

Bettina Kluge – Hildesheim

The Collaborative Construction of an Outsider as a Troll in the Blogosphere of Latin American Immigrants to Quebec, Canada

1. Introduction

Communication crucially depends on trust. And indeed, most of the time interactants are collaborating towards a common conversational goal. But sometimes, it is more fun to go against the established rules of communication – at least for the one who is breaking the rules. In this contribution, I will focus on the practice of trolling, a more or less ludic manner of deceiving others about one's own identity for the purpose of disrupting an online community's normal business. As an example, I will consider a case within a blogging community of migrants and prospective migrants to the Canadian province of Quebec. This is a very closely-knit community which offers crucial emotional and logistic support to its members in the long and uncertain process of applying for permanent residence status. The emerging blogosphere can be described as a *Community of Practice* (Wenger 1998). Members typically encourage each other in this crucial phase of their lives; however, in the case study to be presented, one commentator warns the blogger against migration to Quebec using very strong, personally hurtful language. After an initial exchange between this

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commentator and the blogger, the commentator is subsequently labelled a troll by other commentators and portrayed as an outsider to the community. The incident can be shown to have lasting repercussions in the blogging community. In this article, I will hence argue that trolling incidents can be used by the community to collaboratively construct an outsider, and by this means enhance group cohesion and reassert the group's values and communicative norms.

Before turning to the actual data, I will consider previous research on trolling. In fact, while a quick search on the Internet leads to a heap of examples where users are accused of being trolls, there is "surprisingly little academic research" on the topic of trolling, as Hardaker (2010: 224) stresses. There are even fewer studies on trolling within the linguistic and interactional framework. Also, I will argue that more attention must be given to the facts that a) communication in the Social Media has multiple addressees, and that b) trolling (and the accusation of trolling) has consequences for the identity construction of the interactants involved.

2. Trolling on the Internet

The exact definition of what constitutes a troll in the context of virtual discourse is unclear. Most researchers apparently draw their definitions of trolling behaviour from the media and their own intuition: "As such, 'trolling' has become a catch-all term for any number of negatively marked online behavior" (Hardaker 2010: 224). While Shachaf/Hara's (2010) study on Wikipedia trolls focuses on generally disruptive, destructive behaviour of Wikipedia 'contributors' (with trolls deleting or introducing non-relevant information into Wikipedia articles), most studies (Tepper 1997; Donath 1999; Herring et al. 2002; Hardaker 2010) examine users

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who first enter into a Social Media community – typically news-groups, online forums or, as in our case, blog communities –, engage in them and then start trolling. Trolling can broadly be defined as “being deliberately antagonistic online, usually for amusement’s sake” (Hardaker 2013: 58), but also, crucially, includes concealing one’s identity and intentions, the subsequent loss of trust by others and the possibility of lasting effects within the community in question.

For the rest of this paper I will adopt Hardaker’s corpus-based definition of who should count as a troll:

A troller is a CMC user who constructs the identity of sincerely wishing to be part of the group in question, including professing, or conveying pseudo-sincere intentions, but whose real intention(s) is/are to cause disruption and/or to trigger or exacerbate conflict for the purposes of their own amusement. (Hardaker 2010: 237)

Hardaker (2010) is the first to base her study on a large-scale corpus in which she compares user-based moves to label another user as a troll with definitions found in academic literature. In her study of an equestrian newsgroup, all messages posted within the years 2001-2010 have been searched via WordSmith for the string [troll*]. Even while missing out on some comments where the word *troll* does not show up in the near environment, the search produces over 2.000 hits. Since a troller’s ‘real intentions’ are hard to discern from their contributions alone, it is no surprise that Hardaker’s study shows only one case where the incident was acknowledged as a case of trolling by the troller. In most examples, users speculate about a certain user’s apparent troll identity and warn others. Some of the techniques that raise suspicion in the other users, as described in the literature, include the following:

- “aggressive, malicious behavior undertaken with the aim of annoying or goading others into retaliating” (Hardaker

2010: 231), also including hostility and disrespect – this is the most often agreed-upon verbal behaviour that deserves the label ‘troll’

- disruptive behaviour, including “meaningless, irrelevant, or repetitive posts aimed at attention-seeking or response-generating” (Hardaker 2010: 232)
- dissemination of poor or false advice
- continued troll-like behaviour even after being warned
- if confronted on-record, accused users may “deny the accusations, plead ignorance or inexperience, brand those who block them as censorious or cowardly, or even accuse individuals who confront them of being trolls themselves” (Hardaker 2010: 228)

