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Figura... or Face? Reflections on Two Sociopragmatic Key Concepts in the Light of a Recent Media Conflict Between Italians and Germans and Its Negotiation in Italian Internet Forums

1. Introductory remarks

Immediately after the accident of the cruise liner *Costa Concordia* near the Italian island of Giglio in January 2012, in which the ship's captain, Francesco Schettino, cowardly left his ship without managing the rescue of 4,000 passengers, the media and the internet were full of comments on this avoidable tragedy and the captain's unacceptable behaviour.

Among the global reactions, an ironic column published in the online edition of the German news magazine DER SPIEGEL gave the worldwide discourse a sharp turn by provoking (once again)¹ a fierce verbal controversy between Italians and Germans. The

¹ Such a media controversy between Italy and Germany based on historically developed mutual heterostereotypia (cf. the two books by Heitmann 2003 and 2004) is nothing new. There are, for instance, the reactions concerning the SPIEGEL cover from 31/1977 (a gun on a pasta dish) and 29/2011 (Berlusconi as a gondolier) or several football world championships and so on. Cf. for instance Mazza Moneta 1999 and more concrete Ehrhardt 2007 (online manuscript).

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column – entitled “*Italienische Fahrerflucht*” (= Italian hit-and-run driving) – was introduced by the following derisive remark:

Bella figura machen, heisst der italienische Volkssport, bei dem es darum geht, andere zu beeindrucken. Auch Francesco Schettino wollte eine gute Figur machen, leider war ihm ein Felsen im Weg. (Spiegel Online 2012)

Presenting a ‘bella figura’ (a ‘beautiful’ = good figure) is the Italian national sport, which is all about making a good impression on others. Francesco Schettino is one of those who wanted to make a good impression, but unfortunately a rock got in his way.

This key sentence, which was intended to be nothing other than a rhetorical teaser aimed at turning the readers’ attention to the European crisis, was evidently misunderstood by the Italians: the fact that a German journalist compared the tragic shipwreck to the slump in the European economy by relating Schettino’s irresponsibility with the cultural stereotype of the Italian happy-go-lucky *pappagallo* was too much for the already *bunga-bunga* shaken Italy, and was thus seen as a collective offence to the national pride. In addition to a protest letter from the Italian Ambassador to Germany, this SPIEGEL column immediately sparked millions of furious comments in web 2.0 blogs. At the same time, a flood of reactions in all different kinds of media arose, revitalising the historical ascriptions, viz. ‘lazy’ (but happy) Italians versus ‘hard-working’ (but unhappy) Germans, (cf. Heitmann 2003), through the contrasting figures of “Schettino” and “Merkel”. Increasingly rich imagery, exploited for all kinds of visual and verbal caricatures, was developed.² Finally, newspapers, mainly the reputed *La Repubblica*, did not shy away from going back to the situation in

² See, for instance, the title in the *Tagesanzeiger*, Zürich: “Fauler Italiener, überheblicher Deutscher” (2012-01-24), or the satirical stylisation of the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, as the fleeing captain of the ship *Europa Discordia* in the newspaper *Libero* (2012-01-26).

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World War II. But then, a coup took place which changed everything and pushed the whole affair into the world press: “*A noi Schettino, a voi Auschwitz*” was the headline of the Berlusconi-close tabloid *Il Giornale*, on 27th January 2012. All of a sudden, this turned an airy-fairy *bufera in rete* into a tasteless twisting of history: the populist discussion about intercultural clichés now developed into an evil discourse about race, which egged on national prejudices long thought to be dead and, presumably, was played by both sides against the other with political calculation. Abusing the luring repertoire of Nazi connotations, Italians no longer worried about attacking and offending the Germans, thus reflecting a frightening picture of the vitality of nationalism and its easy outbreak into a hostile “clash of cultures”. At the time this article was written (March 2012), the mutual baiting in the internet was in full swing.

In my opinion, the trigger to this media row turned out to be the unhappy use of the holy notion of “*fare bella figura*” in the mouth of a German journalist; hence, *figura* – and no longer the failing captain Schettino – became the main subject of the never-ending Italian forum outrages I am still following with astonishment from outside. Thus, within the context of this volume entitled “Face work and Social Media”, I decided to look at the notion of *figura*, as mentioned above in the key sentence of the online column, from a linguistic perspective. On the one hand, it is the key subject of this intercultural dispute, and, on the other hand, it bears directly upon the concept of *face work*, including broadly based discussions in pragmatic research. Not only does this term embody Italian-ness as seen from the outside, but it also represents a common inner value that is kept in continuous tension between the two ethical points of reference – *bello* (good) versus *brutto* (bad). *Fare bella figura* can therefore be considered the epitome of what is regarded as typically Italian without being really definable or

describable (cf. the American translation of Severgnini's book 2006). Even though the term is semantically and pragmatically fuzzy, the manifestation of *figura* as a good or bad image that individuals constantly reveal in interaction with others is without doubt the most important identity criterion of Italian cultural behaviour, and thus rightly serves as the key fuel in the SPIEGEL column and the verbal harassing it still provokes between Italians and Germans.

Encouraged by the current example, I would like to deal with the question of why and how Italian-ness is constructed and defined through the term *figura*. A diachronic, a synchronic and a comparative view of the term's semantic development, its collocations and co-occurrences will soon shape it against another key notion of modern pragmatics, the notion of *face*. As we are concerned with this obvious metonymic relationship between the two conceptions, our observations are automatically positioned in the framework of the theories of interaction, viz. particularly, the paradigm of politeness. Without doubt, *fare figura* has to do with politeness and can therefore also be connected to the concept of *face work*. However, how and why these concepts are related has not been examined systematically as yet. Thus, finer clarification in both the semantic relationship between *figura* and *face* and their pragmatic coverage might not only throw some light onto intercultural discourse and communication, but could also lead to further theoretical and methodological findings in modern socio-pragmatics (cf. Haas 2009; from a linguistic point of view Wierzbicka 1991; Trosborg 2010 or consecutive issues of the *Journal of Intercultural Pragmatics*).

In this context, the question of the role and meaning of *figura* seems all the more interesting. As mentioned above, in the SPIEGEL discourse the Italians themselves get quickly caught up in a paradox: the 'noble' defence of their *bella figura* developed obvi-

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ously into an ignoble *brutta figura*. Or, could we also say in modern terminology: *face defence* turned into *face loss*? Thus, if there is a connection between *figura* and *face*, are the terms really conceptionally interchangeable in such situations? And can they be used in an ethno-psychological sense (as, for example, Kainz 1941-1965 has done) in order to characterise people, ethnics or nations idealistically? What will happen if the confusion is made even worse through the usage of some more competitive terms such as *identity*, *image*, *honour*, *dignity*...?

The enormous number of reactions from Italians and Germans caused by the Schettino problem in all forms of Social Media thus offers a never-ending corpus for linguistic studies from different points of view. This paper will first deal with the Italian reactions to the column in SPIEGEL online in a selected Italian chat forum (cf. Schettino corpus). The data are enlightening insofar as they deal with the *figura* problem on various levels: on a meta-linguistic and thus discursive level, on an interlingual level (due to the distinct cultural approaches of the users and the filtering through different attempts to translate and to report) and on the level of the ongoing verbal negotiation itself. With regard to the latter, *figura* is interesting in two ways: on the one hand, it is the topic to be dealt with and, on the other hand, it is an intrinsic process, which means that it is shaped and judged through verbal behaving in the postings thus coming out as either *bella* or *brutta figura*. Or is it all about *face*, which becomes 'visible' in the text and which is developed during the communication among the different users? This last question leads us directly to the area of sociopragmatics, where *verbal action* equals *social action*, which is defined as aiming at rational cooperation in order to sensibly handle and balance communicative conflicts. Such verbal conduct due to be situationally appropriate is called *face work*. *Computer-mediated communication* (CMC) needs to be written and thus lends itself to proper em-

pirical surveillance of such strategies. Whatever one thinks about the value of *figura*, whether it is seen as positive or negative, there is no doubt that it deals with the realisation of *face*. If there is a mutual *face* acknowledgement among the participants, there is yet another, competing concept involved, namely *politeness*. Thus, our discussion around *figura* deals not only with a term, but also with a corresponding pragmatic paradigm developed to explain interactive action in general. This further condenses our considerations theoretically.

According to these introductory remarks, the study will contrast the notions of *figura* and *face* by outlining the following points:

- 1) a brief comparative study of the two notions concerning their terminological development as a result of the cultural-semantic implications;
- 2) a draft of the main sociopragmatic concepts of *face* (and *face work*) in order to figure out continuities and differences with the concept of *figura*;
- 3) a discussion of these findings within the theory of (*im*)*politeness* and its different interpretations as lay-concept or scientific modelling;
- 4) the provision of methodological tools due to further application to the data of the *Schettino corpus* where *figura* and *face* are supposed to be reflected in written language cues.

