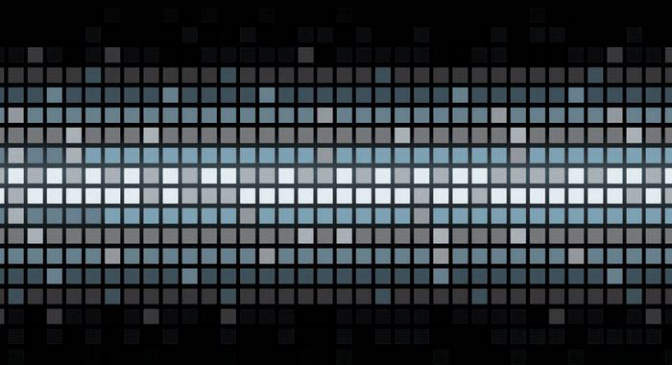


OXFORD STUDIES IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

# DIGITAL DISCOURSE

Language in the New Media



EDITED BY

Crispin Thurlow and Kristine Mroczek

# *Digital Discourse*

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*Language in the New Media*



*Edited by*

CRISPIN THURLOW  
KRISTINE MROCZEK

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## *Foreword*

### *Naomi Baron*

PREDICTING THE FUTURE of the written word is a tricky business. Just ask Johannes Trithemius, the Abbot of Spondheim, whose book *De Laude Scriptorum* (*In Praise of Scribes*) appeared in 1492. Trithemius railed against a modern invention of his time—the printing press—arguing that hand-copied manuscripts were superior to printed ones. Among the Abbot's complaints were that parchment would last longer than paper, that not all printed books were easily accessible or inexpensive, and that the scribe could be more accurate than the printer. At the time Trithemius was writing, he was perhaps correct. He noted, for example, that printed books were often deficient in spelling and appearance. But he also maintained that "Printed books will never be the equivalent of handwritten codices," a prediction that thankfully proved untrue.

New technologies can understandably be unnerving. Decades back, people were sometimes terrorized upon seeing their first automobile or airplane. In the 1970s and 80s, telephone answering machines produced similar fears. Many users hung up when they reached an answering machine, too tongue-tied to know what to say.

Today, it is new technologies such as computers and mobile phones that are commonly depicted as threats to both the social and the linguistic fabric. Regarding social issues, the concern has been that face-to-face encounters will diminish because we replace physical meetings with e-mail or text messages. Work by Barry Wellman, Anabel Quan-Haase, and others (e.g., Quan-Haase et al., 2002; Wang & Wellman, 2010) has challenged the contention that new media are reducing social capital.

The question of whether new media will compromise language standards is particularly vital in light of how much *Sturm und Drang* the issue has generated. Crispin Thurlow (2006) has provided an array of examples of the "moral panic" expressed in the popular press over lexical shortenings, random punctuation, and nonstandard spelling assumed to typify the text messaging of young people. These linguistic transgressions are seen as spelling doom for the English language. My own favorite from Thurlow's collection is this one from the *Observer*: "The English language

is being beaten up, civilization is in danger of crumbling" (March 7, 2004). This rhetoric, as Thurlow (2011) has noted most recently, is surprisingly persistent and sometimes even more sweeping: "Text messaging corrupts all languages" (*Economist*, May 2008).

But is English actually being beaten up (much less civilization in danger of a swift demise)? The simple answer is "no", but the story behind that verdict illustrates how important it is to substantiate off-the-cuff claims about new media language with both empirical research and awareness of the larger social context in which new media and language are used.

The English language has a far-reaching history of people being concerned that linguistic standards must be established—or maintained (Baron, 2000; Crystal, 2008). Around 1200, an Augustinian canon named Orm wrote a lengthy homiletic verse through which he illustrated his proposed new spelling system. (Medieval English spelling was chaotic, to say the least.) The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were the heyday of prescriptive grammars, in which self-appointed authorities set out normative rules, including the infamous "no prepositions at the ends of sentences." Among the consumers of these handbooks were members of the lower classes, for whom "proper" speech and writing were necessary steps to bettering one's station in life. The twentieth century brought a new generation of language mavens, ranging from Henry Fowler (in England) to John Simon or Edwin Newman (in the United States). By the early twenty-first century, we had Lynne Truss (*Eats, Shoots & Leaves*), along with the popular press.

However, this steady drumbeat of prescriptivism needs to be set in a broader linguistic and social context. As I argued in *Alphabet to E-mail* (Baron, 2000), the relationship between speech and writing has undergone major changes over the past 1200 years. From Old English times to the Elizabethan era, writing largely served to record the formal spoken word or, in many cases, to be re-presented as speech. Chaucer read his works aloud in court, and Shakespeare's plays were essentially created to be performed, not read in printed quartos. Then, for roughly three centuries, writing emerged as a medium distinct from speech. Writing became the platform for defining a standard language. However, by the latter half of the twentieth century, the role of writing began to shift again, commonly functioning as a medium for recording informal speech. As a result of these transformations, today's "off-line" writing (for instance, the writing of newspapers or magazines, as opposed to the language of e-mail or texting) is far more casual than writing of half a century ago. (If you

doubt this generalization, simply compare a current front page of the *New York Times* with its counterpart around 1960.)

The most recent linguistic shift was the product of a cluster of social changes. And here I will speak principally of the USA as the context I know best. One such change was a growing sense of social informality, evidenced, for example, in forms of address (calling people you don't know by first name rather than by title and surname) or through wearing casual dress, regardless of the occasion (think of showing up in jeans at the opera). This informality was also reflected in American pedagogy. No longer was the teacher the center of many classrooms: The model of the "sage on the stage" was replaced by that of teacher as "guide on the side" (Baron, 2000, Chapter 5).

A second factor was the rise of American youth culture and the tendency among adults to emulate youthful behavior patterns (Baron, 2003). These days it is common to find baby boomers wearing trendy clothing designed for young people, and even saying "Awesome!", "What's up?", or "LOL."

