, from psychology to social ethics, i.e. the physiological term ‘face’ becomes stylised as the mirror of the soul, turns into the expression of the personality and stands for the reputation, fama or aura that persons as socialised individuals automatically possess and which are to be perceived as such by others. As this gets manifest only in social encounters, the term face is therefore strongly anchored there; thus, transferring from a static to a dynamic concept. Yet, in many languages there are idiomatic expressions and collocations that reflect

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some of the values and the social implications that the respective communities ascribe to face conceptions. The establishing process of these ascriptions and their reflections in everyday communication behaviour are, however, historically determined. In our view, the main issue is the humanistic concept of the human being from the Antiquity and the Renaissance. This is evidenced, for instance, by the treatment of face throughout academic history where it passed from the aesthetic-qualitative representation in art history through the physiognomic and psychological view of the natural sciences to the ethical-moral implications of philosophy and ultimately to the numerous ideological interpretations of modern and post-modern social theories. In spite of the different historical interpretations, a face term becomes established that is generally centred around the self. It, therefore, comes close to the term *self-identity*, which, as the *conditio sine qua non* of human nature, ultimately provides a wide range of interdisciplinary research. But due to the variety of individuality, self-identity is just as difficult to define and can neither be ascertained empirically. Nevertheless, the social-psychological study of identity gives cause to reflect on and theoretically sharpen the concept of face. Great importance is still assigned to the emic view of the internalised value structures acquired in socialisation. New, however, is an etic view, viz. the fact that identity is communicatively performed and as such perceivable in corresponding symbolic means of an ongoing social interaction. This is a necessary step to an analytical operationalisation and, thus, is presumed as a significant issue for further establishing of a phenomenology of the face concept that makes it tangible for applied sciences.

A summarising overview of the dimensions that the face concept has passed through on its way from a lay concept to a scientific construct and the various findings that emerge as still valid by being overlapped or differentiated will once again justify the diffi-

culty of conversion into real data: Arguing with Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001: 36-37) that “*face* is not a simple concept”, three pragmatic dimensions are assumed responsible for this complexity,

“the

- locus of face, viz. the concern for self, other, or both;
- face valence, viz. whether face is being defended, maintained, or honoured;
- temporality, viz. whether face is being restored or proactively protected.”

(Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010: 245)

Based on the central point, the bond to the person and his or her identity – “*face* is an identity boundary phenomenon” (Ting-Toomey 1994: 2) or Spencer-Oatey’s “*identity face*” (2007: 650) – a spectrum of attributed face properties emerges. In accordance with the historical development of the concept they come into play under two aspects – a static and a dynamic one. See the schematic representation in fig. 1 (next page).

Interpreting the schema we can assume that face is at any rate an individual dimension that is related to biographical events. It is internalised and cognitively anchored as personality-determining “*possessions*” (cf. Sifianou 2012). However, since persons are social individuals, these “*possessions*”, or better: these features of “*character*”, have at the same time developed within the persons’ socialisation into a cultural context and are repeatedly being re-contoured by the natural striving for collective recognition and the growing affiliation to reference groups (*collective / fellowship face*). Face, therefore, stands for self-consciousness and at the same time represents the self-esteem established and acknowledged in social contacts (*autonomy face*). The sort, extent and importance of the individual components (*face domains*) are exclusively culturally shaped and result in strongly differing face sensitivities. These are only made aware and set in motion by and with others who perceive, provoke and evaluate them – face, therefore, exists only as

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projected face, which might be at stake in every social encounter. It consequently implies a relational dimension (cf. Arundale's concept of the "persons-in-relationship-to-other-persons" (sic!) 2006: 200), which is continually repositioned and focused through the mirror of others (*relational*).

