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Heike Baldauf-Quilliatre, Christine Develotte, Magali Ollagnier-Beldame

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Identity Construction in Social Media

The Effects of Social Media on the Dynamics of Identity: Discourse, Interaction and Digital Traces

Ce que font les médias sociaux à l'identité numérique

HEIKE BALDAUF, CHRISTINE DEVELOTTE ET MAGALI OLLAGNIER-BELDAME

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Résumés

English Français
This paper introduces the journal's special issue concerning identity construction in social media. While considering social media, we examine how (and if) its use changes the dynamics of identity: constructing or shaping the identity, negotiating it, etc. In other words, what do social media "do" to dynamics of identity? With our multi-disciplinary background (philosophy, linguistics, cognitive sciences), we will seek to answer this question at least partially by first explaining what we mean by dynamics of identity (part 1) and how we study social media in terms of interactivity and discursiveness and by the digital traces they leave behind (part 2). Thirdly, we will examine identity construction with the temporal, spatial and otherness dimensions, which are the three fundamental aspects of human interaction (part 3).

Dans cet article qui constitue une introduction à ce numéro spécial sur la construction de l'identité dans les médias sociaux, nous nous interrogeons sur la façon selon laquelle les médias sociaux et les pratiques liées aux médias sociaux changent (ou non) la dynamique identitaire : la construction et le façonnage de l'identité, la négociation de l'identité, etc. Autrement dit, nous nous demandons ce que les médias sociaux "font" à la dynamique de l'identité. À partir d'un arrière-plan pluridisciplinaire (philosophie, sciences du langage et sciences cognitives), nous tentons d'apporter des réponses à cette question centrale. Dans une première partie (section 1), nous expliquons ce que nous entendons par "dynamique de la construction identitaire" en partant des approches philosophiques (Ricoeur) et sociolinguistiques (Bucholtz & Hall). Dans un deuxième temps (section 2), nous détaillons les trois dimensions linguistiques qui nous semblent essentielles pour comprendre la construction identitaire dans les médias sociaux : le discours des médias sociaux en tant que sous-discours

du web 2.0 (section 2.1), l'interaction dans les médias sociaux, à la fois configurée par la machine et utilisant la machine (section 2.2) et les traces laissées par les interactions enregistrées (section 2.3). Ces dernières sont examinées sous trois aspects : leur visibilité (2.3.1), leur durée (2.3.2) et leurs propriétés auctoriales (2.3.3). La troisième partie s'intéresse à la construction de l'identité par rapport aux dimensions temporelles, spatiales et à celles relatives à l'altérité, ces trois dimensions étant fondamentales de l'interaction humaine (section 3). Puis, nous poursuivons en résumant quelques-unes des spécificités liées à la temporalité des médias sociaux, notamment en lien avec les articles du numéro spécial (section 3.1). Ensuite nous abordons différentes dimensions spatiales, en nous fondant sur Chabert (2012) (section 3.2). Nous examinons tout particulièrement l'espace écranique (section 3.2.1), l'espace physique (3.2.2) et l'espace imaginé des interactants (3.2.3). Finalement nous nous interrogerons sur l'altérité comme dimension centrale de l'interaction (section 3.3) en mettant l'accent sur le type de "communauté" créé par, dans et à travers les médias sociaux.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : médias sociaux, interaction
Keywords: social media, interaction
Rubriques : Points de vue / échanges

Texte intégral

1. Dynamics of identity: our approach[1]

1 Traditionally, identity has both a synchronic dimension (a stable state, for example genetic identity) and a diachronic dimension (a process of continual construction, one that is continually incomplete). For Ricoeur (1990), the accumulation of experiences over a lifetime relates to the identity-idem (sameness). It is the "what" that a person consists of. As for appropriation, a reflexive exercise or recognition of these experiences by the person as him/herself constitutes the ipse-identity, "who" the self is (Ricoeur, 1990). Through this appropriation, the individual maintains his/her self by "finding something of the one in the multiple" by claiming the actions carried out. For Ricoeur, this is the attribution of connections between actions and an individual, which can lead him/her to say "These actions are mine and they have meaning." This process must necessarily rely on traces of experience that can be either internal (memories) or external (notebooks, photos, documents that serve as reminders of the past). On social media, all human-system interactions are recorded, creating digital traces (see 2.3) which are the connection between past and present/future, between self and other, between the self and the machine. They are at the heart of the dynamics of identity in social media.