Thirdly, there was multiculturalism. In the United States, struggles in the second half of the twentieth century to confront the evils of racism drew attention to the linguistic legitimacy of African-American Vernacular English. During this same period, America began actively promoting multiculturalism, entailing tolerance of people with nonmainstream identities or from different cultural (and linguistic) backgrounds. National rhetoric (and curricular design) reflects a legally and pedagogically structured acceptance of individual and group differences, including teaching children not to pass judgment on regional dialects or nonnative speakers. In the process, society loosens the grip of norms regarding linguistic correctness or consistency.

These social changes led, in turn, to relaxation of traditional notions concerning what students should be taught about English grammar. Today, grammar books are no longer part of many American schools' curricula. Students can hardly be expected to follow rules they have never learned—and that are not consistently evidenced in everyday speech (is it "between you and I" or "between you and me"?). In the world beyond the schoolroom, there is a growing sense that consistency of linguistic usage or knowledge of the rules being violated is not especially important. To use an American colloquialism, the attitude reflects a "Whatever!" approach toward language standards (Baron, 2008, Chapter 8). This attitude is evidenced in subtle but palpable ways: in the increasingly sloppy proofreading

found in publications from respected presses or in costly print advertisements; in the laissez-faire attitude toward grammatical usage heard on mainstream television and radio broadcasting—and in the language used by university students. In my early years of teaching, students used to apologize for “incorrect” grammar. Today, they often don’t know which usage is correct (is it *who* or *whom*? *he* or *him*?), and more significantly, commonly they don’t believe the answer matters.

Combine together shifts in contemporary expectations regarding off-line writing with current social attitudes about informality, youth culture, and multiculturalism. The result is a sociolinguistic milieu in which speakers and writers feel they have considerable latitude in the language they use. These attitudes predate the profusion of computers and mobile phones. To the extent that laissez-faire approaches toward traditional linguistic conventions appear in e-mail, IMs, text messages, and the like, digital media are not to blame. Rather, we use electronic devices to perpetrate language patterns that were already in play.

The moral of this tale is that in thinking about language used with new technologies, the relationship between surface phenomena and root causes may be less than obvious. As with any scientific venture, the study of new media language demands both creative sleuthing and hard work.

It is just this kind of creativity and focus that characterizes *Digital Discourse*. Crispin Thurlow and Kristine Mroczek’s welcome volume offers up a collection of fascinating—and methodologically rigorous—studies of the intersection between new media and the social use of language. Such research enables us to speak with authority (rather than from fear or bravado) about how new media may—or may not—be transforming the ways in which we use language with one another. The editors are also to applauded for following in the tradition of Brenda Danet and Susan Herring (2007), whose book *The Multilingual Internet* offered a linguistically and culturally diverse perspective on how to think about “mediated” language. What is more, *Digital Discourse* casts a broad net regarding what constitutes “discourse,” including not only the anticipated fare of texting, blogs, social networking sites, or online gaming, but also other social contexts that entail exchange of ideas or information, such as tourism or performance.

Thurlow and Mroczek have produced a collection that is at once timely but grounded in earlier research, theoretically driven but highly readable. While it’s tricky business to predict the future, it’s a safe bet that *Digital Discourse* will become part of the emerging cannon of trusted voices regarding communication in a digital world.

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# *Introduction*

## FRESH PERSPECTIVES ON NEW MEDIA SOCIOLINGUISTICS

*Crispin Thurlow and Kristine Mroczek*

OUR PRIORITY IN editing a collection such as *Digital Discourse* is to give precedence (and space) to the work of our contributors. Instead of providing a lengthy and probably tedious literature review, therefore, we offer only a brief meta-review of *some* of the most comprehensive, sociolinguistically relevant publications to have appeared in English. (See our comment below about language politics.) The kinds of sociolinguistic topics, trends, and directions that others in the field have already pinpointed, enable us to locate *Digital Discourse* in the field. They also help us to identify the four most important concepts or organizing principles that we think delineate (or should delineate) the field of new media sociolinguistics: *discourse, technology, multimodality, ideology*.

Since 1996, there have been only three edited volumes in English dedicated, at least in part, to providing an orchestrated perspective on new media language. Following Susan Herring's groundbreaking *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross-Cultural Perspectives* in 1996, came Brenda Danet and Susan Herring's *The Multilingual Internet: Language, Culture, and Communication Online* (2007) and then, in 2009, Charley Rowe and Eva Wyss's *Language and New Media: Linguistic, Cultural, and Technological Evolutions*. Of course, Naomi Baron's highly regarded and much-cited book *From Alphabet to E-mail* (2000) was another key moment for new media sociolinguistics; her *Always on: Language in an Online and Mobile World* (2008) is already proving to be similarly influential. Although less grounded in first-hand empirical research, David Crystal's *Language and the Internet* (2001) and *Txtng: The Gr8 Db8* (2008) have been hugely popular and undoubtedly raised public awareness about the role of language in new media.

In this time, there have also been three journal special issues offering coordinated accounts of language/discourse and the new media. Two

of these appeared in the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*: Brenda Danet and Susan Herring's (2003) issue on new media multilingualism, a precursor to their edited volume; and our own issue on young people's new media discourse (Thurlow, 2009). Arguably the most significant special issue was Jannis Androutsopoulos' (2006a) on computer-mediated communication for the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*.

Without a doubt, the work presented by our contributors (and our selection of their work for the volume) is heavily informed by these various scholarly "distillations" in the English-language literature and, of course, by a wealth of research published in other languages. We can tease things out a little further, however, by listing some of the specific topics, trends, and directions identified by scholars like those just mentioned.