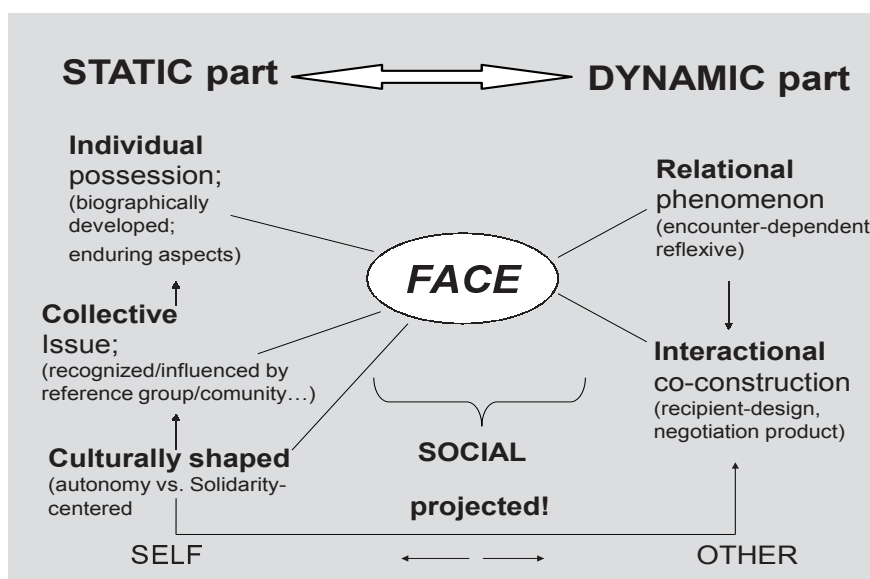


Fig. 1: The characteristics attributed to face in theory

The assumption that every socialised individual has a face turns social interaction in the interplay of reciprocal face maintenance and face saving into a constant process of *impression management*. As such, face automatically appears in symbolic interaction as action-immanent (*interactional*) and is then mutually projected during the process (*co-constructed*), jointly negotiated and, therefore, repeatedly re-summarised and differentiated. Haugh (2009) even goes as far as to say that face is not only "constituted by interaction", but is also "constitutive of interaction" and is "con-

straining language use and imposing on interactants certain patterns of behaviour” (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010: 260).

Following this complexity, which is differently postulated, treated and weighted by the theories, face is omnipresent in all communication and can thus be considered as linguistically inherent. However, its importance and the impact of its properties differ according to the situation, the interpersonal constellation and the socio-cultural embedment, which means that it is hardly possible to ascertain binding activities or symbolic forms and to accept these as universal. We know how controversial and difficult it is to apply, for example, the canon of strategies of *positive* and *negative politeness* proposed by Brown and Levinson 1978/87 to real data; nevertheless, the transformation of face into a bipolar structure of wants (*positive* vs. *negative face*) created a connecting point to communicative reality which, at the same time, set guidelines for ‘correct’ social behaviour. In order to characterise this setting in the social exchange between *self* and *other*, and to allow analyses within pragmatic theory, a dualistic set of instruments with different ranges is constructed.

On the basis of the heuristic dualisms, as we have summarised them from the different theory approaches and schematically listed in fig. 2 (next page), normative, intentional-strategic and culture-typological categorisation possibilities of face-relevant actions become apparent. Initially, they are focused exclusively on supportive activities, which in an ethical sense (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 14 speaks of *sociality rights*) are aimed at interpersonal cooperation and consensus. However, they occur only *ex negativo*, in other words primarily in imminent conflict situations, and can, therefore, be identified and dissected as face-protecting, face-enhancing, face-saving and face-acknowledging actions.

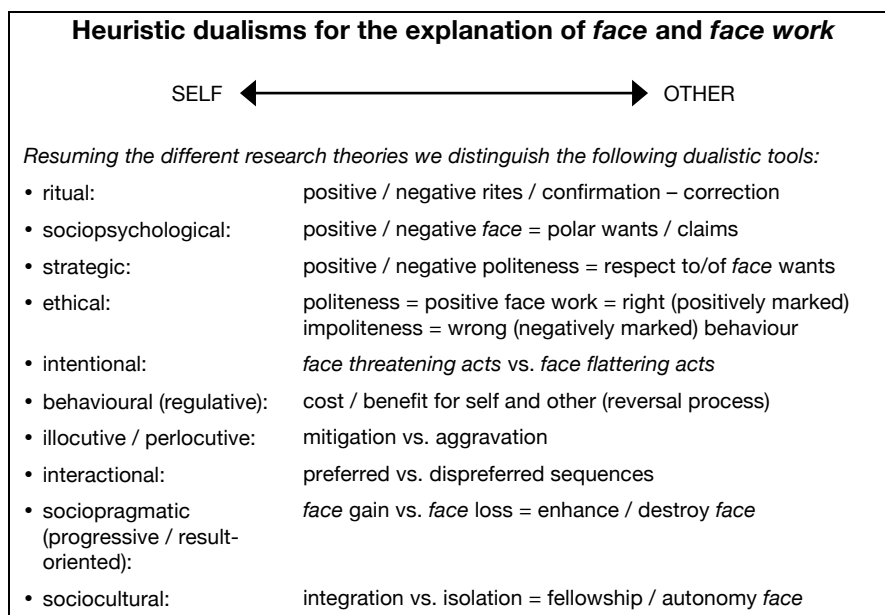


Fig. 2: Dualistic concepts for determining face and face work

In a first stage, they are equated with politeness. Due to the diffuse interpretation of this notion between the cultural-historical folk concept (politeness₁) and theoretical abstraction (politeness₂), the identification with politeness does not go far enough. The turn from a normative to an interpretive paradigm expands the view to the communication-immanent side of face work as relational work:

Face work is not a social requirement that must always be satisfied, but a means of manipulating a given relationship and/or situation. Face work, therefore, should be understood as a reflection of one's relational intention and action goals (Lim 1994: 227).