2 This philosophical perspective allows us to consider the dialectic between permanence and change over time in the construction of an individual's identity. In the specific context of interactions on social media, we must also examine the practices of identity construction through discourse and the role of digital traces in this process.

3 In the last decade, the construction of identity through discourse has been studied within different methodological traditions and approaches (Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou, 2003; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; de Fina Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Dolon & Todoli, 2008; Garzone & Archibald, 2010; Page, 2012a; Du Bois & Baumgarten, 2013). Their analyses have shown that identity is produced discursively and how it is produced discursively, that is, that identity appears always as "identity in use."

According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 585-586) we consider identity as a "relational and sociocultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local

discourse contexts of interaction." Hence, identity is first locally constructed, maintained and negotiated; secondly it is connected to recognized social or demographic categories (such as nationality, age, gender) as well as to local roles and positions and to locally defined categorizations; thirdly it can only be understood in relation to other identities, in other words, "it always acquires social meaning in relation to other available identity positions and other social actors" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005: 598). We follow a social constructionist approach which views identity as a socially emerging phenomenon rather than a pre-defined and pre-determined fact, an intersubjective construction rather than a personal one.

2. Social media

5 We start with Ellison and boyd's definition (2013: 158).

> A social network site is a *networked communication platform* in which participants 1) have *uniquely identifiable profiles* that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data; 2) can *publicly articulate connections* that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, and/or interact with *streams of user-generated content* provided by their connections on the site.

6 Concerning social media in particular they add:

> What makes "social media" significant as a category is not the technology, but rather the socio-technical dynamics that unfolded as millions of people embraced the technology and used it to collaborate, share information and socialize (Ellison & boyd, 2013: 160).

7 According to Herring (2013), the web 2.0 reconfigures the early analysis frameworks used for computer-mediated communication such as "Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis" (Herring, 2004) bringing us to talk now of "Convergent Media Computer-Mediated Communication", or CMCMC. This idea proposes three classifications for different phenomena: those already present in communication, for example, email; phenomena that are modified by the web 2.0 environment; and emerging phenomena that are specific to web 2.0. Interactive phenomena are massively impacted by these shifts: "It is difficult to link emergence with any specific aspect of language use; rather (...), it is tied to technological developments" (Herring, 2013: 21).

8 Describing "technolinguistic material" and the "technodiscursive form" of social media today requires new concepts (Paveau, 2015). Marie-Anne Paveau offers the term "*technosigne*" in French for the "#" or hashtag, which has a specific function in Twitter. Until we have a descriptive system made specifically to include all the complexity of this hybrid reality that is a blend of language and technology, we propose a combination of various perspectives. To describe social media practices, we will start provisionally with the descriptive traditions used in linguistics for oral and written communication, which are discourse and interaction analysis, then include an analysis of digital traces. We distinguish then between three dimensions (discourse, interactions and traces) in our linguistic approach to social media which will be described later in relation to the three key dimensions of human interactions, which are space, time and otherness. These three dimensions are separated here only in the interest of clarity.

2.1. In terms of discourse

In terms of discourse, social media discourse is part of the inter-discourse on the

Internet (websites, blogs, chatrooms) with which it shares certain characteristics (graphics, synchronous and asynchronous production, etc.).

10 The "*espace d'exposition discursive*" (Develotte, 2009) of social media relates to the techno-semio-linguistic materiality of their online form, as much as to their design on a screen or their functionalities. These are multi-modal spaces that combine graphic, iconic and still or moving pictorial elements with synchronous and asynchronous communication functions. The example of the Voicethread platform (see Herring & Demarest, 2017, in this issue) shows that these various modes of expression are used differently depending on the user's gender. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) sought to develop unified semiotics to analyse multimodal communication, taking into consideration how different elements relate to each other. The multimodality of social media can vary from one social medium to another but also depending on how they are used (for example, by taking advantage of only part of its semiotic potential when writing without emoticons).