Arguably the best known—internationally speaking—scholar of new media language, Susan Herring (e.g., 1996, 2001a, 2004) characterizes her own work as *computer-mediated discourse analysis*, which she organizes around a series of analytic priorities that continue to direct a lot of research in the field; these are

- *technological variables* such as synchronicity, size of message buffer, anonymous messaging, persistence of transcript, channels of communication (e.g., text, audio, video), automatic filtering;
- *situational variables* such as participation structure (e.g., public/private, number of participants), demographics, setting, purpose, topic, tone, norms of participation, linguistic code; and
- *linguistic variables* (or discourse features) such as structure (e.g., typography, spelling, word choice, sentence structure), meaning (i.e., of symbols, words, utterances, exchanges), interaction (e.g., turn taking, topic development, back-channels, repairs), and social function (e.g., identity markers, humor and play, face management, conflict).

This basic framework—a shopping list of new media discourse variables—informs and grounds a great deal of sociolinguistic research in the field, and reference is made to them throughout *Digital Discourse*. Others have, however, wanted to push the field a little further and suggested a more refined and perhaps also up-to-date research agenda for sociolinguists interested in new media—or what is often referred to as computer-mediated communication (cf. Thurlow et al., 2004). In the introduction to his special issue of the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, for example, Jannis Androutsopoulos (2006b) offers some specific suggestions; for example:

- the need to challenge exaggerated assumptions about the distinctiveness of new media language;
- the need to move beyond early (i.e., 1990s) computer-mediated communication's simplistic characterization of—and concern for— asynchronous and synchronous technologies;
- the need to shift away from an undue emphasis on the linguistic (or orthographic) features of new media language and, related to this, the hybrid nature of new media genres;
- the need also to shift from “medium-related” to more ethnographically grounded “user-related” approaches.

In more recent work (e.g., 2010), Androutsopoulos has continued to promote the value of research shaped by this type of *discourse-ethnographic* rather than variationist approach, something he also addresses in his contribution to the current volume (Chapter 13). In this regard, Androutsopoulos' driving concern is that scholars move beyond a one-track interest in the formal features of new media language (e.g., spelling and orthography) and a preoccupation with delineating individual discourse genres; instead, greater attention should be paid to the *situated* practices of new media users (i.e., communicators) and the intertextuality and *heteroglossia* inherent in new media convergence (i.e., people's use of multiple media and often in the same new media format, as in social networking profiles).

Along much the same vein, and in both an earlier article for the journal *Pragmatics* and in a commentary for the Androutsopoulos special issue, Alexandra Georgakopoulou (2003, 2006) summarizes and problematizes recurrent linguistic topics in the broader field of computer-mediated communication. She also offers her own recommendations for future research, which parallel many of Androutsopoulos's concerns and include:

- the need to accept as read the way new media blend spoken and written language (this is no longer news);
- the importance of attending less to the “informational” functions of computer-mediated communication and more to the playful identity performances for which it is used;
- ensuring that the study of language is grounded in a concern for the broader sociocultural practices and inequalities of communities (or social networks);
- always considering the connections between online and offline practices, and between different technologies;

- a general move toward emphasizing the contextual and particularistic nature of new media language;
- relying on the combination of *both* quantitative and qualitative (particularly ethnographic) research methods.

Once again, we see in Georgakopoulou's "manifesto" for new media language studies a call for research that is altogether more committed to the social meanings of technology and its particular (hence "particularistic") significance for specific users, groups, or communities.

One persistent problem in new media scholarship (sociolinguistic or otherwise) has been the apparent dominance of English—as both the medium of publication and, more importantly, as the subject of analysis. This has certainly been a central criticism in the reviews by European colleagues like Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou. In their groundbreaking collection *The Multilingual Internet*, Brenda Danet and Susan Herring (2007) made a concerted effort to rectify the situation, drawing together a wide range of work about the use of languages other than English on the internet, work that was written largely by scholars whose first/preferred language was not English. In the introduction to their book, Danet and Herring set out the following list of topics for organizing its chapters; this is a list that likewise helps set a more multilingual/multicultural agenda for new media sociolinguistics:

- language and culture (e.g., speech communities, context, and performance);
- writing systems (e.g., the restrictions of ASCII encoding, ad hoc improvisations by users);
- linguistic and discourse features (e.g., orthography and typography);
- gender and language (e.g., politeness, turn taking, social change);
- language choice and code switching (e.g., language use in diasporic online communities);
- linguistic diversity (e.g., small and endangered languages, the status of English).

In addition to elevating these topics for consideration by researchers, Danet and Herring's book also gave space to a world of non-English-language scholarship. The fact remains that, for all sorts of problematic institutional and geopolitical reasons, valuable research by scholars such as Michael Beißwenger, Chiaki Kishimoto, or Silvia Betti, to name only three, is still

too easily overlooked. This is something that we were certainly very mindful of when putting together *Digital Discourse*, and we are pleased to be able to offer a collection that engages with multiple languages (specifically, Irish, Hebrew, Chinese, Finnish, Japanese, German, Greek, Arabic, and French), as well as a number of other important nonstandard and/or nonofficial ways of speaking.

### *Delineating New Media Sociolinguistics*

All the work represented in *Digital Discourse* responds either directly or indirectly to the kinds of issues and recommendations proposed by prominent scholars like Herring, Androutsopoulos, Danet, and Georgakopoulou. And, as we say, they are certainly the ones best known in the English-language literature. Inspired by the same run of priorities, we want now to set out four organizing principles that we think could/should define the work of new media sociolinguistics; they are certainly the ones that ground *Digital Discourse*. For a field with such an interdisciplinary authorship and readership, these types of conceptual clarifications have the added benefit of making our disciplinary stance a little more transparent and hopefully understandable. The four principles are quite apparently interrelated and only separated for rhetorical convenience; they are also presented here as deliberately short, only loosely mapped statements.

#### Discourse: Language, Mediation, and Technologization

Putting “language” in its place, we establish from the outset that the object of this volume—and also for the field as a whole—is the study of language insofar as it illuminates social and cultural processes (cf. Bucholtz & Hall, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2006). In other words, our primary concern is not with the abstract, “grammatical” language of linguistics, but rather the everyday life of *language in use*—or just *discourse*.