2. *Figura* – a cultural-semantic excursus

The awareness that human feelings are physiologically ‘exteriorised’ is as old as mankind itself. The body, its posture, and, primarily, the face, as the physical part which is permanently visible (VISUM) due to its being unconcealed in most cultures, are per-

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ceived as a mirror of personality (cf. also Stagl 1994 concerning the concept of "honour"). Whereas physicalness as a whole is a product of collective rules and regulations which shape it and represent both culture and 'modes' to the outside world, the face is unique; as the visible epitome of singular traits of character it represents the key to the subject. The Latin word FIGURA and its development within European languages gives evidence of this perceptible field of tension, which has been carried forward from antiquity onwards through the many anti-carnal centuries in the Middle Ages, over the Renaissance to Modernity. The humanistic idea of man (Germ. '*Menschenbild*') integrated physiological and psychological characteristics into an aesthetic whole representing power. During the Enlightenment, this idea turned into a rational calculation of social climbing, which in the 19th century is further charged with morality, manners and decency, finally spotlighting current mental states through the influence of psychoanalysis. Outward appearance always plays a central role; hence, a person could not only be accepted but also classified socially. *Figura* thus refers to "visible" corporality as a material outlook.³

In the Renaissance, *figura* referred exclusively to physical appearance (*apparenza*), as perceived by others. It implied the aesthetic potential to elicit pleasure (*delectare*) as well as 'pleasing' others (*placere*). *Contegno*, *grazia* and *spezzatura* are the demands which the *perfetto cortegiano* should radiate in his presence. According to the aristocratically influenced value system, this should happen not only through the stature, but, more specifically, through outward behaviour (*(com)portamento*, cf. Wandruszka 1954; cf. also Stagl,

³ This does not go without saying if we look at the semantic development of the term (from lat. FINGERE "to form", "to model") via the denomination of a special shape (compare modern engl. *figure*) and the different characteristics of its forms (for instance, rhetorical, grammatical, artistic etc., "figures") to the antonomastic access to the person itself. In spite of all semantic and formal diversification the lowest common multiple of this word field is nevertheless the outer "appearance".

concerning 'honour' 1994). In my opinion, the major works of the Renaissance, *Cortegiano* and *Galateo*, focus the term *figura* to a collective, 'polished' and thus 'glossy' attitude (*pulitezza* > French *politesse*, Engl. *politeness*), which tie the courtly ideal of civilisation to urban bourgeois (monetary) power and thus evoke the illusion of a good reputation, which is achieved through personal effort and was thus worth representing to the outside (cf. Burke's concept of "conspicuous consumption", Burke 1987: 111). The ideal depiction of human qualities and advantages can also be found in the so called "*ritratto*" (cf. also Christiansen/Weppelmann 2011). As an "image" of glory and wealth, the portrait is the preferred artistic instrument used with regard to seigniorial marriage politics, but shows at the same time the central role of the face in the demonstrative presentation and characterisation of outstanding personalities within the competitive context of aristocratic origin and social standing.⁴ In fact, the popular *ritratto* projects the gaze from the *figura* to the *viso*, literally the 'visible', which emanates the high rank and thus turns into an indexical value scale of the hierarchically organised society.

This physiological metonymy between body and face seems to be inherent within the notion of *figura*. It is later on reflected in the polysemy of the French term *figure*, which developed during the verbal *bienséance* in the 17th century. The ordinary word *face* (directly taken from Latin FACIES) was substituted by the euphemism *figure*, especially as it referred to something naked and thus of bad taste. According to another hypothesis, *face* phonetically coincided with *fesses* ('thighs'), an equally ignoble term that had to be abo-

⁴ Cf. also the concept of *vera effigie* ('real copy') in the art of portraiture during the Renaissance.

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lished. In either case, it was seen by the courteous society as not appropriate to the so-called *bon usage*.⁵

This example of the French extension of meaning leads to the second point of my arguments, namely that *face*, in contrast to the figure or body, focuses on individuality and thus on subjective uniqueness. This view is based on the antique psychological knowledge that facial expression is the mirror of the human soul.⁶ Thus, Latin has two expressions referring to face, *FACIES* (from *FACIO*, 'I shape, I form') and *VISUS*, the effectively "seen", the perceived part of the body. In terms of cultural history, this points to the majority of customs to leave the face (as the place of the senses) unveiled and thus openly present it. The Romance languages, however, deal differently with the two terms: in Italian we have *faccia* and *viso* as different varieties of usage, whereas in French we have *face* (*face à face*) and *visage*, the latter a derivation of the old French *vis* (*vis-à-vis*), which, for phonological reasons, shows different diachronic stages. The Ibero-Romance languages take the Greek *CARA* and additionally differentiate it stylistically with the metonymic *ROSTRUM* ('beak') (Port. *rosto*). German, however, prefers various calques of *VISUM*: *Gesicht*, *Angesicht*, *Antlitz* (the Indo-European prefix *ant-* means 'towards', 'in the face of'; viz. *Antlitz* thus is the part of the body that 'looks back' to us in the social encounter), but German also knows the French borrowing *visage* as an either derogatory or technical term. Only English simply keeps *FACIES* as the standard word *face*. Hence, *face* then becomes a technical term of sociopragmatics, and as such turns into an

⁵ This is why French today has a differentiated word-field concerning *face*, its idiomatic collocations and the word-formation in this area. The derivational *figuration* is of special interest for us as it is often used as the French translation of the English term *face work*. While the English expression *face* is directly transferred into the French *face*, *face work* is translated into *travail de la face* respectively *figuration* with or without inverted commas (cf. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1992, second part).

⁶ Cf. for instance *facial expression* in Wikipedia.

internationally used key notion we will deal with in more detail, by arguing in contrast to Italian *figura*.

As we have seen, *figura* reflects cultural evolution standing for collective physical presence. However, during the Renaissance, this 'visible' embodiment was stylised into the ideal form of the perfect humanistic personality, predominantly manifesting itself in the outward appearance, the so-called *bella presenza*. After the decline of the seigniorial glory and Italy's regression into foreign domination, the *figura* ideal remained as a unifying factor within the collective memory. However, it did not degenerate into the pure illusion of a splendid, but unreturnable past; on the contrary, it becomes the daily pleasure of putting the proper self adequately on stage by reviving and inventing ever more theatrical forms of self-representation: *fare figura* turned into the basic principle of post-rinascimental *art de vivre*; enriched with values of the respective societal context *fare bella figura* vs. *fare brutta figura* turned out to be the performative key to right or wrong behaviour, which provided the fragile social order with regulative lines of rights and morality. At the same time, it guaranteed a common mental commitment during a time of lawless foreign dominance, making living together bearable as it hid social competition and injustice behind the skilful demonstration of a beautiful façade.

Nevertheless, outer form is kept together with the help of strict inner rules. Regardless of whether it was the cultural group or era which decided what was considered beautiful and what ugly, (cf. Eco 2004 and 2010) the *figura* concept turned out to be a covert method of judgement learned in the socialisation of those who grew up in Italian territory. Its outer handling and inner valuating in the range of *bello* vs. *brutto* became the social imperative for all Italians, unifying the experienced in-group against an extraneous out-group. Without doubt, Italian language is the most telling mirror of this development. According to Lurati (1997: 310), particu-

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larly *fare bella figura* is an expression witnessed and frequently used already in the 17th century even in all dialects. Regardless of local origin, it is an expression of general estimation; what or who is considered *bello* simply depends on the other's vision – it is the look, the visual effect that a *figura* makes in and to the community. That is why *apparir bene* becomes the leitmotif of people being aware of constantly making a good impression. Hence, people's art of living is the great art of delighting the others by themselves, by *la bella presenza*, which is not simply an aesthetic way of self-presenting, but a general respectful kindness, a disinterested openness that puts a simply embellishing masquerade over social reality and difference. As *bella figura* is the norm, it can apparently be performed by everyone regardless of his or her social background. This makes it – paradoxically – a social equaliser which guarantees the stability of societal organisation.

The *brutta figura* (today more frequently named as *figuraccia*), on the contrary, is considered a violation of the norm and thus implies the feared condemnation by the *comunità*, including loss of reputation and honour. This expression is witnessed a little later. But as language is also the mirror of ongoing social processes, Italian has developed a range of depreciating idiomatic phrases which reflect the inability to perform *bella figura*. This is considered typical for emarginated social groups; that is why we find idioms like the North-Italian *fare una figura da cioccolataio*,⁷ further *figura da cameriere*, *figura del parente povero*, *figura da barbone*, procuring the linguistic proof that the *figura* concept has steadily turned into a tool for social (even racist) depreciation. This trend is still very productive today, constituting a wide range of common popular

⁷ According to Lurati 1997: 311, this is due to the faces of the chocolate workers which are stained with dark chocolate or to the chocolate characters in sweet shops, "che raffiguravano a vivi colori poveri negri delle piantagioni centroamericane con un aspetto molto primitivo e sciocco".

expressions like *figura da stupido*, *figura da stronzo*, etc. and, in an offensive sense, even *figura di merda*. Last but not least, this diversity of expressions shows that negative emotions always provoke more drastic imagery and are thus language-wise more vital than positive feelings.