11 Norris (2004) introduced the notion of "multimodal density" to distinguish between interactions that are not multimodal, such as essentially text comments on Facebook, compared to those that are "highly multimodal" and employ multiple modes–photos, sound, video, with different degrees of social presence (Walther, 1996). Of these highly multimodal interactions, "video and audio, being richer in social presence, also reveal more about a communicator's 'real' identity'" (see Herring & Demarest, 2017, in this issue).

12 According to Lemke (2009), a phenomenological perspective must be included in the semiotic analysis because aspects such as rhythm, sensation and involvement of the body are constructed semiotically.

13 These discursive spaces condition the enunciations and productions possible within the interaction. Twitter messages, for instance, are limited to 140 characters. Another example, on Facebook 2015, interactions encourage positive interindividual relations–there is a "like" function, but not an opposite "dislike" function and the "netiquette" does away with any comments that are judged to be too rude or inappropriate. Also, it is the user who chooses, depending on his desires and his interlocutor, how he/she uses or does not use everything that characterizes him/her as an individual, combining the possibilities within the system or not–filling out a Facebook profile, posting a video with or without commentary, commenting in a language-based text, with an emoticon, a photo, video or a combination of various media, leaving a written or spoken private message, etc. Social media then are a discursive exposition space that configures the possible discursive productions.

14 Another element that can influence what is said or not said on social media is the discourse that refers to social media (Rebillard, 2011), that is, all the written or oral discourses about social media in whatever form (text, video, audio)–the discourse of businesses that promote them, the media, advertising, etc. All these discourses influence potential social media users and encourage or discourage them from looking more closely at these media.

2.2. In terms of interaction

15 In terms of interaction on social media, the machine both frames the interaction, particularly the type and the mode of interaction with which the tool functions (as we have just seen in the example with Facebook) and it is also part of the interaction, as an artefact that the individual brings into play. It influences the inter-individual interaction (Ellison & Boyd, 2013) in a variety of ways.

16 - Geographic distance makes it possible to express oneself in diverse and unusual ways. It also allows changes in modes, from oral to written, from expression in words to expression through images, using the participant's own words or the use of "spectacles" (shared multimedia content, Androutsopoulos, 2010). Distance also

makes possible contact between people who might not know each other off-line.

17 - Social media software is developed for combined use of different oral-related (sound/voice, gestures, postures, looks, etc.) and written (text, photo, etc.) semiotic resources as well as different "voices" (Androutsopoulos, 2011). Users thus choose not only the different semiotic means but also the mode (oral, written), the media (photo, video, text) and the "voice" or the "language" based on their interlocutor and/or the identity they enable. The students in Dooly's paper (in this issue, 2017) for instance carefully chose the language or language mixtures used on different platforms.

18 - Social media revisit different types of action and make it possible to combine, appropriate and reuse them in other contexts: there is nothing new about informing others of what we are doing. But doing so in writing, with multiple people at the same time, remotely, is a new activity. All the more, as the only possible action for these people is to "comment" (an action that is in fact strongly encouraged).

19 - Interaction on social media relies generally on the biographies of the participants, based on off-line social rules of which they are more or less an extension. According to Facebook's terms of service (2015).

> 1. You will not provide any false personal information on Facebook, or create an account for anyone other than yourself without permission.
> 2. You will not create more than one personal account.

20 However, some people, either because they have been victims of harassment, because of their activist stances or for any other reason may find it useful to create profiles corresponding to a fake identity (boyd, 2011). "Being online makes it easier for people to explore new forms of identities, such as fantasy avatars, and to shift identity or secure multiple identities with relative freedom" (Foresight Future Identities, 2013: 25).

21 - The ability to address multiple listeners at the same time using different modes alters the participation frameworks (Goffman, 1981). Users can then not only choose who can see and read each message, they can also explicitly and publicly address one or more people, thus positioning others as overhearers who are nonetheless authorised to participate. Additionally, we may wonder who the author of a message on social media is. For example, film excerpts, another person's shared photos or links to other websites raise the questions "who is the author? Who is responsible? Who is the creator of the content?" Similarly, comments on these "spectacles" or other external sources can both concern the semiotic source itself and the person who shares them.

22 While interaction via social media, as we have just shown, presents innovative aspects, it can nonetheless be described on the basis of the principles of face-to-face interaction, particularly turn-taking.