Whatever theoretical variations and methodological styles they encompass (see Jaworski & Coupland, 2006), sociolinguistics and linguistically oriented discourse analysis are grounded in a shared commitment to the following: the social function of language, the interactional accomplishment of meaning, the significance of communicator intent, and the relevance of social/cultural *context* (cf. Duranti & Goodwin, 1992). This has two specific implications for new media sociolinguistics. First, we should accept the inherently *mediated* nature of all communication (cf. Norris & Jones, 2005;



Scollon, 2001) and not just in the case of so-called computer-mediated communication; communication is always contextualized (i.e., mediated, embodied, emplaced) by, for example, relationships, setting, layout, gesture, accent, and typography. Sometimes, the medium (i.e., “technology”) is the least of the mediators. Along these lines, we might also usefully draw a distinction between mediation and *mediatization* (cf. Couldry, 2008) for instances where language is mass-produced or broadcast in, say, newspapers, magazines, or websites.

The second implication of a strictly social-cultural approach to language is a need to think about its *technologization* (cf. Fairclough, 1999), before, that is, we even get to thinking about literal technologies for communication (Thurlow & Bell, 2009). In other words, we should engage with the particular historical-political context of contemporary language use: its commodification and its recontextualized use as a lifestyle resource or marketing strategy to be sold back to us, or as a workplace tool used to “manage” us (cf. Cameron, 2000; Heller, 2003). This is the real stuff of *symbolic power* (cf. Bourdieu, 1991) and an important part of the way new media language is nowadays also being organized, talked about, and (re-)valued (Thurlow, 2011a). In many ways, new media language simply adds another dimension (or domain) to these larger cultural shifts.

### Technology: From Spectacular to Banal, from Digital to Linguistic

Technology is not a straightforward matter. People readily think of computers, telephones, fax machines, and perhaps also of washing machines, hearing aids, and rockets. But what of paper clips, pencils and paper, or writing? It is not only the machinery of clocks that is designed to enhance our basic human capacities, but also the mechanism of time itself (Thurlow et al., 2004). New media sociolinguistics needs an altogether more critical, carefully theorized take on technology before even contemplating its role in human communication.

Against the backdrop of technological determinism and extreme social constructionism, we should accept a certain *materiality* to communication technologies; undeniably, they *afford* certain communicative possibilities and not others (cf. Hutchby, 2001). Technologies—even “new” communication technologies—are, however, often not as spectacular or revolutionary as many would have us believe (cf. Thurlow, 2006). Indeed, they are usually *embedded* in complex ways into the banal practices of everyday life

(cf. Herring, 2004). Technologies are thus best understood as *prosthetic extensions* of people's abilities and lives, rather like the hearing aid and the paperclip (Keating, 2005; cf. McLuhan, 2005 [1964]).

It is for this reason—the embedded, prosthetic nature of technologies—that we have privileged the notion of *media* over that of technology (cf. Buckingham, 2007; Kress, 2003; also Livingstone, 2002). For us, speaking of “new media” is a way to debunk—and reflexively acknowledge—the tendency for popular and scholarly writing to fetishize technology at the expense of its social meanings and cultural practices (cf. Herring, 2008; Thurlow, 2006). Mark Nelson (2006, p. 72) puts it rather nicely: “Power tools do not necessarily a carpenter make.” Just as we are interested in language for its social uses, so, too, are we interested in technology for its cultural meanings. As sociolinguists and discourse analysts, we are also mainly concerned with what technology tells us about language.

To complicate the relationship between language and technology a little further, we might even consider drawing a distinction between mechanical or *digital technologies* and between semiotic or *linguistic technologies* (cf. Leupin, 2000; Nusselder, 2009). Although not everyone would agree (see Pinker, 1994), language is, at heart, a cultural construction (cf. Pennycook, 2004). In other words, it is a technology just like, well, “technology.” Working with the idea of language as a technology forces an ongoing consideration of the constant interplay of the message and the medium (cf. McLuhan, 2005 [1964]; see also Hutchby, 2001) and of any overly neat or artificial separation between language *and* technology.

## Multimodality: Beyond Language and into the Bedroom

Multimodality is—or at least should be—a “taken-for-granted” in new media studies. It is increasingly regarded as a core concept in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis more generally (e.g. Jewitt, 2009; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Scollon, 2001; Scollon & Scollon, 2003). In this regard, something new media scholars outside of discourse analysis seldom do is follow a clearly articulated line on the difference between *medium* and *mode* (see Jewitt, 2004; cf. Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) and the interplay of the two. This is especially germane given the growing complexity of the *multimedia* formats of newer new media, brought about by the inevitable *convergence* of old and new media (Jenkins, 2006) and the *layering* of new media with other new media (cf. Androutsopoulos, 2010; Myers, 2010).

In their efforts to redress the relative absence of the linguistic in computer-mediated communication, scholars often overlook the fact that it is only ever one of many communicative resources being used. All texts, all communicative events, are always achieved by means of *multiple semiotic resources*, even so-called text-based new media like instant- and text messaging. Herein lies much of the potential in new media for *invention and creativity*; time and again, research shows how users overcome apparent semiotic limitations, reworking and combining—often playfully—the resources at their disposal (cf. Burgess, 2010; Danet, 2001; and Thurlow, 2011b). New media sociolinguistics is going to need advanced analytical equipment if it is to keep track of the changing significance (in both common senses of the word) of language in the synaesthetic (Kress, 2003) and *heteroglossic* (cf. Androutsopoulos, 2010) spaces of new media.

Speaking of space, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2001, p. 11) use the bedroom for demonstrating the inherent multimodality of texts as well as the “orchestration” of multiple semiotic modes. For our purposes, another telling invocation of “bedroom” is Rodney Jones’ (2010) more literal reference to bedroom as a common location of new media practice/access for young people (cf. also Holloway & Valentine, 2003). It is the situated, *spatialized* (which is not to say static) experiences of new media that are also crucial to an understanding of their meaning.