Even though *bella figura* has manifested itself mainly through communicative behaviour since the Renaissance (cf., for instance, Guazzo's *Civil Conversazione*) and thus affects verbal manners and comportment (Castiglione's *Cortegiano*), it is always the person *per se* who is the centre of the *figura* concept: it embraces the construction of the ego in its convenient appearance and has a social function insofar as it turns encounters into a pleasant but primarily visual event. The concept of *face*, on the contrary, refers to a completely different aspect of social encounter, namely the one which evolves through interaction and is shared (*shared face*) and concretely put into practice at a communicative level. From this, we could deduce in advance that *figura* is always connected with the EGO, whereas *face* depends more on the ALTER and is thus a reflexive term. This assumption can also be justified through the consequences which ensue for the *figura* concept in the respective historical context: the tension between how one is looked at and what one looks like finally always focuses on the stylisation of the self, not only by making up the physical appearance and the 'good looking', but also by cultivating the personal ambiance of living, environment and lifestyle. This determines the whole way of living in Italian culture.⁸

It is, actually, not only the external view that turns the art of *bella figura* into this "typical" Italian sense of style and appearance,

⁸ Today's consumer society also uses the term for Italian design, fashion labels, aesthetic art, and for guidelines concerning Galateo with visible results of specific creativity and event culture (for instance, the title of books such as: *Il galateo a tavola per fare sempre bella figura*, *La bella figura in cucina*, etc.).

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which foreigners, even after a certain amount of experience in Italy, cannot copy as being the “inimitable art of a beautiful image” (Severgnini). No, it also refers to the experience of the public sphere (such as the dramatic appeal of customs and traditions, public manifestation forms, the political show culture and particularly the mediatisation of society itself peaking in the Berlusconi televised ego-cult) or to certain kinds of sacral and profane architecture (thus, churches are, for instance, seen as a “predecessor of the glory of heaven” (Hoffmann 2010) and city houses are generally called *palazzo*). It also sets the rules and regulations for appropriate behaviour within private relationships (even within marriage!) as well as in social networking and career systems. It extends from having advantages in groups to the *omertà* principle of the mafia. To put it into a nutshell: what seems to be “normal” or even innate behaviour for Italians is striking only for foreigners. So-called strangers are speechless when they are confronted with the art of “perfect illusion” (Barzini 1965) and feel that they are outsiders who cannot be integrated either in their inner or outer state. They might even feel like a physical emanation of a *brutta figura*, torn between jealousy and admiration. It is therefore not surprising that people travelling to Italy perceive *figura* either directly or indirectly as the engine of this non-specific longing which makes this country “where the lemons are in bloom” (Goethe) so attractive but unattainable. It is not for nothing that cultural studies, tourist guides and sociological literature are full of attempts to describe the *bella figura*, explaining the secrets of its aura and the extension of its effects.⁹ Looking at the innumer-

⁹ Forums in the world wide web make it obvious that people can neither define the term nor translate it convincingly, e.g.: “I am still trying to wrap my head around the concept of *fare bella figura*. It literally means “to make a beautiful figure”, but most people would translate it as “a good impression”. Truthfully, it is a little of both – and it’s singularly Italian. In order to possess a *bella figura*, you must look put-together. (...) But this is just the most basic level of the *bella figura*, the surface clues to a more complex outlook on

able commentaries on *bella figura* on the internet (only very few are mentioned in footnote 9) and their evaluations from both an inner and outer perspective, it becomes clear why it is the *figura* principle that turned into a marker of national identity, and is thus exploited in today's media discourse, used for consumption and economic competition, and politically played off against other cultures and ideologies.

This is the cultural context in which the discourse concerning the Schettino affair and the Italian provocation through the use of the *figura* stereotype has taken place. To reveal the multi-layered complexity, further remarks on the concept of *figura*, especially with regard to language, are necessary. Even though *figura* is described mainly from the outside as "the good impression" deriving from outward appearance, an inner capacity which equally remains incomprehensible for foreigners needs to be seen as connected to it as well. *Fare figura* also means having the necessary amount of sensitivity and diplomacy and expressing this successfully in language. This obviously implies a skilful verbal acting which has its

life. Deep down it means ... caring about detail and quality, it means having poise, being hospitable, and appreciating those qualities in others (The Great Whatsit 2007). See also many personal comments in postings on www.italienforum.de. Looking at the internet it also becomes clear that the impossibility of arriving at a definition of *bella figura* also leads to stereotypes and the acclaimed "substantial principle of Italianity" (Severgnini 2006: 7) mutates to national prejudices and supports political ideologies: „*Fare una bella figura* is a cultural and societal cornerstone for Italians. ... *Fare una bella figura* isn't simply aesthetic, it's a matter of respect and active participation in Italian society" (Student comment in Flo'n the Go 2012) or: "Many people have been trying to depict the value- or non-value- of the beautiful SCHEIN ('appearance') (...) In Italy it has long been accepted as a part of culture that cannot be rejected. It has been given another name which is not derogatory: *la figura*, the figure, the shape, there is something concrete to it, especially when it is *bella* (...). But *fare bella figura* is not all about decorum and clothes, it needs to be there for the whole of Italian life ... it is this which leads to having followers and appeal." And a conclusion from a historical point of view: "Non-Italians don't have the *Rinascimento*, the genetic disposition for the Italian talent of self-marketing without which a *bella figura* could never exist." (Posted on vabene@rom.goethe.org, accessed 2012-04-21). Other comments on *bella figura* cf. also Nardini 1999.

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consequences on Italian language. Thus, in relation to the *figura* principle, an interesting tension between two antagonistic sides seems to be apparent in the situation of Italian language: on the one hand, there is a really relaxed attitude towards a frequent use of vocabulary and idioms from the sub-standard, including sexual expressions, which, to this extent, is not to be found in any other Romance language. This does not endanger *bella figura* and leads by no means to *brutta figura*. On the other hand, there are rather explicit rules concerning verbal *garbo* in Italian. This means that the Italians have “a collective consciousness for a good communication style” (Severgnini 2006: 173), which turns Italian speaking into a subtle art of successfully enacted self-management. Hence, there is no doubt that the principle of making a *bella figura* also concerns communicative behaviour, in all its facets of physicalness, viz. with regard to kinetics, gestures, mimicry and, verbally, with regard to prosody, stylistics and rhetoric. This assumption can be proven by a rich repertoire of person-bound routine formulae perceived as commonly polite (viz. well-wishing such as *abbi pazienza, mi raccomando*, or the amount of smoothing replies to acts of thanking such as *S’immagini, Si figuri* which pragmatically enrich the universal inventory such as *prego, di niente* or *non c’è di che*). There are the frequent direct allocutions mentioning name and title as well as the historically connoted differentiation of address pronouns (such as *voi* vs. *lei/loro*), the morpho-pragmatic handling of the quantitative and qualitative suffixes and the way of using indirect utterances, modality processes and euphemism.

Many of these particular language abilities were already identified by Spitzer as early as 1922 in his description of *Italienische Umgangssprache* (“Italian colloquial language”) in association with a specific “tricky” politeness. Drawing on idealistic linguistics, Spitzer does not hesitate to characterise Italian intuitively as a language of dialogue per se, where subtle aesthetic, stylistic variation

and context-sensitive flexibility are skilfully united in order to realise the 'good conversation' propagated already by Guazzo during the Renaissance. With regard to language history, we should briefly mention that the major argument for the Italian *questione della lingua* is primarily the awareness of a supra-regional adequacy and policy for all communicative situations. This emphasises the idea of a common and unifying *idioma gentile* (De Amicis) that respects appropriate social behaviour.¹⁰ *Fare bella figura* appears thus to be an inherent part of Italian culture: in regard to language it even turns out to be the communicative autopoiesis which constantly controls and automatically cleanses even the language system (consider, for instance, the leitmotif of the *Crusca*-Academy). As opposed to this, *brutta figura* is a kind of social gaffe, performed by pragmatically inappropriate language use. What is excusable for outsiders is socially sanctioned for insiders who are then considered as uncivilised and illiterate fellows. This shows yet again that communicative competence in Italian is judged in a large extent by the principle of *figura*.

3. *Face* – a rival term and its theoretical formation

The discussion of the verbal manifestations of the *figura* concept automatically leads to the area of politeness, especially in terms of verbal politeness. Thus, the cultural-historical excursus rightly draws our attention to current pragma-linguistic research, where the concept of *politeness* plays a crucial role by retaining two understandings. On the one hand, there is the traditional lay con-

¹⁰ *Gentile* has had a special connotation ever since the *Dolce Stil Nuovo*. This is something that cannot be discussed here, but is automatically implied when referring to De Amicis.

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ception, based on historical and culture-specific value implications that are learned and experienced by the members of each cultural group in the ongoing socialisation process. This acquired know-how conducts social interaction in order to make participants feel at ease, and consists in mutual strategies of appropriate verbal behaviour, mostly based on a repertoire of formulae and routine speech acts. On the other hand, *politeness* is understood from a scientific point of view, where it forms the basis of a theorem to help to universally explain communicative interaction in general (according to Eelen 2001 and Watts 2003 *politeness*₁ versus *politeness*₂). The scientific understanding of the term constitutes the so-called politeness paradigm (or Grice-Goffman paradigm) and has been causing a boom of research among many different cultures, languages, communicative events and situations ever since the pioneering work of Brown/Levinson in 1978/87. Up until today, it has been both approved and criticised from various points of view. The central question is the empirical appearance and, so to speak, the language concreteness of such strategic processes which apply to the two distinct understandings of politeness (cf. Held 2010 and 2011). Therefore, a normative benchmark is needed. This is found and constructed in the concept of *face*.