23 For conversation analysis, the interaction is organised in turns or sequences, one action which calls for an action in response from the interlocutor (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2007). This turn-taking is also to be found in social media, and is almost identical when two people are talking "privately" or at least similar when several people are responding successively to an initial message and referring not only to what is at the source of the interaction but also to previous comments. The situation is a bit different when the comments refer only to the source, without taking into account the comments or exchanges that preceded them. In this case, the author of the comment positions him/herself in a dialog with the author of the source and relegates the other participants to the role of mere "audience."

24 The different "source" messages can themselves be considered a story told by the author. They are "short stories" (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) which because of their shortness and their anchoring in the present are turned towards the activities of the interaction's participants. In social media, these "short stories" (status updates, tweets or other) create a coherent narrative and "infer a coherent life story behind the

personal chronicle that emerges" (Page, 2010: 441). This "life story" can even be given a more concrete form in paper, particularly a compilation of the story of how a couple met, a photo album, souvenir book, etc.

2.3. In terms of digital traces

25 In terms of digital traces, we should remember that in social media all the (inter)actions (between people and between people and the system) are recorded. We can point to several distinct characteristics of digital traces (Ollagnier-Beldame, 2006), which are related to the dynamics of identity.

2.3.1. Characteristic 1: the visibility of traces

2.3.1.1. Visible traces

26 Some traces are visible to the people who create them; this is the case for example with a browser history. Discussion threads are also visible to contributors themselves as well as to their interlocutors. In some cases, the records may even be visible to an "audience."

27 What are the effects of social media's visible traces on the dynamics of identity? To begin with, these traces can be considered the equivalent of "physical" traces that make it possible to construct an ipse-identity, ie appropriation, recognition by the subject of lived experiences as part of him/herself, in a reflexive exercise. In this view, digital traces enrich the total traces that an individual has to appropriate and make his/hers. However, if we draw an analogy between digital traces and memory traces, which also participate in the constitution of the ipse-identity, this calls into question their epistemic status with regards to the individual–are they an extension of the person? And if so, is there an in vivo self and an in silico self? Previous research, including studies on transactive memory (Sparrow, Liu & Wegner, 2011), have addressed this important question. Additionally, how does the reflexive movement by which a person appropriates his/her past experiences happen? This reflexive movement is dynamic and temporally located. It consists in recalling old fragments of meaning to create new ones, looking more closely at previous productions, all while distancing oneself from them. This reflexive process arises when a human is confronted with what he/she has done. For Gillespie (2007), reflexivity is a temporary phenomenological experience during which the "self" becomes an object for the human being. It is a time during which humans distance themselves both from themselves and from the immediate situation. This distance allows them to act on themselves and on the situation. We can then look at the conditions for the emergence of reflexive processes. Several socio-cultural theories have provided some answers to this question (Gillespie, 2007). They have shown the need for contact with others and the role of an external framework in bringing about a reflexive process; this can take the form of conversations with a third party that show people a (re)formulation of their activity (see parts 2.1 and 2.2) or data, such as digital traces which refer back to activity as the accomplishment of a task. Such data can be explicitly created by individuals (blogs) or constituted by others, including by the software itself (record of periods of activity, social network user history made up of indicators, etc.).

28 Why is the visibility of traces important?

First, it can serve as the basis for the explanation of an action (Coen, 2006), offering a visualisation of action that a person can process and interpret, such as the graphs showing the evolution of a task or statistical data concerning the frequency of a particular behaviour on social media, etc.

29 Second, it creates the foundation of "reflexive technologies" (Licoppe, Draetta &

Delanoë, 2013) because these traces are more than a memory, they are also the remnant that refers back to personal experience, to the individual's "personal space" (Goffmann, 1973). These records, objectified and made visible by the system, are assertions about the experience of the person who sees them. They tell the user "your activity is this"/"These actions are yours and they have meaning." They concern his/her "self" over which the individual has the right to the first and the last word. This is also a characteristic that is used in psychological interviews to encourage the subject to react. Similarly, visible digital traces invite a response (confirmation, correction or denial), because people are affected by the traces not only for cognitive reasons but also for moral ones. This effect is all the more important because these assertions can be repeated by the reactions of others who see them.

30 Lastly, visible digital traces wield another power when it comes to identity construction–by playing the role of "mirrors with memory" they also strengthen self-awareness (Ollagnier-Beldame, 2013) and individual or social regulations.