The concept of trolling, however, has changed somewhat over the years. Tepper (1997), for instance, portrays trolling as techniques initially employed to gently tease new members (newbies). She demonstrates this with examples from the Usenet group *alt.folklore.urban* (AFU).¹ These techniques could include references to topics that have been discussed extensively before as well as typos that are usually only corrected by new members. Trolling hence serves as an initiation ritual to newbies and as an important device to signal in-group status to long-standing members. They will “identify the troll, will not be baited by it, and may even mock those who are” (Hardaker 2010: 224). ‘Troll’ here refers as much to the person as to the activity. Some years later,² the definition of the term broadens to include deceitful hidings of one’s own intentions to belittle other people and to make fun of them, as discussed in

¹ The OED gives as the earliest attestation of troll in this meaning an example from AFU dated December, 14 1992 (cf. Oxford English Dictionary Online 2012).

² The English Wikipedia version (s.v. ‘troll (Internet)’) suggests the end of the 1990s, when Usenet groups such as AFU became more popular.

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Herring et al.'s (2002) influential study of a male discussant in a feminist forum who is ultimately removed from the newsgroup. Donath (1999) and Hardaker (2010; 2013) describe trolls giving advice on motorcycling and on horse training. This behaviour, in contrast to simply jesting, might cause actual harm, if carried out in earnest.

While the metaphor of trolling initially described a fishing technique (in the sense of fishing with long lines, see above the reference to newbies being 'baited' by older group members), nowadays trolls are more often personified and tend to relate to the mythical Scandinavian figures of mischievous creatures "waiting under the bridge to snare innocent bystanders" (Herring et al. 2002: 372). See Graphics 1 and 2 for examples of popular depictions of internet trolls: the Trollface, created by the artist Whyhne, which quickly became a part of popular culture and an internet meme in itself; and an example for the slogan 'Don't feed the troll'.



Graphic 1: Trollface (Wikipedia 2012)



Graphic 2: Don't feed the troll (Virtuose Marketing 2012)

In both instances, the activity of trolling as fishing with bait is discarded as the main meaning, in favour of a conceptualisation of a troll as a non-human, at times even monster-like living being. Yet the notion of trolling as baiting is still attested in Hardaker's corpus.

What makes trolling unique and distinguishes it from other practices such as flaming (cf. Danet 2013; also Helfrich, this volume, and the literature cited therein) and hacking is the deception inherent to an act of trolling: the sincerity of the question posed, the advice given, or the identity proclaimed as one's own is questionable and in many cases questioned by other users. In fact, this is precisely why concepts such as rudeness, impoliteness, and verbal aggression do not fit the behaviour labelled trolling (as is discussed extensively in Hardaker 2010: 216-219). Bousfield (2008; especially chapters 5.1 and 5.2), enlarging on the work of Culpeper (1996), lays out a tentative typology of realisations of impoliteness, among them 'Seek disagreement / avoid agreement', 'Use taboo words – swear, or use abusive or profane language', 'Condescend, scorn or ridicule – emphasise your relative power', 'sarcasm / mock politeness'. All these strategies can be found in trolls, but they do not touch on the central issue of deceit, misused trust, and uncertainty of intention that annoy or hurt the victims of a troll, often more than the act of trolling itself.

Two studies focusing on the deception of other users are Donath (1999) and Hardaker (2010; 2013), with examples from different newsgroups (wedding, motorcycle, equestrians). It is very revealing that these groups are very supportive, with people apparently caring a lot for each other. A troll can wreak greater havoc in such groups than in loosely-knit, fun-oriented communities (e.g. Failblog, a website where users regularly engage in trolling, and are regularly touted for doing so³). Thus, an interpretation of a

³ See for example Failblog 2012 – here, a video shown on the Jimmy Kimmel Show is commented on: "Who is the brunette, she looks really familiar?", to which user 'Troll' responds: "its jimmy kimmel". The initial poster rebukes this answer, to which two other users respond, one by posting a link to a web dictionary's entry of 'sarcasm', another (?) user called 'Explanation' with the response "He was trolling (hence the name)". The very fact that a user should choose a user name indicative of their trolling activities also

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particular contribution from a troll is very much dependent on the specific group in question, the particular activity the group engages in, and also on previous experiences of the users (newbies vs. more experienced members of the community in question who might even enjoy playing with the troll and mocking them).

