**Computer Assisted
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Book Review

Researching Language and Social Media: A Student Guide

Ruth Page, David Barton, Johann W. Unger, and Michele Zappavigna

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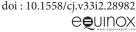201 pages
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Reviewed by
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Social media platforms have become an inevitable part of our lives, and the language used in these platforms has attracted the attention of many linguists. However, it is not very easy to collect and analyze data in these platforms, as the flow of interaction and patterns of conversation are completely different from other genres, such as books, daily spoken language, newspaper articles, etc. This book provides invaluable insight into researching language use in social media from the perspectives of both students and expert researchers in language studies. One of the key strengths of the book lies in the variety of perspectives that results from the dynamic group of expert contributors to this volume.

The first four chapters of the book are dedicated to defining social media, explaining linguists' perceptions of social media, outlining the basic principles of research in different fields, and discussing Internet ethics for research. Although these chapters give introductory information about the area, they are nonetheless informative for scholars, since these platforms are quite novel as a research area. In addition to the general introduction, researchers can

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benefit from the sample case studies, which are used to illustrate the topics in the book. Beginning with Chapter 5, the rest of the book deals with qualitative and quantitative research methods that can be used for studies of social media platforms.

In Chapter 1, social media is defined as "Internet-based sites and services that promote social interaction between participants" (p. 5). The history of social media platforms is presented from 1978 to 2011, and it is helpful to see the antecedents of the tools which are being used today. In this chapter, social media is compared with Web 2.0 tools, and a classification of social media types is suggested according to criteria such as synchronicity, message format, topic, and size of the message. This classification is a helpful introduction for novice researchers. Finally, social media is discussed from the perspectives of its users, its content, message format, publishing context, time, immediacy, purpose, and activity.

In Chapter 2, social media platforms are discussed from a linguistic perspective with sample case studies. It is mentioned that most linguists usually ignore the importance of social media, but this is likely to change over time. In this chapter, the different levels and areas to research are presented, and these ideas give an important insight into the focus and the research design of future studies. For example, an important table for Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) by Herring (2013) is provided. A researcher can easily utilize this table to help determine which method should be used for analyzing different issues and phenomena in language. Finally, this chapter ends with a list of recent studies carried out of social media platforms.

Chapter 3 outlines the general ideas and key factors about research studies in various disciplines. This chapter includes the rationale and basic principles of research and the main steps for designing a research study. The three key paradigms in methodology—quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods—are described in detail, and advantages and disadvantages of each are presented.

In Chapter 4, the ethics of Internet research are discussed in terms of the often-controversial issues that emerge in researching online environments. Researchers cannot use public posts, comments, or user entries without taking research ethics into consideration. Key issues which researchers need to consider are listed as a guideline and they include how to deal with aspects of the text that might contain details of the participant's identity, whether or not informed consent will be required, and the extent to which the participants can be involved in the research process.

Chapter 5 defines discourse throughout history and associates it with social media. Discourse analysis is among the most commonly used techniques in social-media-related studies because the purpose is to better "understand the

social meanings that are made in texts through close analysis of the language used" (p. 94). In this chapter discourse analysis, conversation analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, and CMDA are presented with example studies of each. The chapter shows readers how to write research questions, and collect and organize data according to these frameworks.

Chapter 6 starts with the history of ethnographic studies and their importance for social-media-related studies. Ethnographic studies are carried out for understanding the Internet and how it structures a new context for language use. Through ethnographic studies, linguists could find patterns in language use in social media platforms and establish related theories. Common principles of ethnographic studies are listed, and steps for conducting an ethnographic study are outlined.

Chapter 7 describes technolinguistic biography. It requires one to keep his/her own records about the linguistic choices made in social media and includes three stages that one can easily implement: *researching the self, differences across time and space,* and *the broader context.*

The last two chapters include information about the use of quantitative methods for exploring language use in social media. Although qualitative methods allow researchers to understand the context in depth, quantitative methods can help to measure and count particular phenomena. In Chapter 8, quantitative methods are described in detail based on sample research questions. Advantages and disadvantages of quantitative data collection tools are explained. Chapter 9 focuses on the analysis of quantitative data. Computer software programs including SPSS, NVivo, and Microsoft Excel are suggested. In addition to these, concordance programs are mentioned through which frequency lists, keyword lists, and collocations can be explored and results reported as text visualization. Difficulties that might be encountered with these programs, such as the use of emoticons and hashtags, are summarized.

In sum, research on language use in social media is a very important topic in the field of computer assisted language learning (CALL). Researchers are eager to reveal the characteristics of language produced by Internet users across purposes, settings, and disciplines, such as linguistics, education, or sociology. However, conducting research on language used in social media requires mindfulness about the ownership of language data, and the analysis and interpretation of the data. For example, a researcher should inform the users about the collected data, obtain necessary permission, and adhere to ethical rules. From this perspective, this book is insightful, as it provides useful guidance for novice researchers. This well-organized book makes a great contribution to the field of CALL as it includes sample studies and offers specific points to consider, while collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data in social media platforms. Although the book is designed as

a student guide, language researchers and practitioners at all levels can benefit from this book, which will equip them with the necessary tools and knowledge to design successful research studies on social media.

About the reviewer

Sedat Akayoğlu is currently working as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Foreign Language Education, Abant Izzet Baysal University, Turkey. His main interests include computer assisted language learning, computer mediated communication, English Language Teacher Education, and 3D Virtual Worlds.

Reference

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