31 In all cases, comparing visible digital traces allows us to pay particular attention to past experience, this process then contributing to the development of the person and his/her identity. Digital traces become a necessary resource on two levels of reflexivity, offering two distinct types of action: accessing the lived experience reflected in the action and analytically developing a subjective view of the activity (see also 3.1).

2.3.1.2. Non-visible traces

32 In addition to these visible traces, there are also traces which are not visible to the person but which are nonetheless recorded by the system. These traces (cookies, logs) are the input for algorithms that govern decisions about the person's identity, with the aim of predicting behaviour (sites visited, purchases, etc.). These predictions rely on calculations that aim to define what Georges (2009) calls the "calculated identity." This is the automatic construction of a user profile based on a person's online actions.

33 The calculated identity is in the end a "data self" or a "quantified self" (Licoppe, Draetta & Delanoë, 2013), created from personal data that social media collect about individuals. This is a digital identity as told by search engines and aggregators, not by the individual who is the source of that data.

2.3.2. Characteristic 2: the permanence of digital traces

34 Another characteristic of digital records with regards to identity is their permanence over time: although they are not always visible, the traces collected on social networks are not automatically erased. In France, the CNIL, or national commission on freedom and information (*commission nationale de l'informatique et des libertés*) allows individuals who know of their personal information being kept on file to ask for a copy of it, request its modification or even ask that it be erased. The French law on "information technology and civil liberties" provides for storage of this data for a limited time, determined by the use made of it, providing people "the right to be forgotten." Unlimited storage (unlimited in quantity and duration) of personal traces can be harmful to the people at the source of those traces, for instance in the context of job recruitment (Galinon-Mélénec, 2011).

35 The permanence of records over time also poses the question of the construction of a digital identity after a person's death. Where does a person's construction of identity stop and the construction of a collective memory of a person start? Do people continue to live after death in the profile created and/or maintained by others on social media? The article by Fanny Georges (2017) in this issue concerns this question and cites the work of Brubacker and Vertesi (2010) which shows that after death, a person's digital identity continues to be constructed through the actions of friends and family who keep alive the memory of the deceased.

36 The permanence of traces can conversely allow an identity to stabilise after death.

For Vitali-Rosati (2014), it is in this silence, in death, that the story is finished (paradoxically when the individual is no longer there and identity stabilises). This stabilisation can for example overcome the identity fragmentation of the multiple identities (synchronic or diachronic) that Internet users may have created throughout their life.

2.3.3. Characteristic 3: who digital traces belong to

37 A third characteristic of these traces is who they belong to: who is the owner of these digital traces? Their "producer" or "author"? People who comment on them? People who share them? In social media, the question of traces' ownership becomes critically important; they can be considered both as individual entities and distributed entities or even "collective" ones, depending on the scale chosen to analyse the issue (individual, group, community). The example of co-authoring an article in the Wikipedia community can illustrate this. During this activity, records are created and shared in the form of text traces (statements, rough drafts, annotations, comments, etc.). It is through the creation and sharing of these artefacts that a "discursive" community is created.

38 Wikipedia allows articles to be written by multiple people with all types of content. As a Wikipedia contributor, you can use various tools that keep track of your activity. For example, you can view different versions of the article and see the sequence of your contributions and the modifications made by other contributors. You can also consult the log of the article; this lists the contributions and related data (contributor's username, date, etc.) but does not list the content. You can also consult the contribution management tool which will show, over time, the changes in the article's length. If you write freely and extensively, this last piece of information will be useful for monitoring the volume of your contribution.

39 All this information found in Wikipedia is a trace of your activity together with other contributors. And every textual trace belongs to its author (you or another contributor) as well as to others if it is used again, corrected (spelling or content), illustrated with an image, etc. This is a new editorial genre with an expanded notion of author–every user is a possible content producer and owner of the traces associated with that content production. One difficulty in the calculation that the machine makes about the identity of an individual (the quantified self) concerns ownership and the issue of determining to whom the digital traces belong. If the machine does not "know" specifically to whom each trace belongs and whose history includes a trace, how can it make reliable identity calculations?

3. Construction of identity in social media

40 In this section, we will examine the construction of identity in connection with aspects of time, space and otherness, which are three fundamental considerations in human interactions.