Initiated by Goffman's sociopsychological approach, *face* turns into the basic and referential concept of the theoretical grasp to the notion of *politeness*. Due to its development within the Anglophone context, *face* is constituted and generalised as a rival term to *figura*. In one of his seminal publications, "On Face-work", Goffman defines *face* as "an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes – albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes (...) a good showing for himself [sic]" (1967: 5). It remains to be discussed whether and in how far the 'good showing' through *face* differs from the Italian *figura*. However, it is clear that the concept of *face* turns into an abstract value

to be the normative centre of every rational interaction and thus determines the *lines* (in Goffman's own terminology) of actions in order to avoid conflicts by respecting general cooperation to mutual advantage. Hence, *face* is a dynamic concept which is only activated and negotiated in interpersonal encounters. It is thus inherently communicative and manifests itself only symbolically, viz. mainly in language. As a purely communicative action with a social-harmonizing effect, *politeness* is thus generally directed to satisfying the wants and claims of *face* by activating a range of appropriate verbal strategies and attitudes.

From his studies on *face* and *politeness*, O'Driscoll (1996 and 2010) draws the following interesting conclusion concerning the term *face*: "Face we have, politeness we do". This means that he differentiates between the two concepts according to endogenous vs. exogenous aspects. If we attempt to formulate this conclusion using the term *figura*, it would read: "*face we have, figura we do*" (= *fare una bella* or *brutta figura!*). In opposition to *face* which, as an inherent – normally unconscious – quality of each socialised individual is yielded only in confrontation with the other and as such mutually approved or threatened, *figura* has a uni-directional, result-oriented character. It is symbolically created in order to find one's own personal confirmation; the other is just the mirror and, lacking reciprocity, is not responsible for its judgement, nor for its forms. That is why, for the sake of my discussion, we have to take into account the *fare...figura* which, as a strategic interaction process in which a good or bad result is achieved, comes closer to the concept of *(im)politeness*. Both activities are concerned with communication. However, a look at the related concept of *politeness* illustrates more precisely the differences between *face* and *figura*. They will become even more explicit when considering their exact role during the communicative process. In my view, if we want to judge certain behaviour forms as polite, *face* can then be seen as

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their catalyst, whereas *figura* is intended to be their goal. But it is difficult to find evaluation categories to verify this assumption.

Let us thus try to grasp the relationship between *face* vs. *figura* again from the point of view of semantics. As shown in the first part of this paper, both terms have the same core meaning: it is the denotation 'face' which, according to the respective cultural context, alternates between the more physical or more psychical embodiment. As we have already seen, *face* is a direct descendant of the Latin FACIES from FACIO 'to make, to form, to shape' (It. *faccia*, O.Fr. *face/faz*, Span. *faz*, Port. *face*, Rum. *față*, Engl. *face*). With regard to the 'revelation' of the personality (*persona* 'mask') and its uniqueness, a concrete second term developed in Latin, namely VISUS, 'the seen' which was borrowed in German as 'Angesicht' (and later *Gesicht*). It continues to exist in the Romance languages in It. *viso*, O.Fr. *vis* / Fr. *visage*, Sp. *visual*, Port. *visão/vista*. Whereas in English both everyday and technical terminology has been focused on the neutral word *face*, the Romance languages developed the two rival terms, differentiating between distinct varieties of usage and constituting a great number of locutions which – as always in idiomatics – show the stages of language development.

In order to illustrate this, I would like to focus on the central-Romance languages: within Italian, for instance, *faccia* is the semantically more extensive term; it is more often used in everyday language denoting the optical side of the facial expression (*faccia a faccia*). Expressions like *una bella* or *brutta faccia* only relate to the look of the face in terms of an aesthetic evaluation and are in semantic contrast to the figurative *bella* or *brutta figura*. *Faccia* is thus the concrete semantic unity, at the same time also a rather expressive colloquial term (*alla faccia mia*, *faccia tosta...*). For a more polished style or even for technical terminology (for instance, in cosmetics or art), it is replaced by *viso*, which is therefore connotatively different. Concerning French, I have already explained the

metonymic replacement of the traditional word *face* (*face à face*; *en face de*, etc.) through *figure* (see above). The phonetically shortened word *vis* today appears only in locutions such as *vis-à-vis*. In order to avoid the rather frequent French *homonymie gênante*, *vis* was replaced by the longer term *visage*, which has the highest semantic expansion from general to technical vocabulary (and is known in German as a foreign, depreciating word).¹¹ However, we are not dealing further with the ramification of the semantic field of Latin VISUM. What is more interesting here is how the Romance languages react to the English terminology which is constituted within the area of the sociopsychological theories of *face*. Is it Ital. *faccia*, *viso* or *figura*, Fr. *face*, *visage* or *figure*, Span. *faz*, *figura* or *cara*, Port. *face* or *visão* ... and others? Or is the term *face* simply conserved as a scientific notion that is about to infiltrate common language use?

We should look at this question by finding out how both *face* and *figura* are treated in Italian. Today, the locutions *salvare la faccia* / *perdere la faccia* can be found in every dictionary.¹² Without taking into account the scientific usage based on Goffman, where it would logically be a literal translation from English, the idiom (in the lemma marked with fig.= figurative) can be considered as a rather common and often used expression. In fact, “Espressioni come *perdere o salvare la faccia* sono presenti in misura significativa in molte lingue: ne risulta una sorta di mappa antropo-geografica” (Lurati 2001: 285). But when paraphrasing the two idiomatic expressions Lurati makes a difference: “*salvare la faccia*” is explained as “salvare le apparenze”, “*perdere la faccia*”, on the contrary, as “*fare una brutta figura*” (2001: 285), viz. *faccia* and *figura* seem to be correspondents only in the negative domain. Is this an occurrence

¹¹ The Ibero-Romance languages also use the Greek word CARA within the semantic field and marginalise *faz/face*, both do not have the same semantics.

¹² N.B. Fr. also *perdre la face/sauver la face*, Port. *salvar a face*, but Span. *salvar la cara*.

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of translation or a necessary distinction? Further discussion is needed, leading us into the theoretical discourse around *face*.

Both lexicography and the different branches of *face* theory¹³ assume that the term *face* – as Lurati states in 2001: 285 – is a fitting metaphor for the “microcosmo delle specificità individuali”. Automatically present in every communicative encounter, it is performed and negotiated. In contrast to the more static perception of *figura*, as in the bodily appearance and impression of a singular person, *face* is a dynamic and complex term which comes into being as a verbal and non-verbal *patrimonio comunicativo* and thus is only realised in interaction with others. Whereas *figura* is a (socially learned) individual thing which can also stand on its own depending on context, *face* is constituted in relation to others and is newly created over and over again in interactions. *Figura*, namely the ‘good *figura*’, is perceived by the other as an exterior quality and can thus be evaluated according to esthetical or sociological criterions. *Face*, on the contrary, is completely dependent on the other; it is created through the other who as well is engaged to actively put his proper *face* into the ongoing interaction. This means that *face* is above all a reflexive term, including a claim to reciprocity. Basically, it is considered as an anthropologically universal core concept; the problem lies in its different symbolic realisation, which derives from its culturally distinct interpretations.

Going back to the origin of the term *face* in its metaphorical sense, we are again confronted with both the conception of *face* and the conception of *figura*. Research agrees that it derived from the Chinese and was then taken over by the different languages. There is no real proof of this, but the formal congruency of the idiomatic expressions *lose/save face* which exist in most languages gives reasons to assume this common descent. There is again the striking

¹³ Cf. the English Wikipedia entry on *face negotiation theory*.

fact that the negative expression can be traced back longer than the positive one. According to Lurati, the expression *to lose face* as the verbal statement of the fear of being socially punished and isolated already existed in the 19th century in all Romance languages. The positive counterpart *to save face* presumably came into our consciousness only with the advent of sociopsychological theories. It seems to be a fact that Goffman and the translation of his works enormously added to spreading the concept to represent social order in an iconically transparent way and thus quickly crept into everyday life and societal-political discourse. It is certainly English that can be seen as the vehicle language for this transmission. However, the term *face* is, also in English, only a makeshift translation of a far more complex social metaphor, which can already be traced back to the 4th century BC within the Asian tradition.