In other words, face is not only ratified in discourse, but is also mutually negotiated and re-contoured. It is, therefore, fundamentally manifested in every form of communication through the reactions of the other. Face work can, thus, be defined more generally

as “all actions which have a bearing on face” (O’Driscoll 2007: 467) and, therefore, includes a wide range of content, text structure and linguistic means, i.e. also those that go far beyond strategic politeness and consequently have face-destroying, face-threatening, face-aggravating, face-losing, etc. effects, and are either unmarked as “normal” or quite the opposite as impolite or over-polite (cf. Penman’s conception of face game 1990).

We can summarise with Bargiela-Chiappini, who sees face as a “complex image of self”, “which is socially constructed and shaped by culture”:

As a bridging concept between interpersonal interaction and social order ... *face*, at the micro-level of verbal and non-verbal behaviour, encapsulates and dynamically displays the manifestations of macro-level cultural values. (Bargiela-Chiappini 2006: 423)

Even Social Media can be described as “cultures”, i.e. they constitute and maintain communities of practice with specific “communication cultures”, which have developed certain standards and rules to be respected (e.g. so-called netiquette). As Social Media are primarily aimed at conveying social presence which is visualised on the screen, they seem to be highly appropriate to provide concrete symbolic indications of the different faces, which are involved in the ongoing forum communications. In accordance with the theories, *shared faces* or *conflictual faces* are as likely established as in everyday conversation; moreover, they can be followed in written text chunks and are, thus, to be studied more easily. What is new, however, is the multiple addressing of this media communication forms and, therefore, the multidimensionality of face-relevant actions between self-presentation and the construction of relationships. On the one hand, it involves self-directed face work, which attempts to optimally and demonstratively display the identity of the producer (*prestige face*), while on the

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other hand – as is usual in communication – it is a question of other-directed or relational face work, which the communication partners accordingly ratify, thus, expressing social awareness interactively (moral face). One might in each case assume different textual and (meta)linguistic devices, which are constantly overlapping and connecting – face and face work of Social Media are, therefore, hybrid constructs that represent new and major challenges for sociopragmatic research. This volume, which traces the facets and strategies of face work in the different forms of communication of Social Media and attempts to describe them in various kinds of communicative events, speech acts and formulation patterns, adds an important component.

According to the different contributions and their thematic and methodological focus, the volume is divided into four blocks:

Block 1 (*Theoretical Considerations on Face and Identity in Social Media*) contains several papers that study the concepts and terminology in detail and examine the field of *face – figura – identity – self* with reference to the realisation of such concepts in Social Media, where they play an extremely important role. In research, the concepts overlap, due to the fact that many disciplines draw borders differently between them. For example, the constructivist identity concept differs from the psychological one, which must have consequences for the definition of the concept of face. This is also true for the other concepts.

Stimulated by a dispute in an Italian internet forum, Gudrun HELD examines in her paper a terminological problem between the two semantically related concepts *figura* and *face*. While *face* has turned into a universal scientific construct of modern socio-pragmatics, by means of which social and linguistic behaviour can be theoretically explained, the notion of *figura*, an Italian lay concept idiomatically present in everyday language (*fare bella* vs. *brutta figura*), reflects the historical development of an appearance-

oriented self-identity that turns social encounters into permanent impression management. Trying to compare both concepts systematically leads not only to revisit the face construct and its various implications between politeness, cooperation and communicative efficiency in the different face theories, but also to the explanation of its outer side, viz. face work, which, in Social Media, is considered as a range of visualised verbal procedures of presence shaping.

The specifics of face work in online forum communication and the applicability of classical theories in this field are examined by Claus EHRHARDT. In his paper, he comes to the conclusion that involvement in online communication requires a “default face” for everyone, which has to be fundamentally respected but which each person can individually switch off for themselves.

Uta FRÖHLICH also shows that self-presentation in Social Media is linked with the identity of those who are communicating and with the individual face that they want to present. According to her, this presentation is multicodeal, which means that it applies not only to texts in which persons are expressing themselves but also to profile creation, images, signatures and allusions to shared knowledge.

The papers in Block 2 (*Construction of Group Identity in Social Media*) examine, besides other aspects, a special feature of Social Media communication: the contexts are primarily dialogic, but interaction often occurs among larger groups. Participants of the platforms establish links between each other. FTAs towards individual members of a different group can damage the face of the group as a whole and vice versa, thus promoting an identity for the group.