41 Lemke (2005) uses the term "chronotopes" to talk about typical patterns of organization of and across activities in space and time. Activities in social media are also part of spatial and temporal dimensions which are inextricably linked together but which here we will address separately for the sake of clarity.

3.1. Construction of identity in the specific temporalities of social media

42 Time-related aspects play a role on different levels in the construction of an individual's identity.

43 Social media use is integrated in the chronology of social time and life, with periods of greater or lesser participations, for a variety of reasons. But a lifetime is not the limit of social media. Profiles can remain open after a person's death, and serve as a place of remembrance, or be created for persons who do not yet or who no longer have the ability to express themselves in this way (children, the deceased, see Fanny Georges, 2017, in this issue).

44 You can view your Facebook page or tweet something at any time of day (or night) without worrying whether it will bother those you are addressing, similar to writing a letter. But unlike a letter, social media also allow users to check if a message has been seen, by whom and when, as well as who is connected and therefore possibly available, etc.

45 Being connected mainly means being available–"I can read and react", availability that must however be negotiated among participants. Thus, when a contact whose status is "online" fails to reply, it is not considered unusual or necessarily impolite. This is in part due to the sometimes very complex temporality of a sequence of events: not only can answers arrive over a huge span of time (immediately following the original message or several days, weeks or even months later), the web 2.0 makes possible a constant overlapping of replies, several responses coming in simultaneously or very close together but not necessarily with any relation to each other in terms of content.

46 Managing messages in social media over time requires users to have a good understanding of what is and is not saved by these media: the ephemeral, spontaneous aspect of posting photos of oneself at a party with friends is rivalled by the enduring nature of traces that will give representations of an individual that should not be viewed by a potential recruiter months or years later. Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008) distinguish three different time frames for Facebook messages and thus three time spaces in which users can act and interact: data related to the present, data related to the presentation of oneself over a longer time and archived data. Facebook lets users speak about the current time-space (or performance region) where users comment on the hic et nunc or use it as a basis for comments. This time-space is highlighted by construction of the interface (timeline interface), which places the most recent comments first. Secondly, Facebook lets users return to what was written in the past, deleting it, adjusting it, commenting on it and managing one's image "after the fact" (exhibition region). The ability to return to the past and connect it to the present via recent activities creates a very complex temporality. Thirdly, add to this the fact that all of the data will be recorded, thus leaving traces and making it possible to archive life's moments (personal region) and construct an individual's biography.

47 Lastly, the potential omnipresence of social media must be negotiated by each person in individual and social time (off screen).

> (...) analysts of situated or distributed cognition and mediated cultural activity have shown in great detail how meaningful activity is mediated by artifacts, documents, and persistently available other persons in related roles (...). An analysis in terms of chronotopes and heterochrony extends this perspective to longer timescales and longer-term projects that entrain many specific activities in different times and places (Lemke, 2005: 120).

3.2. Construction of identity in relation to social media space

Spatial dimensions called upon with use of social media relate to several layers of space according to Chabert (2012).

49 - **The screen space** (the online interaction area) with its functional and semiotic specificities. "Screen as a site and site as screen" (Jewitt & Triggs, 2006: 132), the screen is a liminal area between two worlds which combines heterogeneous spaces, spaces both on and off screen.

50 Every type of social media has its own screen design and specific functionalities for expression. The screen creates a coherent space in which the user acts according to the rules and the formatted structures (see in particular Androutsopoulos, 2010, on the role of language in this construction of space). What is possible (or not) in this space allows certain types of actions (or not): as we have seen previously, Facebook 2015 for instance encourages positive inter-individual relations with the "like" function. The window that opens below every new comment by a member of the network encourages comments, the profile page encourages users to give certain specific information about themselves (name, birthdate, professional experience), whereas other information is not required (eye colour, favourite food, pets). LinkedIn on the other hand, as a social medium focused on the professional world, offers users the chance to recommend someone else for her specific skills and leaves room to include key words summing up competencies, etc. This is then a discursive space that configures discursive productions which can come about starting from the affordances (Gibson, 1977) it provides.