### Ideology: The Disciplining of Technology and Language

Linguistically oriented discourse studies, especially those falling under the rubric of critical discourse analysis, often also orient to the notion of Foucauldian *discourses*—what we dub *F-discourse* as opposed to *L-discourse* (“language in use”; cf. Gee, 2010, on d-discourse and D-discourse). In practice, what this means is that scholars are interested both in the ways microlevel interactional and textual practices constitute our social worlds and in the ways that our everyday communicative/representational practices are structured by the social order, by larger systems of belief, and by hierarchies of knowledge. Insofar as Foucault (e.g., 1980, 1981) thought about the normative, naturalizing, and “neutralizing” qualities of discourses, they are not far removed in their effect from Marxist *ideologies* or Barthesian *mythologies*.

To start, digital technologies are themselves inherently ideological, both in terms of their political economies of access and control (see below), and also in terms of their potential as mechanisms or resources for both

*normative* and *resistive* representation (cf. Kress, 2003; Thurlow, 2011b). This is quite apparent when one thinks of the symbolic power of the news and broadcast media (see Durham & Kellner, 2001); no less is true, however, of any number of seemingly mundane mechanical, medical, or digital technologies (cf. Headrick, 1981; Feenburg & Hannay, 1995). Technology or not, language, too, is fully ideological.

Online or offline, spoken or typed, face-to-face or digitally “mediated,” what people do with language has material consequence (cf. Foucault, 1981), and language is instrumental in establishing categories of difference, relations of inequality, or at the very least, the social norms by which we all feel obliged to live our lives (see Thurlow, 2011c). Whether it is done by academics, journalists, teachers, or “nonexperts,” talk about language (or *metalinguage*—cf. Jaworski et al., 2004) always exposes the vagaries of the symbolic marketplace (cf. Bourdieu, 1991): competing standards of “correct,” “good,” or “normal” language; debates about literacy and occupational training; the social categorization and disciplining of speakers; and the performative construction of language itself (cf. Cameron, 1995; Pennycook, 2004). And some people’s ways of speaking inevitably come out better than others; some are voices of authority and reason, some speak “street talk,” “pidgin,” or a “subcultural antilanguage.” Needless to say, as work on *language ideology* (Blommaert, 1999; Schieffelin et al., 1998; Woolard, 1998) reminds us, talk about language is usually, at root, a matter of disciplining the bodies of speakers rather than the niceties of their speech.

### Concerning the “New” in New Media (and the “Global” in Global Media)

To these four organizing principles, we also want to add one obvious but no less important caveat about the supposed newness of “new media sociolinguistics.” There is a contradiction inherent in any book such as the one we have put together here. On the one hand, its existence is predicated on and justified by a claim to novelty—to reporting something new (as in “new media” and “fresh sociolinguistic perspectives”). On the other hand, by the time the book has been published, disseminated, and more widely read, the digital technologies/media will have moved on, will have already started to mature, and will have embedded themselves deeper and/or differently into people’s lives. Inevitably, the sociolinguistic and sociocultural practices of which these technologies are a part will also have changed.

None of this precludes scholars from wanting to keep up to date as best they can. There is much to be gained from simply tracking and recording developments and changes. Nonetheless, it is important to think twice before making overextended claims and wild predictions about the stability or endurability of the technolinguistic changes of the moment. It is also important to keep in check our academic enthusiasm for the *newness* of “new media” and any undue *presentism* (cf. Sterne, 2005) by which technological change is regarded as somehow removed from its historical or “developmental” context. For the most part, technologies unfold gradually out of previous technologies and emerge into broader, complex systems of technological practice. Besides, moderating our own uptake of in-the-moment buzz phrases like “Web 2.0” can help us stay one step ahead/above of the excitable rhetoric of corporate discourse that is deeply and unavoidably invested in obsolescence and the marketing of newness (or the rebranding of oldness). It behooves us to remember, for example, that *Facebook* profiles bear a strong formal and functional resemblance to personal home pages, and that interactivity, user comments, and online collaboration existed *before* the so-called Web 2.0. In the early 1990s, we also heard many of the same hopeful/idealistic claims for the liberatory/participatory (“global-conversational”) potential of the internet that circulate in the 2010s about social networking sites, wikis, folksonomies, and so on.

In this regard, it is equally important that scholars keep a constant check on their enthusiasm for, and very real investment in, the new media and acknowledge how it all continues to be structured by entrenched—albeit variable and slowly changing—inequalities of access, control, and opportunity (cf. Alzouma, 2005; Castells, 2009; Rodino-Colocino, 2006). While we appreciate the excitement (and genuine hope) that underpins sweeping visions for a “global communication network,” the fact remains that so-called global flows of wealth, information, and technology are also marked by stoppages, blockages, trickles, and any number of nonflow metaphors. The opportunities of new media may span the globe, but they certainly do not cover it, nor do they span it in equal measure (Herring, 2001b; cf. also Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010). Closer to home, these same political-economic realities are such that much of the academic work on new media studies is also done by rich-country scholars writing about the experiences of their own people—with the occasional dabbling in other people’s places. Just as sociolinguists are coming to terms with the utterly local and tightly bounded realities of some people under globalization

(e.g. Block, 2004; Blommaert, 2005; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010a), so too must new media scholars see through the presumptions of phrases like “global networks” and “global media.”

## Digital Discourse: *Background and Overview*

In September 2009, we co-organized at the University of Washington in Seattle, USA, the third in a series of international conferences on the role of the media in the representation, construction, and/or production of language. The first two conferences were organized by Sally Johnson at Leeds University in 2005 (“Language in the Media: Representations, Identities, Ideologies”) and 2007 (“Language Ideologies and Media Discourse: Texts, Practices, Policies”). Both of these conferences have resulted in the publication of edited collections (see Johnson & Ensslin, 2007; Johnson and Milani, 2010), books concerned with the way the conventional media commonly depicts language-related issues and also how the media’s use of language is central to the construction of what people think language is or should be. As we have already indicated, *Digital Discourse* shares a similar interest in issues of metalanguage and language ideology; however, with its focus on contemporary *new* media (rather than broadcast or news media per se), our volume is more broadly concerned with the situated language practices of ordinary communicators and *relatively* less concerned with issues of policy and “old” media depictions of language use.