Following the anthropologist Hu (1944), who wrote the very first study on the term *face* (and is therefore quoted in all research on *face* as, for instance, in Ting-Toomey 1994), the line goes back to the Chinese, where two different *face* terms exist: *lien* and *mien-tzu*. In Morisaki/Gudykunst, we find the following definitions: *Lien* "refers to the confidence of society in the moral character of ego" (1994: 49), this means, according to Lurati, "il prestigio che un individuo riesce ad acquisire con i propri sforzi" (2001: 286); "*mien-tzu*" refers to the social prestige which involves a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation"; according to Lurati (ibid.) *mien-tzu* "indica il rispetto del gruppo per un uomo [sic] che ha una buona reputazione morale, che assolve a tutti gli obblighi senza curarsi della fatica che ciò comporta". The definitions deliberately distinguish a more static from a more dynamic concept and thus come near to the dichotomy between *figura* and *face*. The first term *lien* has a more individual dimension resulting from the personality, the second a more social dimension based on the judgement of the other and hence of

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the collective. As we know, the Asian self-concept is entirely determined through the group and the position of the individual within the group. This position needs to be constantly renegotiated and confirmed. Perhaps this explains why the concept of *face* developed accurately within Chinese culture. It also explains the blending of these two terms into a hybrid metaphor in which, nevertheless, the aspect of social relation is the major one emphasising the communicative character, and it becomes still more apparent in the goal-oriented idioms such as *to lose/save face*. "Loss of *lien* puts ego out of decent human beings and security (...); it entails not only the condemnation of society, but the loss of its confidence in the integrity of ego's characters" (Hu 1944: 61). Thus, this collective loss of trust which, especially within the group-oriented Chinese culture, has the most horrible results for the development and acceptance of one's personality must be constantly avoided. The fact that people are careful to act according to the social norms turns out to be the principle of everyday interaction: worded as an idiomatic maxim it affects other cultures progressively. Ho later states more exactly: "*Face* is never a purely individual thing. It does not make sense to speak of the *face* of an individual as something lodged within his/her person; it is meaningful only when his/her face is considered in relation to that of others in the social network" (1976: 882), meaning that *face* would without doubt be "a sociological, rather than psychological construct" (1976: 876). In contrast to *figura*, which is simply oriented to a delighting self-representation regardless of the instantaneous environment's reactions, *face* always needs the communication partner as a 'sounding board', viz. it can only constitute itself through the mutual system of turns where it is constantly negotiated and reshaped. A *bella* or *brutta figura* can be assumed without being confirmed, harmed, destroyed or rebuilt, degraded or even without being realised at all. This is completely different to the concept of *face*: its *conditio sine qua non* is an ongoing

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communication. The term *figura* appears to be both person- and culture-related, whereas the term *face* is merely interpersonal and – as literature propagates – it is supposed to be universal, it applies independently of culture. But is this really the case?

4. From *face* to *face work* and back – or: from the idea to a phenomenology

With these arguments, we have reached the theoretical framework around the concept of *face* and try to pick up its most important assumptions in order to distinguish it again from the concept of *figura*. As a construal to explain social performance in general, *face* is a key concept of post-modern societal theories. The potential to be empirically observed turned it into the field of linguistic pragmatics where it passed to one of its main frameworks. Unlike the vague notion of *figura*, *face* is a twofold concept: it has a hypothetical inner side, which is assumed to be oriented towards certain values, and a concrete symbolically manifested outer side, which shows itself in the social encounter. Symbolicity, semioticity and rituality are thus the basic qualities of *face*, which possibly should be both described and assessed with the help of certain parameters. Language plays a central role here. It is the symbolic surface which perceivably reflects and transports both the anthropological conditions and the culture-specific interpretations of *face*. The sticking point for the essentially phenomenological character of *face* is thus the materialistic transformation of an ideal construct and its ascribed attributes into *face wants* that appear in communication. Inasmuch as every individual acquires such wants through socialisation on the filter of the cultural community, these are constantly displayed in the symbolic forms, turning social interaction

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into a ritual process of their mutual satisfaction. All moves which symbolically fulfil these claims are rightly called *face work* in research literature. With *face work*, a notion is born which, in its mainly verbal nature, bridges pragmatics and linguistics.

As the maintenance of face is the most essential condition for successful social interaction, *face work* is realised by a range of positive relational acts that, in the respective communicative situation, are considered the most convenient strategies. We know that Goffman exclusively sees in *face* a "sacred thing", requiring continuous respect and recognition. Thus, the notion of *face* deliberately includes a performative character where players – just as in the theatre – are 'performing' exact dramaturgical roles and respect stage directions in order to be perceived, accepted and applauded by spectators. With regard to the basic social code, which Goffman divides into the *rules of self-respect* and the *rules of considerateness* (Goffman 1967: 9 and 10), we are concerned with symbolic practices that are staged above all when a threat or damage to *face* is imminent – when and how this is the case in the performance, depends on the respective peripetia. The way in which this can be communicatively managed is culture-specific: "Facework serves to counteract "incidents" – that is events whose effective symbolic implications threaten *face*" (Goffman 1967: 12); to remain in the theatre metaphor, when tension or friction arise, it needs skilful reaction and solution. This is the issue where *face theories* are constituted opening up two different areas of research: pragmatic *politeness theory*, on the one hand, and sociopsychological *face negotiation theory*, on the other. Both see their ground basically in constituting a framework for interactive conflict management and have consequences for intercultural communication.

In the linguistic context, *politeness theory* has caused such waves since the *pragmatic turn* that the connection between *politeness*, *face* and *face work* is beyond doubt. *Face work*, however, is the linking

notion. To return to O'Driscoll (see above), *doing politeness* may always be understood as a situationally appropriate *face work* which responds to the respective *face*-needs of the interactants.

At least Brown and Levinson, the pioneers of the *politeness paradigm*, use this as the starting point for their *politeness theory*: by interpreting *face* as a dichotomy of "basic wants" which are commonly claimed by every rationally socialised member of a community, it manifests itself by a related dichotomy of interactional strategies. To give these strategies a pragmatic ground, there is another methodological restraint. Mostly linked to the accomplishment of the famous *face-threatening acts* (FTA) which have normally to be mitigated, these strategies appear frequently and can thus be observed and functionally classified. The dichotomy of this constructivist, but highly explanatory approach, can be traced back without doubt to the polarity between *face-saving* vs. *face-losing*. But based on Durkheim's distinction between positive and negative rites, *face* was metaphorically split into a positive and a negative part, i.e. on the one hand, it covers the desire for attention and acceptance (*positive face*), and, on the other, the need for territorial freedom and protection (*negative face*). Thus, *face* turns out to be a ritual constraint of claims to which a range of verbal strategies is commonly responding – namely if the execution of an FTA is not avoidable. In order to soften the "dangerous" illocutionary force of these acts, *redressive action* has to be put on stage. It consists in a clever and situationally appropriate verbal modification by answering the two face-wants respectively with correlated strategies, viz. *positive politeness* vs. *negative politeness*. This is nothing but a very short summary of the model the two pioneers of the Grice-Goffman paradigm have initiated in order to explain the construction of *face* and its communicative, namely verbal outcome.

It is, however, the criticism of the model which leads us back to our problem, viz. the distinction between *face* and *figura* and the

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evaluation of *face work* as a *bella* or *brutta figura* in the Schettino corpus. Primarily, our concern is the unclear equation of *face work* and *politeness* based on mixing *politeness*₁ as a historically and culturally coined lay concept and *politeness*₂ as an anthropologically universal theoretical category (Held 2011; Thaler 2010 and 2011). What makes the Italian behaviour so polite or impolite when defending their *figura* concept? And can we in this case operate with *(im)-politeness*? What kind of behaviour leads us to the impression that *brutta figura* is predominant in conducting the internet dispute? Or, do the Italian users rather lose their *face* by attacking the Germans with all kinds of national stereotypes, even putting Second World War crimes into play? What are the – right and the wrong – *face work*-strategies in this collective self-defence? Further points of criticism of the *politeness* paradigm (cf. Held 2011) must be considered in order to separate the three concepts from one another and to put them into concrete form, especially in their application to CMC and the problems with which we are concerned in the Schettino corpus.

On the one hand, there is the tendency to ethnocentric interpretation (in my case the “German” view) of the controversy over the Italian self-image which leads to a relative evaluation of the frequent aggressive and offensive actions as effectively face-threatening, especially in the forms as they appear in Italian language. On the other hand, this ties in with the whole question of categorising verbal actions as polite vs. impolite, taking into account that – according to Watts 1998 and 2003 – the whole area of *politic behaviour* lies in between, that is to say, a neutral, essentially expected co-operational behaviour, the so-called *supportive face work* (cf. Watts 2003: 117-141). Keeping *face work* and *politeness* apart (and thus, above all, apart from the repertoire of politeness formulae, which every historical language has specifically developed) is Watts’ great achievement and basically introduces a change of

paradigm: *face work* is extended to the processes of “*relational work*” (Locher/Watts 2005), no longer merely serving only the “mitigation of face-threatening acts” (2005: 10), but comprising “the entire continuum of verbal behaviour from direct, impolite, rude or aggressive interaction through to polite interaction, encompassing both appropriate and inappropriate forms of social behaviour” (Locher 2004: 51). Although, in this postmodern turn, the basic orientation is still directed towards communicative cooperation and conflict avoidance; being seen as current normality introduces new perspectives.

Firstly, we find out that the existence of politeness is purely a matter of interpretation by the respective listener and thus – according to Watts – a matter of intentionally ‘marked’ *supportive face work*, i.e. “efforts made by the participants (...) to be as considerate towards one another as possible” (Watts 2003: 277). These efforts are more than the just usual, socioculturally expected *politic behaviour*: “Facework ... consists partly, although by no means totally, of utterances that are open to interpretation as ‘polite’. The problem is that politeness, which ... is equivalent to giving more than required by the expected politic behaviour, may be evaluated positively or negatively.” (Watts 2003: 130). Watts thus removes the commonly practised forms out of their “semantic-functional” meaning to successfully make the changeover to the – listener-oriented – context sensitivity of the interpretative paradigm.