How, then, should a community deal with trolls? Since trolls want to elicit response from others, the most common way of counteraction – or at least the one that is most often suggested – is to NOT feed the troll, in the sense of not responding. As Donath (1999: 48) stresses, “[r]esponding to a troll is very tempting, especially since these posts are designed to incite.” In a newsgroup or blog, this might mean having to abandon a particular thread of discussion and turn to other ones instead. Based on her corpus, Hardaker (2010: 237) distinguishes four major outcomes:

- 1) Trolling is frustrated “if users correctly interpret an attempt to troll, but are not provoked to respond”.
- 2) Trolling is thwarted “if users correctly interpret an attempt to troll, but counter in such a way as to curtail or neutralise the success of the troller”.
- 3) Trolling fails “if users do not correctly interpret an attempt to troll and are not provoked by the troller”.
- 4) Trolling succeeds if users “believe the troller’s pseudo-intention(s) and are provoked to respond sincerely”.

Another outcome indicated by Donath (1999) and Hardaker (2010; 2013) can be seen as a subcase of 2: people correctly interpret an attempt to troll, but deem the bait too dangerous for other, less experienced users. For example, if a troll posts techniques for declawing a cat that would cause the animal extreme pain, users may respond to the post, even when suspecting or knowing a post to be

shows that trolling is perceived as an integral ‘part of the game’ on this website (also cf. similar arguments by Helfrich, this volume).

bait for fear that less knowledgeable readers, present and future ones, would take the bait as a piece of well-intended and good advice. As Hardaker's examples show, such responses are often quite witty and border on counter-trolling. Finally, Hardaker also points out the case when users publish a message in a mock troll format, with the aim of enhancing group cohesion and affection. Her example of mock trolling is so outrageously overblown that all users of the particular newsgroup she investigated should correctly identify the posting as non-genuine. Nevertheless, just in case, the message was signed for the hard-to-understand: "Love, Trollerita" (example 25, Hardaker 2010: 230).

In contrast to the findings above, two aspects in trolling research so far have received less attention than they merit: the inherently polylogous nature of communication⁴ on the websites where trolling is attested, and face. Concerning multiple addressees, Hardaker provides many examples of users speculating about third parties' troll-like nature, "at once employing the face-saving strategy of not engaging with the troller directly, and also the offensive face-attacking strategy of talking about the troller as though she is nonexistent" (2010: 236). But even her discussions of outcomes boils down to the question whether a troll is correctly interpreted as such and responded to. In most cases, most users (and researchers) are ignorant of a particular user's malicious intent, since most trolls will not 'blow their cover' after a successful troll.⁵

⁴ For the concept of polylogues in computer-mediated communication, cf. Marcoccia 2004.

⁵ As Hardaker stresses, "users may perceive trolling where none exists, and miss it when it occurs" (2013: 62). Hardaker 2010 and 2013 also discusses the inability to identify speaker's and hearer's intention, arguing that it is this "accidental or deliberate ambiguity" of communication that "provides the very opening for a troller to exploit" (Hardaker 2013: 63). In fact, intentions might even be changing during an ongoing communication. Imagine a user who might not have intended a troll initially, but after being rebuked and (erroneously) called a troll, they decide, for reasons of face-protection, to pose as a troll and aggravate verbal contributions – a case that shows that speaker intention and hearer perception are fluid and dynamic.

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Independent of their being successful or not, trolls are seen as being the product of a rather two-sided communication: between the suspected troll and the community. This must be seen as an idealisation: 'the community' consists of different members, present as well as future ones, with different degrees of involvement, experience, length of membership, different opinions on a subject, etc. Thus, in the subsequent analysis, I will emphasise the effect trolling has on the community and how the community reasserts its rules of what is seen as good communicative behaviour.

In line with this behaviour is the notion of face (cf. also the discussion of face in online communication by Ehrhardt, this volume) – not so much of particular individuals, but of the community as a whole. Research on face matters has recently shifted its focus to the management of interpersonal relations, more than on one's own individual face needs. An example is Arundale's (2006) proposal for a framework in which face is seen as relational and as being continually reconstructed in ongoing interaction. Research on face in the Social Media also needs to consider that many interactions are polylogues with multiple addressees, and that we witness a many-to-many communication even in cases where contributions are explicitly addressed to a specific person: as long as a contribution is not distributed via an alternative communication channel (e.g. private messaging), it is publicly available. Thus, besides 'communicating with each other' we also find 'communicating about person A in a way so that they will know it'. Again, the most important point here is a particular community's communicative norm, the 'rules of conduct' so to speak. In some communities it is more acceptable to engage in ludic behaviour, and more difficult to draw the line between witty, although somewhat aggressive behaviour and trolling for the sake of trolling. In the case of the blog community analysed in the present study, this is not the case but sincerity and personal reputation is valued highly.