We do want to be clear about one thing: while *Digital Discourse* comprises a careful selection of some of the best work presented at the 2009 conference in Seattle, there are also number of invited chapters, and the book is by no means simply conference proceedings. With an invited foreword and commentary from two of the most internationally recognized scholars of new media language, *Digital Discourse* brings together the work of some well-established scholars in sociolinguistics and/or new media sociolinguistics; it also showcases the work of several newer scholars whose research represents the cutting edge of new media studies, a truly interdisciplinary field that has always—and for obvious reasons—been driven in large part by younger/junior scholars.

## *The Organization of Digital Discourse*

We have organized the volume around a series of key analytic concepts in contemporary sociolinguistics and discourse studies, most notably,

the bread-and-butter concepts of *discourse* (i.e., language in use and linguistic ways of representing), *style* (identities and linguistic ways of being), and *genre* (text types and linguistic ways of [inter]acting) (cf., for example, Fairclough, 2003). This tripartite system of discursive, stylistic, and generic meanings in language is clearly also akin to Halliday's (1994) core communicative metafunctions of language (i.e., ideational, interpersonal, and textual), which also serve as a useful way to frame new media generally and to structure the analysis of new media language in particular. The chapters in each section privilege discourse, genre, or style for special consideration, although every chapter in our book is necessarily concerned with all three. Each contributor is likewise, in one way or another, just as interested in the identificational, interpersonal, and ideological possibilities of new media language. In this regard, we also have a section dedicated to *stance*, a topic of growing interest in sociolinguistics (see Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009a), as well as a concluding section on issues of *methodology*, which new media have to some extent turned upside down (see Levine & Scollon, 2004; Norris & Jones, 2005). For now, we offer the following short overviews of each section.

### *Part 1 – Metadiscursive Framings of New Media Language*

The three chapters in this section open the book by looking at three different ways new media language is represented and reflexively attended to; in other words, its existence as a metadiscursive or metalinguistic phenomenon (cf. Jaworski et al., 2004). Each chapter thus connects most directly with the broader *language-ideological* critique underpinning this volume (cf. Irvine & Gal, 2000; Woolard, 1998), which is to say our interest in the ways language and new media language are subject to the disciplining gaze (Foucault, 1973) of the news media, commerce, government and, of course, “users” themselves (cf. Johnson & Ensslin, 2007; Thurlow, 2007, 2011a, 2011b).

In one of the only studies to date to consider the text messaging practices of adults, Lauren Squires opens the chapter with her analysis of metadiscursive commentary in television news reports of a high-profile extramarital affair. Squires structures her detailed analysis around the *heteroglossic* renderings and institutional/ideological recastings of the original text messages. In this case of adult text messaging, not only are the news media's representations very inconsistent, but there is also an apparent investment in standardizing (or tidying up) the appearance of

messages in stark contrast to the way the messages of young people are typically depicted.

In their chapter, Graham Jones, Bambi Schieffelin, and Rachel Smith address an even finer, more specific feature of everyday metalanguage. Returning to their previous work on the use of “polyphonic” reported speech—specifically, the quotative *be + like*—in young people’s instant messaging (Jones & Schieffelin, 2009), they document the intertextual (or “metacommunicative”) and multimodal (or “metasemiotic”) co-construction of gossip by young people using both IM and *Facebook*. As before, Jones et al.’s work nicely refutes simplistic, negative stereotypes about new media language and perfectly demonstrates the interplay of online and offline discursive practices. In this chapter, we also see the emergent and/or convergent qualities of new media, developing out of previous media and in concert with others.

In the third chapter in Part 1, Aoife Lenihan, too, is concerned with the *production* (cf. Pennycook, 2004) and policing of language. Drawing on ethnographic-discourse data, she examines the metalinguistic practices of the self-appointed “community” of Irish-language translators for the social networking site *Facebook*. The elegance of Lenihan’s argument lies in her added attention to the mechanical (i.e., application design) and institutional limitations imposed on translations by *Facebook* itself. In doing so, she takes on the poster child of Web 2.0 by showing that its idealizing rhetoric of inclusive linguistic diversity is rooted also in the self-promoting business of corporate reach. In this case, we see how *Facebook*, Inc. (the company) capitalizes on the political motivation and symbolic status anxieties of everyday speakers as unpaid translators.

Together, these three chapters set the stage for the ones that follow. From the outset, we have evidence that language is not only on the move but also under constant surveillance and invariably deployed as resource (or excuse) for social judgment and control. Of course, so too is language a resource for endless creativity, reflexive practice, social intervention, resistance, and play.

### *Part 2 – Creative Genres: Texting, Messaging, and Multimodality*

A favorite preoccupation of linguistically oriented new media studies has been the identification and specification of emergent genres (e.g., e-mail, online chat, message boards)—an endeavor that typically “concludes” with the inevitable hybridity of the various text types (Herring, 2001). The chapters in Part 2 take their analysis of genre a little further, however: first,



by bringing the technologies under consideration up to date (e.g., text messaging, mobile storytelling and microblogging); second, by taking hybridity as a given and attending instead to the inherent multimodality and cultural embeddedness of these different ways of (inter)acting with/through new media. Certainly, each contributor is careful to situate generic form and content in relation to both communicative function (cf. Myers, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2004) and the way users overcome (or capitalize on) the genre-defining affordances of the medium (cf. Hutchby, 2001; Norris & Jones, 2005). In each case, contributors are attentive to the emergent, variable nature of the features and practices they describe.