Secondly, Watts’ and Locher’s view brings with it an opening to the hardly considered area of *impoliteness*, impoliteness as the opposite pole on the broadly ranging *face work* scale. From this moment on, research pays attention to “negatively marked behaviour” by studying various “situationally inappropriate” strategies which, nevertheless, have exactly to be distinguished from

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the areas of *non-polite* and *over-polite*.¹⁴ This results in many, partly unsolved, functional issues, which may be relevant in the aggressively composed Schettino corpus.

The simple assumption that *fare una ...figura* may be related to *face work* and, in particular, *fare bella figura* to politeness is thus no longer valid. However, Watts' argument is always based on direct interaction situations, which do not exist in this form in internet communication and so lead us to further considerations. As online forums do not always follow a sequential development where the participants react immediately to the contributions, there is no real check point for classifying the contributions as polite or impolite within the ongoing discourse. In addition, postings on the internet also have a public side, which means that uninvolved users follow like an audience turning every contribution into an item addressed to an undefined plurality of persons. Nevertheless, even here, there are certain rules of performance to be respected. These lines, known as netiquette, are supposed to be in relation with *politic behaviour* and not with *politeness*. Thus, in internet interaction the point of reference is no longer the reflexive "counter *face*" of a specific recipient, but rather the hypothesised judgement of many anonymous co-users, so that there is little loss of self at stake. It is more a matter of acceptance or rejection in the community, and thus we argue that, in internet communication, it is more the *figura* principle which matters and not the ethical principles of politeness.

Watts' well-argued suggestion of the basic congruity of *face work* to *perceived supportive work*, a result of "involving the reciprocal social

¹⁴ The discussion of *impoliteness* under application of the *politeness paradigm* is currently en vogue. Many studies focus so deeply on this – opposing? – phenomenon that it is possible to talk of an "impoliteness turn" (cf. Culpeper 1996 and 2011; Bousfield 2008; Bousfield/Locher 2008). It is striking that more recent titles which go into the *politeness paradigm* always look at both sides and mark this with bracketing (*Im*)*politeness*. Cf. for instance, Culpeper/Kadar 2011.

attribution of face to the participants ... in accordance with the lines the participants can be assumed to be taking in the interactions" (Watts 2003: 131), is therefore preferable for the analysis of an internet forum. Not only does it lead us back to Goffman's fundamental concept of *face*, but it also provides the connection to a general social-anthropological view of *face* in an interdisciplinary context. Inasmuch as *face work* is no longer just "counteraction to face-threatening incidents" (Goffman 1967), it symbolically represents any *face* as a *conditio humana sine qua non*. The resulting paradox, "no facework without face" (Ting-Toomey/Cocroft 1994: 308), leads us to deduce the following conclusion: no face work without social interaction, viz. no face without interaction. That means that *face* belongs to the very essentials of sociality per se. Every interaction thus reflects the biographically developed needs and the cognitive and emotional claims individuals have interiorised as their proper personality – they are automatically reproduced in social interaction, no matter when, in which medium or in which situation. Any communication is thus an encounter of faces and therefore ubiquitous *face work*. The questions are only whether and in which way it comes out in language, and under which constellations of relationship it is mutually negotiated, destroyed or confirmed. *Face* is thus universal as an ideal conception, but, in reality, it is coded as frame-based and thus is expressed in different forms, mostly in language. It is up to linguistics not only to identify the "tangible" cues of *face* in the various communicative acts, but also to examine and measure their functions and merits in the situational setting. *Face-theory* as a cultural and social science provides a more extensive view on our subject and is supposed to be more appropriate for the analysis of its complexity as it comes out in an internet forum:

Face is an intoxicating metaphor that connects communication with social life. It is a multifaceted construct that takes on dimensions of identity issues, social cognitive issues, affective

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issues and communication issues. (Ting-Toomey/Cocroft 1994: 307)

Face entails the presentation of a civilized front to another individual within the webs of interconnected relationships in a particular culture. (...) It is a metaphor for the claimed sense of self-respect in an interactivity situation. It has been viewed alternatively as a symbolic resource, as social status, as a projected identity issue, and as a fundamental communication phenomenon. (Ting-Toomey 1994: 1)

and therefore:

Facework involves the enactment of face strategies, verbal and non-verbal moves, self-presentation acts, and impression management interaction. (ibd.)

With these quotations, it becomes clear that *face* as well as *face work* concern every sort of social act on all symbolic levels; thus, every contribution to the internet forum, no matter how aggressive and offensive it may be, transports and constitutes *faces*. As culture-influenced knowledge made up of expectations, wants and sensibilities, *face* unconsciously shapes and reflects the respective personality, first appearing in the interaction with others as mutually shared – and strategically performed – ‘work’. According to O’Driscoll 1996, we can say that *face* is the *background consciousness* which is ‘foregrounded’ only in communication, viz. self comes out only in front of the other. And the more so when it is under threat, when there are imminent clashes to be at stake. *Face* and accordingly *face work* are thus purely relational constructs, flexible and dynamic and, above all, reflexive. Mutuality and *co-orientation* are thus the operative points for our argumentation: disturbed or damaged mutuality of expectations and needs causes conflict; different attitudes to certain topics and values can collide. It all depends on how much common ground there is and how cooperatively differences are approached and negotiated.

The *face negotiation theories* provide a different view: they attribute the functioning of communicative mutuality to the concept of culture: in opposition to Brown's and Levinson's universal credo, *face* – both its value and its maintenance – is a decidedly culturally-influenced form of identity. It is, above all, challenged in intercultural communication and thus has to assert itself, or defend itself mainly in these kinds of encounters. Ting-Toomey, the protagonist of this theory, anchors this 'culturality' in five *thematic clusters*, which have to be mutually 'understood' and symbolically accounted in every interactive confrontation, viz. in *face concerns*, *face moves*, *face work interaction strategies*, *conflict communication styles*, and *face content domains* (Ting-Toomey 2005: 74). All of these five areas are differently transported and realised according to the culture type, whereby the following influences are significant: topic, communicative relationship and personal self-image (*identity*). The communicative negotiation of these influences may differ considerably according to whether the self-image of a culture is more directed to the single individual or to the group or collective (i.e. *independence* cultures vs. *interdependence* cultures). The complex taxonomy of outcomes and the differentiated proportional matrix derived from that taxonomy cannot be further described here (Ting-Toomey 2005).

Nevertheless, it is elementary to this culture-based model of *face work* that the content of all its categories has much to do with conflict solution (*prevention – restoration*). We therefore find many *strategies*, *content domains* and *styles* listed that were identified by Brown/Levinson¹⁵ as verbal politeness; rightly going well beyond the language level and equally involving topic, function and mental structures. In complete contrast to *politeness theory* and more appropriate for our argumentation, the focus is on the concept of

¹⁵ One of the central points of criticism of Brown and Levinson's pioneering work is the *fuzziness* of their *politeness* strategies, where formal and functional criteria are mingled.

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identity, the *Self*, as the motor of all communication and thus the provider – automatically or intentionally – of every kind of *face work*. If *face* is defined as “an identity boundary phenomenon” (Ting-Toomey 1994: 2) or directly as “self-identity through which communicators order their social world” (idem 1994: 3), then, in my opinion, the individual as formed by his or her cultural and social experience stands in the foreground. He or she is the actively negotiating personality, which re-recognises itself again and again through the channel of the other. In complete contrast to *politeness theory*,¹⁶ where all actions are oriented towards the other and the satisfaction of his or her needs, in Ting-Toomey’s theory it is the account of self that always has priority. Every interactive encounter therefore centres on prior-ranking *self-concern*; just the latter is open to negotiation – it is to be confirmed or destroyed (viz. the *identity claim*, Ting-Toomey 1994: 326).

With the sociopsychological concept of *identity*, and the much older and broader construct than *face*, whose clarification in the rather diverse literature would go too far here,¹⁷ another aspect that is in turn important for our investigations comes into view. As an object of negotiation, identity is something generally human, but it is acquired and formed culturally and therefore assumes different facets as a result of different valuations. Basically, we are talking of subjectivity that developed during socialisation, displaying a self-image (*Selbstbild*) in the form of dignity, honour and self-esteem. Inasmuch as it takes on a certain profile by being perceived by others (*Fremdbild*), we can conclude that identity, in communication, is fundamentally *projected identity*.¹⁸

¹⁶ Cf. Cheng’s critical remarks 2001, where he notes “the neglect of self” in *politeness theory*.

¹⁷ Cf. Spencer-Oatey 2007 for an insight into the plentiful literature on identity.

¹⁸ Consider for a moment Mead’s dichotomy of the *I* versus *me* and also the theory of the “generalized other” in Symbolic Interactionism.

Taking into account two completely different dimensions of culture – the individualistic vs. the collectivistic – two completely different identity claims develop: *independent self-construction* vs. *dependent self-construction*. One deliberately supports “*individual identity* where the recognition of self is based on personal achievements and the self-actualisation process”, the other is bound more to *group identity*, where “the recognition of self is based on ascribed status, role relationships, family dependences and/or workgroup reputation” (Ting-Toomey/Cocroft 1994: 314). Further, three *face* types result from this cultural dualism,¹⁹ i.e. the self-satisfying *autonomy face*; the group-dependent *fellowship face*, and in between, the *competence face* relying on individual efforts successfully striving for the recognition of a group (cf. Domenici/Littlejohn 2006: 14ff.). According to interactive relationship and context, different *self-images* are constituted varying their attributes and the degrees of influence.