3. A case study: the interactive construction of a troll

The following analysis is part of an ongoing project on collaborative identity construction in the Social Media in a migration context (for more information, cf. Kluge 2011; Kluge in press; Frank-Job/ Kluge 2012). Migrants and prospective migrants to the Canadian province of Quebec turn to the Social Media, especially blogs and forums, to get information, to meet people with similar experiences and to feel that they are not alone with their problems and anxieties in a moment of their lives where everything appears fluid and uncertain. They discuss topics with strangers who, strangely, might feel less like strangers than family and friends, since they have something in common: the wish to migrate to another country and start a new life, and the uncertainties experienced during the application process. Bloggers not only write their own blog, but also read other people's blogs, and leave comments there. By their common blogging practices, they form a rather close-knit *Community of Practice* (Wenger 1998, henceforth abbreviated as CoP), since, in the process, they come to share "beliefs, values, ways of doings things, ways of talking, – in short, practices – as a function of their joint engagement in activity." (Eckert 2000: 35).⁶

Generally speaking, and in comparison to French- and English-speaking bloggers from the same corpus, the Latin American blogging community presents itself as very supportive of each other (further shown in Kluge, in press). For example, new bloggers are routinely welcomed by older members and encouraged in their

⁶ In fact, the blogosphere of people interested in migrating to Canada and Quebec can be shown to be formed by several, only partially interlinked CoP, mostly separated along language barriers.

immigration project. This, precisely, is the reason why negative voices that caution others not to migrate are treated as deviant: they do not entirely adhere to the CoP's implicit function to give emotional support to each other. We will see how interactants who voice negative opinions – if they do not proceed with caution – are in danger of being treated as intruders and outsiders of the CoP.

3.1. The data

The specific blog post in question comes from the blog *Desafío Québec* (<http://desafioquebec.blogspot.com>). Its authors are the Buenos Aires-based couple Terry and Naty (who I will abbreviate T and N, respectively, and T&N if referring to them acting as a couple), Terry being the main blogger. The blog describes their preparations for immigration to Quebec and the subsequent move and accommodating to life 'up north'. Responding to their second post, published on July 10, 2007, is an anonymous blogger (who I will call Anónimo, or A). A tells them to stay in Buenos Aires and to reconsider their decision to emigrate to Quebec. His statement is very aggressive in tone and content, which is answered in kind by Terry and also by other readers of the blog, both immigrants and immigrants-to-be. They all concur that while admittedly not everything is perfect in Quebec, A has by far crossed the line of polite behaviour and cannot be taken seriously. He is ultimately labelled a troll, a notorious troublemaker, and T&N are advised not to take him seriously. All in all, the original post received 35 comments over a time period of several months, and even later blog posts as well as comments to other posts refer to the debate with A. In order to facilitate orientation, Appendix 1 gives an overview on the interaction between Terry and Naty, Anónimo and further commentators.

As in many other blogs in our corpus (e.g. Kluge 2011; 2012), in the first days after publication of their first blog post on July 8, 2007, the new bloggers T&N are welcomed by the blogosphere, showing acceptance of them in the CoP. After several months of 'silence' (in which T&N have published other entries to their blog), Anónimo then 'reopens' the second blog entry with his comment no. 3. It is unclear why he chooses this particular blog post (a video of snow in Buenos Aires). Most subsequent comments (4-28) are published within the next month, between the end of December 2007 and mid-January 2008, first (3-11) in dialogic form between T and A, then (12-28) with more and more members of the blogosphere joining and siding with T&N. Comments 29-32 are from February 2008. Comments 33-35 are somewhat belated reactions of the blogosphere to the discussion, but are not further acknowledged by T&N (unlike previous comments in January 2008).

Besides Anónimo, only the writer of comments 34 and 35 does not reveal his or her real identity in either in the comment or through the blogger name. There are some similarities to A's writing style (especially the use of capital letters); however, the author identifies as a female doctor from Uruguay with husband and child. This being true or not, I will count the author of comments 34 and 35 as distinct from the author of comments 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 16, 18 and 31, that is, the person who is later labelled a troll. Anónimo self-identifies as a Chilean doctoral student who now lives in Montreal, and is treated as male (an ascription which A does not protest, so I too will consider A as such).