Tereza Spilioti sets the tone nicely in Chapter 4 by homing in on the pragmatic qualities of closings in an ethnographically grounded sample of Greek text messages. In doing so, she challenges two common assumptions about new media discourse: its impoliteness and its uniformity. What Spilioti in fact shows is how her texters make complex, situated decisions about how they close their messages with a view to relationship history and topical relevance (e.g., following a dispreferred response) as well as the sequential position of the message and the daily rhythm of interactions. Spilioti's analysis also complicates assumptions about new media synchronicity (or asynchronicity) as a mechanically determined trait rather than as something interactionally accomplished.

The second chapter in Part 2, is Yukiko Nishimura's study of the creative literacies of *keitai* ("mobile phone") novels in Japan (cf. Morrison et al., 2011, for more on mobile storytelling). Taking an innovative corpus-stylistics approach, she unravels public assumptions about *keitai* novels along two axes: ideologies of *literacy* and ideologies of *literary merit*. Nishimura examines *keitai* novels both in their own terms (e.g., orthography, literary style) and through a comparison with the readability of other conventional genres and canonical texts. Ultimately, Nishimura rather elegantly proves the creativity of new media language users and refutes the way so much new media discourse is dismissed as illiterate or as a kind of "dumbing down."

In the last chapter of Part 2, Carmen Lee offers a uniquely sociolinguistic account of one of the newest—and much talked about—new media covered in our volume: microblogging. Lee considers the emerging linguistic (or orthographic) literacies of Cantonese-English bilinguals' status updates on *Facebook* (a form of microblogging that rivals *Twitter* in its popularity). The small-scale, (auto)ethnographic approach Lee takes allows her to track carefully the dynamic nature of the genre in terms of not only

its linguistic forms but also its deeply embedded, communicative function (cf. Thurlow & Poff, 2011). Following a content-analytic-style examination of the communicative functions typically served by status updates, Lee moves to a singular but no less compelling account of one woman's situated, convergent (as in multimedia) use of status updates.

### *Part 3 – Style and Stylization: Identity Play and Semiotic Invention*

As with the chapters by, say, Jones et al. (Chapter 2) and Lee (Chapter 6), the identificational meanings and possibilities of new media are in evidence throughout this volume. In Part 3, however, chapters foreground style and stylization (cf. Coupland, 2007) by focusing on three particular social-cultural contexts and the ways users capitalize on the semiotic affordances of digital technologies. Where one chapter examines a less familiar group using a familiar medium (i.e., online discussion forums), the other two chapters profile hugely popular online media that are seldom—if ever—discussed by sociolinguists: blogging and role-playing games (although see Meyers, 2010, on blogs). What makes these three chapters particularly exciting is their ethnographically informed attention to three very different, perhaps even unusual (for many readers at least), communities of young people and their largely undocumented practices.

In this regard, we open Part 3 with Lisa Newon's rich participant observation study of a *guild* ("group" or "team") on *World of Warcraft*—the world's largest MMORPG ("massively multiplayer online role-playing game"). This mechanically and interactionally complex gaming environment provides Newon insight into the way players use spoken, written, and visual discourse *simultaneously* for game-focused collaboration and for social interaction. A key feature of MMORPGs is the discursive performance of (dis)embodied actions and the semiotic production of space (or *landscape*; cf. Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010b; Jones, 2010) in which the game takes place. Throughout, Newon pays particular attention to the co-construction and management of certain players' identities as leaders and expert gamers.

In Chapter 8, Saija Peuronen presents her ethnographic study of a Finnish online forum for Christian extreme sports enthusiasts. Members of this *translocal*, hybrid, heteroglossic community style themselves in a number of creative ways that combine the "expressive resources" of not just two linguacultures (i.e., Finnish and English) but also the globalizing discourses/styles of both extreme sports and Christianity. Through her careful analysis of discursive resources like code switching/mixing,

orthographic invention, and in-group registers, Peuronen also tracks the role of global brands and the way members of this community slip effortlessly between standardized (often also globalized) and highly localized practices (cf. Coupland, 2010; Leppänen et al., 2009; Pennycook, 2010).

Following nicely from Peuronen's discussion of the interplay between new media styles and global cultural fashions, Carmel Vaisman rounds off Part 3 with her study of Israeli teenagers' Hebrew-language blogs. Her study is impressive not only for its multilingual perspective, but also because of its ethnographically informed gender critique of the styling practices used by a very particular subcultural group of bloggers (the "Girly Girls" known as *Fakatsa*). By homing in on the unique and highly complex orthographic practices of these young (often teenage) women, Vaisman demonstrates how their orthographic play often privileges the visual-aesthetic form of language—the look of the words—over its communicative function. New media language and/or typography is once again revealed to be a powerful identificational and cultural resource; it is also a means by which often disadvantaged groups like young people or women (cf. Nishimura's Chapter 5) assert themselves as cultural producers and especially vis-à-vis the negative stereotypes of others.

#### *Part 4 – Stance: Ideological Position Taking and Social Categorization*

No identity work happens outside of, or without a view to, relationships; acts of identity are also always acts of comparison, social distinction, and othering. For sociolinguists, a key linguistic manifestation (or, indeed, discursive accomplishment) of this process lies in stancetaking, the ways communicators position and align themselves vis-à-vis their speech/writing and those they are speaking/writing to/about (cf. Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009b). As such, this next section follows tightly on the previous one; like Section 1, however, it also attends more squarely to the matter of ideology since the evaluations that underpin stancetaking typically also hinge on the preservation of symbolic orders (J. Coupland & N. Coupland, 2009; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2009; cf. also Bourdieu, 1977). Each of the three chapters in this section is concerned with the ways that new media facilitate the micro-sociolinguistic accomplishment of larger, sociocultural structures of inequality—a nice corrective for the liberatory/participatory hype of Web 2.0 rhetoric.