How the general concept of identity, finally, can be put into an analytical connection with *face* is shown gainfully by the work of Spencer-Oatey. For her (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2007), *face work* is continuous, but situation-bound *self-identity management*. While *identity* is considered to be a fixed factor, *face* is, in contrast, the interactive development of self on the base of attributes “perceived as being ascribed by others” (Spencer-Oatey 2007: 644). It is therefore always – as we have already stated – a relational, dynamic concept. Hence, *face* analyses go considerably further than language data and can only be done in an interdisciplinary way with special reference to psychological and sociopedagogical approaches (‘theories of identity’), whereby the tension between individual and group is of essential importance. For Spencer-Oatey, there is, however, a hinge between the two sides of the identity definition:

¹⁹ Here, too, see the broadly based research especially centred round Geert Hofstede.

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that is the momentary communicative relationship, where the personal locating is actually formed and is as such symbolically externalised as the specific *sensitivity* for the approved social values: there thus arises the so-called *identity face* as the result of the *relational practices* in the ongoing communication. In the word formation *identity face*, a reflex for the tension between *personal face* and *community face* can be noticed; it is this tension which every one of us has to overcome in the communication process, thus forming his or her current self-image.²⁰

In tying together both *face* paradigms (with Spencer-Oatey 2007: 654), the sociopragmatic and the sociocultural, we can retain the following polarities which make a further and concrete definition of *face* nearly impossible:

Face is a multi-faceted phenomenon, yet it can also be a unitary concept; Face has cognitive foundations and yet it is also socially constituted in interaction; Face belongs to individuals and to collectives, and yet it also applies to interpersonal relations.

Thus, *face* is supposed to be 'everything' that happens in communication. Within these theoretical remarks, *face* has been revealed in its complex, even contradictory nature which makes any further explanation impossible.

The question remains whether the concept of *face* is interchangeable with that of *figura*, e.g. trying to replace the term *face* in the above quotations with the term *figura*. Are all the characteristics of *face* Spencer-Oatey mentions also true of *figura*? In this case, the ultimate answer is supposed to be 'yes'. The real differences are more in the details and concern the effective interactive realisation.

²⁰ Spencer-Oatey 2007: 650f. explains which social values can be communicated with the self-image, using the values scale of the psychologist Schwartz, who distinguishes four poles: *openness to change (stimulation, self-direction) v. conservatism (conformity, security, tradition)*, on the one hand, and *self-enhancement (power, achievement) v. self-transcendence (integrity, universalism, benevolence)*, on the other.

Therefore, we try to convey our arguments briefly to the Schettino corpus.

5. *Figura* versus *face* – or remarks on the construction of identity in the online forum

The attempt to trace *face*, or *figura*, in a medium which is in itself defined as *faceless* and *body-less* (Herring 2003) appears contradictory. However, that this paradox is extremely challenging considering the relation between *figura* and *face*, is going to be shown by clarifying the Schettino corpus in its media-dependent, discursive and social specifics. Applying them to virtual data, the two concepts offer a more distinct functional profile, so that we can conclude our remarks with a schematic comparison.

5.1. The technological, media-related dimension

The most fundamental – and, at the same time, indeed the most contradictory – reference point for the analysis is the fact that internet communication is considered as a virtual and basically anonymous meeting of people, whose contributions appear on the screen as writing-based text chunks in an asynchronous order. In this “appearing” lies the opportunity to suspend the material de-personification by literally ‘visualizing’ the users, undefined in space and time, by symbolic means. Whatever reasons and topics there are, virtual meetings are always primarily a matter of discursive re-creation of “personal” presence (cf. Bays 1998). This happens exclusively as a text and therefore predominantly through language. Thus, we may assume that identities are visually “embodied” through the purely language-based performance on the

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screen. That is why we pretend that the two concepts *face* and *figura* should be in language-data re-traceable.²¹

Internet forums, where users give an opinion in diverse *postings* on a common topic (so-called “*have your say sections*”, cf. Neurauter-Kessels 2011: 195), are therefore the appropriate marketplace for us to observe language acts and modalities which primarily serve the presentation of an adequate self-image. Against the background of a narcissistic performance culture, this still has to be the most positive possible: thus language (and the special phonic and iconic code, e.g. the range of emoticons) conveys social competences (*face*) as well as physiological ideals (*figura*). We may therefore assume that, in public interactions, the manifestation of a *bella figura* is normal, quasi a matter of honour: it stands for the modern self-consciousness and self-confidence and is reflected in handling the topic and the style of the utterance. Among the like-minded community, one is generally intent on permanent, reciprocal *impression management*, re-creating “in written form” a new ego identity between *in-group* and *out-group*, which Spencer-Oatey (see above) describes as the respective *situated* or *frame-based identity face*, typical of the Social Media. I would go so far as to distinguish *figura* media (like Facebook, Twitter, etc.) from *face* media (like chat, mail, etc.) and to link not only certain formats and text types with them, but also certain semiotic and language strategies. Discussion platforms are, in my opinion, somewhere in between – they have a performative and interactive character, i.e. they are just as intent on the ostentatious demonstration of a public self-image as on a smooth dyadic communication among the partici-

²¹ The fact that *Social Media* are an adequate platform for *self-presentation* where users employ strategies connected to *face* and *figura* which, for researchers, are easy to follow on the screen, is testified – in my opinion – by the metaphorical denomination *facebook*. As the worldwide market leader of Social Media it thus is the best ambassador for what Foucault (cf. Luther et al. 1988) denounces as the pernicious “technologies of the self”.

pants. According to the anonymity, *face* as the "real life" identity is not at stake, because less importance is attached to the reciprocal *turn*-taking than to the successful negotiation of a common matter in front of a public audience. The visible *face work* is therefore to be valued less from the aspect of the ongoing interaction between socially conscious users than from the viewpoint of a hypothesised "audience" and the "staging efficiency". I thus dare to state that in such forums *figura* plays a stronger role than *face*, or rather: that *relational face* takes second place behind the tension between *individual face* and *social face*.

5.2. The discursive dimension

The Schettino corpus, which not only deployed the theoretical discussion of the conceptual rivalry between *figura* and *face*, but is also intended to provide the empirical basis for their performance in language, represents one of the many current discussion platforms in online media in which people comment on certain up-to-the-minute topics of a sociopolitical nature. The triggers are mostly editorial contributions, above all openly held journalistic opinions in personally signed articles. The *postings*, enthusiastic reactions of the online readers, a regular user group with a certain standard of education and political interest, are directed in differing frequency and degree of importance towards several addressees – on the one hand, directly towards the respective author of an article and his or her opinion that is presented there, on the other hand, as a dialogue with clear references to the co-arguing partners in communication, and, finally, indirectly towards the general public, or the silently "observing" participants in the forum.²² Forums thus support not only interpersonal contact but also the public

²² Cf. also, Burger's division into effective and intended recipients (Burger 2005: 8).

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'exhibition' of representative opinions and have developed certain behaviour guidelines in this respect – the so-called netiquette.

In our case, the starting point of the media dispute is – as initially described – the column in SPIEGEL-Online (S.P.O.N. "Der schwarze Kanal"), in which the irresponsible behaviour of the fugitive Captain Schettino of the sinking Costa Concordia was supposed to be connected metaphorically to the sinking European currency. However, through the introductory straining of the *figura* cliché, the collective self-image of the Italians was bruised in a politically incorrect way: the improvident use of the principle "one for all" in this tragic case has set off a flood of angry defensive reactions. My concerns are an analysis of the furious Italian feedbacks and thus of both the thematic negotiation and the language performance of the *figura* concept as a symbol of national identity. For this goal I have chosen the platform *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, where, directly after the publication of the SPIEGEL column and the subsequent protest letter from the ambassador, a commentary entitled "*Gli Schettino d'Italia e la credibilità persa*" (= The Italian Schettinos and the lost credibility) appeared, provoking 298 *postings* within 3-4 days (i.e. 24-28 Jan., 2012). The entries appear under pseudonyms with no picture; most are single contributions, others refer to one another, whereby there is no coherent sequence because of the medium-typical asynchronicity (Herring talks of the common "*interrupted adjacency*" in internet forums, cf. 2003; internet printout p.6). Coherence is additionally made more difficult, because, in overrunning a certain length, the entries are shown fragmentarily on the display and can only be seen completely by pressing the *show more* button. The posters can mutually "like" one another – as is usual in forums – or answer one another spontaneously. As the discussion escalated more and more after the use of the equation "*Schettino vs. Auschwitz*" (see above), the reactions on the internet went out of control; Italian and German internet sites are full of

them. I limit myself here to the quoted Italian platform deliberately approaching a discourse which offers not only a good comparable database to work with the construction of self in contrast to other, but can also further be used to explain current European ethno-stereotypes.