The incident also generates further comments, especially in the last days of 2007 and at the beginning of 2008, in comments to other blog posts published by T&N. For example, on January 6, 2008 (responding to the blog post published on August 3, 2007), a reader called Mordi advises them to simply stop answering A and arguing with him. While not calling A a troll, Mordi suggests to

ignore him, as he only writes in order to provoke: “No vale la pena perder el tiempo y contestarle tantas veces. Sólo escribe para molestar. Es uno entre tantos.”⁷

3.2. Analysis

So what exactly did A do? From the many comments he posted, the most exemplary ones have been selected to illustrate the analysis. I will initially concentrate on the first messages (3-5, two by A, one by T) in order to show the way towards ‘escalation’, and then focus on the entry of the CoP into the discussion. After T&N’s initial post, two supportive comments are followed by A’s first appearance:

(1) Comment no. 3: 27 de diciembre de 2007 23:52

Anónimo dijo...

a QUIEN SEA: Creo que no es una buena idea inmigrar a Montreal. Aca se van a encontrar con muchas sorpresas como, por ejemplo, que los servicios de salud son malisimos. Los servicios en Argentina o Chile son mucho mejor, mismo los servicios publicos o indigentes. [...] La gente: hediondos y sucios: el metro es una basofia y los negros de mierda y los chinos e hindues son muy pero muy hediondos y cochinos. Pueden pasar semanas sin tomar una ducha. [...] Si tienen una buena posicion economica en su pais, NO VENGAN A CANADA para quedarse, esto aburre. Y la gente que viene aca lo hace solo para trabajar en cosas casi humillantes: he visto medicos ecuatorianos y peruanos limpiando ascensores. Ademas la gente vive solo para trabajar y no hay vida de familia. En resumen: una mierda.

In his comment, A gives seven reasons why he thinks that it is not a good idea to migrate to Montreal: bad health system, bad educa-

⁷ Throughout this paper, I will not provide translations of the Spanish original text, but will try to reframe the gist of the respective arguments during the analysis.

tion, filthy people, horrible bureaucracy, freezing climate, immigrants have to take jobs much below their qualification, people have to work long hours and have no family life. His wording is not always very polite (especially when qualifying visible minorities on the metro system as *negros de mierda*), but at least, this is his point of view, expressed very clearly and unequivocally. As Herring et al. (2002) observe, a troll's first comment often contains strong language and an opinion that incites to reply, but still stays 'within the limits'. Strangely, A's comment is addressed "a QUIEN SEA", possibly indicating that he not only intends T&N as his readers.

Twelve hours later, the couple responds in a direct comment to A. Simultaneously, T posts his/their answer as a new blog post, thus appealing to a larger public. This new blog post also receives eight comments (six of them again within the first six weeks), which however will not be dealt with in this article. Here the direct answer to A:

(2) Comment no. 4: 28 de diciembre de 2007 12:32

Desafío Québec: Terry, Naty y Nico dijo...

A quien sea (el que escribió):

1) Me gustaria que dejaras de ser anónimo.

2) No buscamos un paraiso en Canada, sino un país donde se respetan las leyes y a donde a la gente de cualquier procedencia no se las trata como en su querida Chile o Argentina (como decis "negros de mierda")

3) La educación de una persona empieza con la familia. Y ninguna universidad del mundo puede enseñarte los valores esenciales de la vida (se nota que a vos te faltó eso)

[...]

6) Si tanto te disgusta, porque aún estas ahí? O te gusta vivir en la MIERDA, como dices? [...]

Taras

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T's answer is politely restrained, he rebuts several of A's expressions (e.g. *negro de mierda*), but also includes some direct attacks to A's face, e.g. the insult to A's family that has failed to teach him the 'essential values of life'. T also asks why A is still in Quebec, if he dislikes the place so much. This is answered, another twelve hours later, by A in comments 5 and 6 (the latter an addendum published one hour and a half after the previous comment):

(3) Comment no. 5: 29 de diciembre de 2007 01:10

Anonimo dijo...

Oye tontorron, te estoy tratando de dar un punto de vista para que despues no te arrepientas. Yo no me he ido de aca porque debo terminar mi doctorado, dudo que lo sepas, pero generalmente un doctor se prepara 4 anos como minimo. Lamentablemente elegi mal el lugar. [...] Oye, si te digo esto es porque lo he visto largo tiempo y creo que es necesario no tener altas expectativas respecto a Quebec. Es bonito, pero todo es artificial y el pueblo quebeco no tiene historia, es un pueblo que nacio muerto. Y son flojos los hijos de puta.