The paper by Kristina BEDIJS further develops Goffman’s concept of *shared face* and applies it to Social Media. She provides examples to show that groups can also have a face. Members of the group often feel that their individual face is affected when the shared face

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is threatened or enhanced, which is shown in offended or flattered reactions to face work.

In the social network Facebook, status updates are mainly used to make contact with others and to maintain the user's presentation to the outside. In their paper, Brook BOLANDER and Miriam LOCHER examine how the choice of language in the status updates is used for signalling affiliation and thus for relational work in whole groups.

Daria DAYTER and Sofia RÜDIGER discuss how mutual criticism is expressed in the CouchSurfing community. As this community is based on mutual trust and the willingness to provide overnight accommodation in their own homes, user ratings that contain criticism and negative judgements have to be formulated in a way to avoid further conflicts and to maintain a good host image. This is why many negative evaluations contain mitigating strategies that anticipate future interactions in the community and that can be judged as face work.

Jenny ARENDHOLZ examines interaction in a forum community. Her paper focuses primarily on the negotiation of status, which is measured for example by the length of membership and the activity of the users in the communities. Using the example of the community *The Student Room*, she shows that newcomers first have to earn the right to perform certain verbal actions.

Block 3 (*Face Threatening and Face Flattering in Online Communication*) is dedicated to examining linguistic strategies that are used online with consequences for one's own face and that of others.

Christiane MAASS shows, on the basis of Watts' model, that online communication on interaction platforms tends to be marked. Due to the media conditions, utterances can be misunderstood or ambiguous. This often leads to a discussion about how a post is to be interpreted and about a third party who may also be reading –

a potential FTA. To counteract this, verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal strategies aim at marking the post as “polite”. Users increase the situational embedding of their posts through multiple codes by means of their user profile with their avatar, signature, etc. – options many platforms provide and thus support such behaviour.

Comments on recipes in a French and Italian cooking community are examined by Verena THALER. She discovers how users avoid open criticism and use various diluting strategies to ensure that the potential FTA is mitigated. These include, for example, messages formulated in the first person to deflect the criticism from the addressed person, and praise aimed at balancing and putting the criticism into perspective.

Uta HELFRICH dedicates her paper to collective attacks against absent third parties. The users, who do not know each other, construct a shared concept of the enemy which they then make fun of, attacking it collectively in the form of so-called ‘flaming’. Even if the person being attacked is unaware of it, this FTA has the effect of enhancing the shared face of the group of attackers.

The construction of a shared enemy is also the subject of the paper by Bettina KLUGE. She examines the phenomenon of the troll, a user who joins a constructive debate with the intention of systematically destroying it by making hurtful or meaningless contributions or ones that detract from the subject. The paper looks at how a community cooperatively construes a user as a troll and how it deals with this disruptive behaviour.

Nadine RENTEL analyses messages on the micro-blogging platform Twitter. She focuses on the question of how users construct face for a disperse public. She finds that users restrain themselves linguistically, for example by formulating their opinion as a question or by expressing uncertainty.

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The fourth block of the volume (*Face in Experts and Laypeople Communication in Social Media*) is dedicated to an area which linguistics has become increasingly interested in: the construction of the roles of “expert” and “layperson” in communication. Ascribing such roles to oneself or to a discourse partner is of major significance for face. The discourse participants negotiate these roles in their exchange, performing or preventing face threats or enhancements in their communicative acts.

Martina SCHRADER-KNIFFKI analyses how such status attributions are developed in the French forum *Français notre belle langue*. Users of this community discuss language-related topics, usually on the level of laypeople in linguistics. However, the self-presentation of the participants plays an important role in the discussion, which is often the result of intentionally subjectified speech acts. In this way, the users develop evidentiality and co-constructed knowledge.

A similar forum, *Languefrancaise.net*, is examined by Melanie KUNKEL. In this case too, the users debate on the French language, especially about norms and their correct application. Users often position themselves as teachers or linguists in order to appear as experts and thus validate their arguments.

The difference between experts and laypeople is also the subject of the paper by Gesa LINNEMANN, Benjamin BRUMMERNHENRICH and Regina JUCKS. In an experiment in pedagogical psychology, they examine efficient knowledge acquisition in e-learning contexts. In the experiment, tutors applied various strategies to criticise the learners’ results, with different intensity levels of face threat. If mitigating strategies were used, the learners considered the tutors to be more credible.

The paper by Beatrix KRESS provides a contrastive study of face work in German and Russian online communication. She analyses users’ comments in online newspapers and comes to the conclu-

sion that Russian debates tend to have a more direct style, whereas German users more frequently apply humour to mitigate FTAs.

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