From a discursive point of view, it must be noted that the selected corpus represents a very complex and decidedly heated, emotional debate on the Italian national self-image. It is striking that the controversy arose and has developed by mirroring their own self-image against how it is seen by the Germans and thus is a result of the friction of the cognitive, emotional and cultural denotations and connotations a historically developed image construction implies: pro and contra collide respectively in regard to Italians and Germans; offensive and defensive actions alternate, are realised as preferred, mostly, however, as dispreferred sequences, whereby acceptance and refusal hold the balance – and all that happens exclusively by wording. *Postings* are writing-based text chunks of different, in our case certainly, of considerable length displaying syntactic cohesion and complexity. As we can see in a first overview, there is the distance style predominating, i.e. in opposition to typical *netspeak*, which is often a rudimentary written reflection of spoken language, we find well-formulated sentences, explicit statements and performative elements; further thematic and dialogical references, a wide variation of language with striking directness and an eschewal of the so-called “compensation symbols” (as Köhler 2003 calls the inventory of onomatopoeia and emoticons). In the search for identity markers – or better: for evidence of *face* or *figura* – we are therefore likely to concentrate on language coding, that means that we try to trace the two concepts in the structures and forms of the written text chunks that appear on the screen.

5.3. The social dimension

One of the most important characteristic of CMC is that the real identity of the user remains hidden behind the anonymity, or the lack of material embodiment. Therefore, the usual fear of losing face as it happens in direct interaction as well as the constituting and handling of improper power relations no longer apply; internet communication mostly proceeds in a symmetrical and democratic way, and thus thoughtlessly establishes nearness and confidentiality. Accordingly, it is difficult to discern the respective real *faces* in their approximate demographic identity and ideology, even if speech acts, language style and language choice give us some indication. Being primarily markers of presence in the case of many contributions, we can largely say whether they transport a good or bad *figura*. For a deeper analysis, it is decisive to develop a method which filters social identities clearly out of the cognitive and emotional dealing with the topic. We need findings on how affiliations are defined between individuality, groups and the collective and how common ground is established or destroyed. The way of formulating opinions and value judgements is essential here, but also the discursive re-production of the respective situational *frames*.

In our case, a conflict community develops which in positive and negative acts – *given and given off* – blows up a national stereotype into a massive row and works it off defensively against the image of the other. On the basis of the theory of social cognition, the use of national stereotypes – as a form of racism – belongs to so-called “emotion-driven hot cognitions” (Langlotz 2010: 168), i.e.

phenomena ... closely related to overrated and biased concepts of one's own positive and superior characteristics, while constructing a stereotypical, denigrating, and weak concept of the other. [...] Moreover, such negative stereotypes are usually

coupled with false beliefs, negative motivations and affect.
(ibid.)

The debate on a “hot” concept like *figura* determines the communicative roles and momentary relationships between the individual and the group, more specifically in four dimensions: *self-concept* versus *other-concept* / *in-group identity* versus *out-group identity* (Langlotz 2010: 173). *Face work* thus can be judged towards what kind of identity construction it is directed. In our corpus, the collaborative reconstruction and rehabilitation of a collective group identity supposedly destroyed by the *out-group* stands in the foreground: the posters’ self-image is a part of it. As the *out-group identity*, viz. the Germans, represent for the Italians a historically conveyed ‘enemy image’ (*Feindbild*’, cf. Heitmann 2003), it is stylised into the common point of attack without any critical consciousness: by ascribing stereotypical attributes and by exaggerating negative evaluations a good self-image is not only proportionally reflected through the contrast with the other-image, but it is also going to be confirmed, strengthened and more highly valued. Many utterances are made thoughtlessly and without redressive action, thus, politeness principles and conversation norms are no longer kept, and etiquette seems to be completely contradicted (cf. the distinction between *impoliteness* and *rudeness*, cf. Bousfield 2008). However, the guidelines of netiquette are respected inasmuch as the posters pursue a common aim and negotiate this cooperatively. Thus, aggression or the insulting of an absent opponent can be executed if it is within the consensus of a user group, and above all if it serves the defence of the self in the in-group against the out-group. Hence, in this furious Italian forum community we are witnesses to the language construction of an *identity face*, which puts collective identity before individual identity and risks (inter)relational identity by not respecting the needs of *face* and the necessary adherence to appropriate forms of social behaviour. What is seen from the outside as *brutta figura*

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reveals itself from the inside as an efficient means of collective self-defence to save the common social concept of the quasi “holy” national *figura* (for a definition of *social concept*, cf. Langlotz 2010).

Nevertheless, if the performed act is dispreferred, viz. deviating from the expected norm, it supposedly tells us still more about the personal contours of the posters – such as their level of education, social status, culture and vocation, etc. – than it would do being preferred, viz. conciliatory and norm-conforming. The assessment of a good or bad *figura*, which hereby comes into existence, will be evaluated differently, according to whether it is made by the forum participants or the public readership, and then, once again, whether it is made by the defended *in-group* or the insulted *out-group*. Nevertheless, *bella figura* is still to be seen when *face* comes out in a compensatory, conciliatory language behaviour oriented towards harmony and balance. In the Schettino corpus, verbal aggression dominates, so that a *brutta figura* clearly rebounds onto the Italians. But, because the direct access to the communication is missing, we cannot speak of impoliteness, but certainly of misplaced emotionality and a shocking lack of education that damages the collective, not the individual reputation. Hence, we are in front of a collective face loss.

What can we deduce from these media-related reflections?

- Social Media can be defined as exclusively text-based channels, where interacting identities can be studied namely in language. As their main function is the sociocognitive re-creation and co-construction of social presence, we can suppose that in the text chunks *faces* are coming out by performing a good or a bad *figura*.
- Social Media are comparable to market places where people meet regularly with the aim of confirming their relationship and creating new ones. They are thus textually performed socialites, where both normative conventions and group-specific

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or individual identities are reflected in meta-linguistic remarks as well as in language expressions and styles.

But there are two different levels of communicative commitment to distinguish: the one I call the “social arena” level, the other I call the “social community” level; the first is where self-representation is dominating, the second deals with the handling of the ongoing interactional relationship. Thus, what comes out through symbolic activities in Social Media-talks is a multiple *face* or a – so-to-say – twofold identity that can be differentiated in consequence of both, communicative commitment and identity markers.

The following schemas demonstrate both and thus conclude our argumentation:

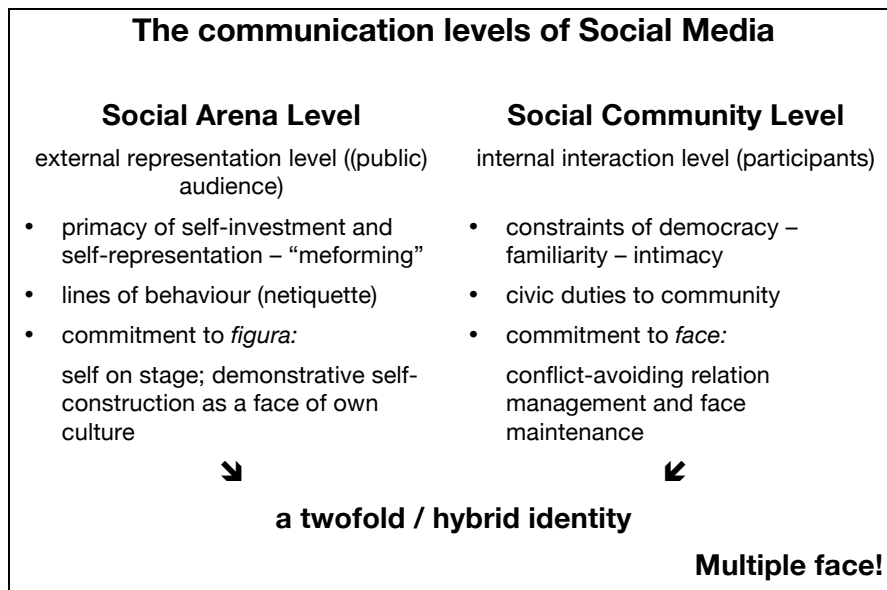


Table 1: Communication levels in Social Media

Presumed CMC-identity cues = signals of presence (“mewording”)	
Demonstrative part:	Interactive part:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identification through nicknames • self- and other-labelling • self-positioning devices • ascription of values • expressivity (rudeness) • performativity – theatricality • preference of dramatic narratives • group- / collective-oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • turn-taking • system of addressivity • metacommunicative cues • connectiveness • modalisation processes – (in)directness • use of presuppositions • respect (politeness!) • other- / relation-oriented
↓	↓
<i>figura</i>-oriented devices	<i>face</i>-oriented devices

Table 2: Identity cues between *face* and *figura*

Social Media are an ideal channel for observing and describing *face* manifestations in and through language, whereby exogenous procedures have to be distinguished from endogenous ones. The typical multiple *face* of the Social Media is due to the mixture of the two communicative commitments, the demonstrative and the interactive. Commonly co-present in CMC, the “presence”-showing of postings comprises both, me-devices oriented to the confirmation on public stage; and other-devices to keep up a smooth relational intercourse where mutual respect is the norm. We deduce from the two tables that the first group is represented by devices which are oriented to the uni-directional concept of *figura*, the second more to the interactional concept of *face*. That means for our discussion that *figura* and *face* show evident differences in the following domains: the external and internal constitution; the way of performance and relatedness; the degrees of universality vs. cul-

turality; the theoretical abstraction and the explanatory force. Hence, at the end, it seems that semantically considered *face* is a part of *figura*, whilst functionally considered *figura* is a part of *face*, viz. their relation is, after all, a mainly dialectic one.

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