Ultimo reamarque: yo pense que la Argentina y Chile eran paises atrasados. JAJA! Ya veras aca a los libaneses, iranies e hindues entre otros, que son los que forman la gran masa. Tu juzgaras. No te olvides de lo que te digo, pues se que se arrepentiran.

Comment no. 6: 29 de diciembre de 2007 02:44

Anónimo dijo...

oye se me olvidaba, yo no tengo nada contra negros ni chinos ni nadie. Pero cuando veas a esos cholos mamones escupir en el metro o comerse los mocos en las vias publicas te vas a cordar del termino 'asqueroso'. Al menos en Chile uno no acostumbra a ver eso, porque si se te sale un gas por cualquiera de tus orificios la gente te manda a la mierda, como debe ser. Tal vez en la Argentina es distinto, pero no en Chile. Y dejate de mamonear, mira que los ucranianos aca trabajan barriendo calles.

We witness here the increasing use of verbally aggressive behaviour: name-calling (of T: *oye tontorrón*, of autochthonous québécois:

hijos de puta; quebecos (instead of more neutral *quebequenses*), of other immigrants: *cholos mamones*), insults of both the people from his host country (as lazy and racist) and of other immigrants (as filthy and uncivilised; again mostly those of a visible, non-Latino minority). A also employs a rather condescending tone towards T, already by use of the interaction marker *oye*, as if T was a small child that constantly needs to refocus on the text. The next comments (6-11) published within the next two days still are a verbal exchange between T and A, again with increasing verbal aggression and name calling. T begins to distance himself from A by changing from initial solidary *vos* in comment no. 4 to more distanced *usted* and *Sr. Anónimo* most of the time (there are some pointed switches to *vos*) and tries to counter A's arguments (which he qualifies as *argumentos ridículos*). Each contestant disqualifies the other as stupid and ignorant. While they are mainly poised towards each other as main addressees, it is obvious that they also write for a larger public. This is even clearer in the case of Terry. For example, in his opening remark in comment no. 10, T talks about *Dr. Anonimo* in third person:

(4) Comment no. 10: 30 de diciembre de 2007 02:55

Desafío Québec: Terry, Naty y Nico dijo...

"Oye, tu tienes hijo y senora. Ya veras que si ella no trabaja aca les va a costar mucho la vida. Yo estoy con mi familia tambien y gracias a Dios tengo una buena beca que me permite casi no hacer nada sino estudiar."⁸

Yo no entiendo, porque Dr. Anonimo piensa que todos deben tener la misma experiencia que el? Es absurdo!!!!

Estas frases como "Ya veras", "te arrepentirás", "vas a ver" ... De hecho, veo que no todo es tan malo en su vida (beca que le permite "casi no hacer nada", por ejemplo). [...]

⁸ The quotation marks indicate that Terry quotes from A's previous comment.

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In this comment, T threatens A's face by referring to A as *Dr. Anónimo* in a mocking and provocative tone (thus ascribing him a status that A states to want to attain in the future), but more importantly, by talking about him in third person, as if A were absent and the comment addressed to the rest of the readers of the blog. T also criticises A's constant predictions ("ya verás, te arrepentirás, vas a ver") that T will ultimately have the same experience and feel sorry that he did not take A's advice to stay in Buenos Aires. T&N stress, several times, that they are looking for *testimonios*, not only the good ones but that they also want to learn from the negative experiences of their readers. However, they also stress that their intent to migrate is unchallenged (e.g. "En realidad no queremos escuchar solo buenos comentarios comentarios [sic]. Nos interesa tener información lo más objetiva posible como para poder tener una visión mas cierta de la realidad en Quebec. Siempre basados en el respeto." – comment no. 26, written by Natalia, January 14, 2008). The very Latin American textual genre of *testimonio* consists of giving testimony of one's own personal experiences in the sense of saying how it is, but without prescriptive elements – this, it appears, is one of A's 'mistakes' in the discussion with T&N.