In their opening chapter, Shana Walton and Alexandra Jaffe examine racialized and class-based stancetaking in the notorious (in the USA at least) blog *Stuff White People Like*. In considering the complex formation of

stances expressed by the blog's author and those attributed to a presumed audience, Walton and Jaffe also show how this particular new medium (or genre) foregrounds the interactional, co-constructed nature of stancetaking (e.g., in reader commentaries). Like the other contributors in Part 4, Walton & Jaffe are left with mixed feelings about the ideological implications of blogging (or this particular blog, at least); while different people/positions are surely put into "conversation"—inducing what the authors call a "mild culture shock"—authorial control and preferred readings are no less prevalent.

Crispin Thurlow and Adam Jaworski take up a very similar line of investigation in their chapter, but this time turning to the use of online photo-sharing sites (in this case, *Flickr*) by tourists. In adopting a specifically *new media* perspective, Thurlow and Jaworski are forced to rethink the sociolinguistics of stance (e.g., its multimodality and complicated footing) but are also afforded new insights into tourism discourse. With regard the second of these "findings," *Flickr* confirms the circulation and ubiquity of tourist practices such as forced perspective shots of tourists interacting with monuments/sites. For Thurlow and Jaworski, processes of (re)embodiment and (re)mediation are also evidence of the ideology they call "banal globalization" for which photography, then digital photography, and now online photo sharing are key technologies.

In the last chapter in this section, Elaine Chun and Keith Walters shift to a yet another ("Web 2.0") new media: the video-sharing site *YouTube* and a particular video of a stand-up routine by Wonho Chung. Chun and Walters start with a critique of Chung's linguistic performance as/ of a fluent Arabic speaker of Korean and Vietnamese parentage, which they follow with an analysis of multilingual, collaborative stancetaking in comments posted from 48 different countries. While this *YouTube* moment reveals the discursive "imagining" of a diasporic Arab community, Chun and Walters also recognize the limitations of the web's democratizing potential and how these media become tools (or resources) for maintaining the moral order and for shoring up privilege (cf. Hill, 2001, 2008). In this case, we see commenters and also Chung himself authenticating and reinscribing anachronistic notions of both Arab and Oriental. As they put it, "*YouTube* may be a space that inherently Orientalizes difference."

What each of the three chapters in Part 4 shows is how the kind of playful, entertainment or parodic frames that often occur on the web *may*

well open up “safe” spaces (akin to “discursive licence” in Coupland & Jaworski, 2003) for public discussion and perhaps even deliberation, but they can, it seems, just as easily foreclose sustained, deeper engagement. Once again, we are reminded that the social meanings and influence of new media are seldom determined (sic) by the technologies themselves but rather by their users and the uses to which the technologies are put. Which brings us neatly to the last section in the volume.

### *Part 5 – New Practices, Emerging Methodologies*

New technologies bring with them new social and cultural practices; these new practices in turn require that scholars rethink their investigative and analytic methods. As Erickson (1996) notes, whole new fields of research are sometimes made possible through the emergence of technologies that enable new ways of recording, organizing, storing, and disseminating data (see also Levine & Scollon, 2004). None of which suggests that older, better-established methods have nothing to offer still. In three quite different chapters, contributors in this final section of *Digital Discourse* explore some of the key challenges and solutions in researching new media language—and they do so from three very different but nonetheless complementary perspectives.

Returning to the notion of heteroglossia with which Lauren Squires started in Chapter 1, Jannis Androutsopoulos argues that a proper analysis of *contemporary* (for him, Web 2.0) digital discourse must move beyond the cataloguing of linguistic differences and sociolinguistic variations. (His chapter here thus extends his earlier critiques of new media sociolinguistics—see discussion above.) Instead, he argues, sociolinguists and discourse analysts should be engaging more holistically with the multi-authorship, translocality, multimodality, and “modularity” of more recent new media. A textual format like the social networking profile requires an analytic frame that can handle the different voices and styles by which it is “articulated” (we use this word for its meaning of expression and the joining of parts). With reference to social-networking and content-sharing sites—and with a specific case-study—Androutsopoulos demonstrates how his approach to *digital heteroglossia* better manages the complex layering and intertextuality (cf. Bauman, 2004) of many new media texts.

In Chapter 14, Christa Dürscheid and Elisabeth Stark turn the tables somewhat on the chapter by Androutsopoulos by presenting the basis for their large-scale, corpus-based study of text messaging in Switzerland.

In combination with the other chapters in this section, their work certainly demonstrates the continued value of quantitative approaches to the study of new media language (see also Georgakopoulou's promotion of combined methodologies discussed above). Dürscheid and Stark reveal some of the preliminary findings of their study that point to intriguing linguistic and sociolinguistic insights—not least of which is the power of their study to map the particular multilingual context of Switzerland.

We have deliberately chosen Rodney Jones' chapter to round off not only Part 5 but also the main run of chapters in *Digital Discourse* because he offers such a compelling example of the opportunities of new media as well as its methodological challenges. Informed by his approach to mediated discourse analysis (Norris & Jones, 2005; cf. also Scollon, 2001), Jones traces some of the special qualities of new media textualities (e.g., their deterritorialization, reproducibility, and mutability) in the online video footage crafted by young skaters ("skateboarders") in Hong Kong. In addition to this analytic framework, Jones also demonstrates the value of historicity for new media discourse studies, and of tracking the *convergence* and, most importantly, *emergence* of technologies from photography to digital photography to digital movie editing to online photo/film sharing. Ultimately, what Jones' chapter makes quite apparent is that distinctions between language and other modalities, between "virtual" and "real" or between "physical" and "symbolic" are only ever analytic conveniences.

Together with all the chapters in this volume, the three chapters in Part 5 leave little doubt that language is, as Naomi Baron reminds us in her Foreword, clearly on the move, and that new media sociolinguists will be kept constantly on their toes. We hope that *Digital Discourse* makes some attempt to keep the field up to date. With this in mind, we are very pleased to leave the last word—as far as this book is concerned, at least—to Susan Herring as someone who has been working for over two decades to keep abreast of language in the new media.

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