Resuming the discussion, up to comment 11, A is increasingly treated as an intruder by T&N. T tries to convince A of his viewpoint, but is unsuccessful. This is the moment the CoP changes from simply over-reading the exchange between T and A to a more visible reaction, namely in the form of public comments (T&N might also have received personal emails of support, which we do not know of). Above all, the CoP begins to openly side with T&N by complimenting their blog in general, and their reflected answers to A in particular. For example, comment no. 19 by Gus Comas says, "Terry, muy interesante las respuestas al anonimo y celebro tu inteligencia y sentido común." The blogosphere ac-

knowledges in their comments that T&N have spent considerable time on their decision to migrate and do not expect a paradise – in contrast to A, whose decision to pursue a doctorate in a country he claims to despise shows, in the eyes of the community, his exclusion from the CoP. Pointedly, A is very rarely addressed directly, which is in accordance with the well-known strategy of ‘not feeding the trolls’ (see Graphic 2). Talking about someone as if they were not present is of course very face-damaging (as pointed out by Hardaker 2010, cf. ch. 2). See for example comment no. 22, in which A is openly labelled a troll:

(5) Comment no. 22: 7 de enero de 2008 22:37

andres dijo...

Consulto el blog con regularidad, es una herramienta muy valiosa para los interesados en el tema de la migración a Québec. Es una lástima que trolls anónimos estén ensuciando el blog con comentarios racistas y ofensivos. Igual, tienes mucha paciencia para responder las tonterías del anónimo, porque él no va a cambiar, seguirá igual de frustrado y de ignorante. Pero tres tipos como esos, pueden arruinar el trabajo de un blog, mejor desde ya eliminar esos comentarios que nada aportan.

felicitaciones por el blog.

Again, T&N are congratulated for their blog that is categorised as a very useful tool for those interested in migrating to Quebec, an act that is publicly enhancing T&N’s face. Andres then expresses his regret that anonymous trolls are defaming the blog by racist and offensive remarks. He denotes A as stupid, frustrated and ignorant without addressing him directly. Still, it is very likely that A will also have read this comment and understood it as intended.

One comment (of four) that does indeed address A directly is comment no. 12, by Roberto Román, a fellow Chilean who nevertheless sides with T&N and refutes many of the arguments A has given initially, by pointing to his own personal migration experience.

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Roberto first directs most of his comment to T&N and the rest of the CoP, and turns to address A only in the last paragraph:

(6) Comment Nr 12: 30 de diciembre de 2007 14:30

Roberto Román dijo...

Veo que mi comentario había quedado en otro lado, así que lo copio aquí:⁹

Lamento los comentarios de "anónimo", justamente de eso hablaba esta tarde con mi esposa, una gran cantidad de chilenos se dedican a decir brutalidades cuando algo no les gusta, no se preocupan de conocer, apreciar o comprender. [...]

Así que "anónimo" cómete tu amargura y soberbia solo, vuelvete a Chile, donde seguirás siendo el cuico de siempre que pisotea al resto de la "plebe". Por lo demás el hecho de firmar anónimamente demuestra cobardía.

Roberto here tells A to shut up and return to Chile, labelling him as an arrogant member of the upper class (*cuico de siempre*). He, as did Terry in his comment no. 3, also shows his irritation that A remains anonymous and links this to cowardice.¹⁰ (As noted in Appendix 1, A did respond to this, apparently very furiously, in comment no. 16 that was later deleted by T&N, as explained in comment no. 17.)

⁹ Apart from this introductory sentence, the comment is identical to a comment to Terry and Naty's blog post of December 28, 2007; published on December 29, 2007, 20:30.

¹⁰ Why are some members of the CoP so annoyed that A stays anonymous? After all, A gives quite a few biographical information (Chilean, doctoral student, father of two children), more than some other readers-commentators – but, crucially, he is not aligned with others in orientation towards immigration as a daunting, but promising and exciting experience. Instead, his exposition of the negative view on his life circumstances in Quebec rather appears to others as the reason why he chooses anonymity. There are other incidents of anonymous commentators in our corpus; however, it seems that at least some of these are due to technical problems of the commentators, as some comments attest, where readers identify themselves in a subsequent comment. Also in this case analysis, comment no. 19 is posted as erroneously written by the wife of Gus Comas, who after noting this error immediately auto-identifies himself as author of comment no. 19.

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Apart from the examples described above, the community's activities can be resumed as following: by and large, A's choice of words is criticised strongly and repeatedly by each commentator. For instance, comment no. 27 by Carlos Asenjo (15 de enero de 2008, 21:08) says, "la verdad es que muchas cosas de las que escribe el señor anonimo son muy ciertas. Aunque tal vez merezca mejor decir las de manera menos vehemente y con mas calma." Moreover, some of A's expressions are reproduced as quotes, albeit with strong distancing from the arguments given. Quotes show that readers orientate themselves towards his arguments in order to refute them, but also whether a commentator has read the entire discussion and reflected on it, thus indexing the amount of time invested in the argument and the blog. Interestingly, as comment no. 27 also attests, some of A's arguments are taken up in the second half of the thread and discussed heatedly within the CoP. Commentators often concur with A's initial arguments (especially Quebec's dismal health system), but never fail to criticise his choice of words. Authors here go to great lengths to present themselves as balanced and respectful of other opinions. Topics are often introduced by reference to one's own personal experience (most often related to problems to find a gynecologist during pregnancy and of revalidation of academic titles). On the other hand, commentators shy away from A's arguments concerning other immigrant groups and visible minorities. In this respect, the role played by narratives as argumentative devices is very interesting: A typically argues by giving generalisations (e.g., *el sistema de salud es una mierda*), while the community tends to prove their point by referring to personal experiences in the sense of giving a *testimonio*. Of course, referring to one's own life inhibits others to contest a fact (since one is the expert of one's own life), but it also creates a certain closeness as telling others about one's life can be seen as a token of trust (entrusting others with personal informa-

tion) and thus enhancing the group's face as caring and supportive.

4. Conclusion

The question arises whether A really is a troll or not. As we saw, this is almost impossible to decide for sure since we have no information on A's intent when he posted his comments. It is unclear if he had the intent to deceive, or if he is – as is suggested by several members of the CoP – a very frustrated, solitary, bitter man who is rebuked even by other Latin American immigrants to Quebec. More important, however, is how A's comments are gradually taken up by the blogosphere and transformed into legitimate arguments worthy of discussion. It is precisely by publicly siding with T&N that shows that the entire CoP feels to be under attack and considers it necessary to address the issue. By siding with T&N, the CoP not only enhances the couple's face, but also updates on its own group identity (also cf. Bedijs, this volume, for a discussion of mechanisms of face enhancements). Face management is taking place by encouraging T&N in their immigration project and by portraying A as an outsider who is not to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that all commentators condemn A for his use of aggressive, racist and impolite choice of word, but that later comments in the discussion start to reframe some of his remarks and elaborate on them.

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Appendix 1: Number of comments, date, author of comment, and addressee of comment

No.	Date ¹¹	Terry & Naty	Anónimo	Other bloggers
Post	10.7.2007, 13:44	X		
1	11.7.2007, 12:36			Gus Comas
2	20.7.2007, 12:23			Juan Francisco
3	27.12.2007, 23:52		X	
4	28.12.2007, 12:32	X		
5	29.12.2007, 01: 10		X	
6	29.12.2007, 02:44		X	
7	29.12.2007, 10: 46	X		
8	29.12.2007, 17:05		X	
9	29.12.2007, 17:14		X	
10	30.12.2007, 02:55	X		
11	30.12.2007, 04:14		X	
12	30.12.2007, 14:30			Roberto Román (directed at A)
13	30.12.2007, 14:46			Roberto Román (directed at T&N)
14	30.12.2007, 15:36	X (response to nos. 12 and 13)		
15	30.12.2007, 17:14	X (response to A)		
16	30.12.2007, 17:38		X (deleted, according to no. 17)	

¹¹ Note that, due to differences in the time zones bloggers and readers are residing in, indications of dates can vary somewhat.

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			directed at T and Roberto Román)	
17	30.12.2007, 17:53	X (noting that no. 16 was deleted for foul language)		
18	30.12.2007, 21:18		X	
19	2.1.2008, 00:40			Mabel/Gus Comas
20	2.1.2008, 00:43			Gus Comas (identifying himself as author of no. 19, instead of his wife)
21	2.1.2008, 00:43			deleted – probably Gus, possibly identical to no. 20
22	7.1.2008, 22:37			Andres (first to label A a troll)
23	8.1.2008, 19:15			Andriana
24	9.1.2008, 07:18	X (response to nos. 22 and 23)		
25	14.1.2008, 00:08			Karina Valdéz
26	14.1.2008, 07:44	X (response to no. 25)		
27	15.1.2008, 21:08			Carlos Asenjo
28	18.1.2008, 03:14			Rosana

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29	10.2.2008, 00:10			LuisP
30	10.2.2008, 09:13	X (response to no. 29)		
31	20.2.2008, 00:26		X (directed at blogosphere)	
32	29.2.2008, 19:03			A1348058 (directed at A)
33	25.1.2009, 21:25			Angiel (directed at A1348058)
34	22.2.2009, 01:43			Anónimo2
35	22.2.2009, 02:44			Anónimo2