51 Friends, subscribers and followers are one of the particularities of social media: we create networks that we display, more or less openly (see section 3.3). The identity of a person on a social network is defined in part by the people they allow into their network as "friends." The extent of this network sometimes is not under the control of the user (followers on Twitter for example).

52 - **The physical space** for using social networks: multiplication of screens, variety in their size and the people's hyper-mobility allows them to communicate via social media from whatever (connected) place they find themselves in (see section 3.1). It is not possible for readers to know really exactly where a person is when he/she posts a message (unless an automatic geolocation function is turned on). People can play around, fool or trick readers as they wish. The physical space can become a central aspect in interaction and in the construction of identity if the place where the user lives becomes a topic (see for example de Nooy's example, 2017, in this issue where Australians in Australia post parallel weather reports for Australia and France). Some places that are privileged sources of information (national congresses or assemblies, scientific conferences) lend themselves more than others to rapid and extensive tweeting.

53 The development of mobile technology encourages not only connectivity at all times but also in all places, requiring multi-tasking, checking social media while walking, in the subway or in a café are simple combinations; checking social media on one's phone during a meeting with colleagues while also following a presentation with visuals and taking notes on a laptop would be a more complex configuration, but not an uncommon one. This mobility and multiple activity requires users to focus on multiple things at once: the road we are walking down with its dangers and social media messages in the first instance, face-to-face interaction with colleagues, a powerpoint presentation on a computer screen where we are also taking notes and the telephone screen showing social media messages in the second instance. Jones (2004) talks about "multi-focusing of attention" which is brought about by this simultaneous use of different forms of onscreen communication. Based on this work, we might think that our becoming progressively accustomed to scattered attention could modify our "attention identity", impacting our ability to concentrate on a single activity.

54 Temporal and spatial variables are combined in social media making it possible to find geographically distant contacts who we have lost sight of, sometimes for years.

- **Interactants' imagined space**: based on the clues seen on the screen, interlocutors create a representation of their environment. That is to say, they create

an imagined space based on clues (linguistic, visual or auditory) that users provide. Which explains, in particular during phone calls with video, the staging of backgrounds or hiding certain details in an attempt to bring the representation of the self in line and up to date with the aims of the exchange (Chabert, 2012).

56 The imaginary dimension is also called upon when messages on the Facebook page of a deceased person transform the "living user's 'digital self' into a 'digital memorial'" (Georges, 2017, this issue).

3.3. Construction of identity related to otherness in social media

57 In the psychological construction of an individual, the "I" is created in comparison to a "you" (Landowski, 2004), we "position ourselves in opposition" to the people sharing the same values and norms and to those with different values. Interindividual relations are structured by society (relatives, friends, colleagues, etc.); individuals belong from birth to certain communities (as a member of a family, a linguistic community, citizen of a state/city, etc.) and they join others over their lifetime on their own initiative (professional or political networks, networks relating to leisure time activities, etc.).

58 These groups, sometimes called "post-traditional communities," are characterized by more flexibility and a common topical focus. Generally, they are not locally determined. Various types of these communities have been described from the beginning of the 1980s with different concepts: as "neo-tribalism" (Maffesoli, 1988) which focuses on the emotional relationship of individuals as the relational element; as an "event community" (Gebhardt, 2008) which emphasizes the short term construction and the common topical focus; as "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998) which relates the coherence of the community to the dimension of "mutual engagement", "joint enterprise" and "shared repertoire"; or as "communication communities" (Knoblauch, 2009) which highlights the interactive construction of the community's identity. With reference to the German sociological concept of "*Gemeinschaft*", Knoblauch (2009) argues that certain "post-traditional" communities ("*Gemeinschaften*") are characterized by a mostly discursive organization of belonging, that is, for instance, the way you join or leave the community or what you can do, what you have access to, etc. In contrast, traditional communities are generally organized through knowledge and tradition. According to him, in post-traditional communities–and Internet communities are included in these–communication becomes the most important element. In social media, community can only be created by communication; belonging, as well as the negotiation of shared norms and values, cannot draw on shared knowledge. In this, social media communities are "communication communities" (in the sense of Knoblauch, 2009) rather than "discourse communities" (in the sense of Pogner, 2005, see section 2.3.3).

59 The terminology of the social network's software qualifies the type of relationship it provides: openly showing one's "friends," "connections," "followers" or others gives an impression of a "closed" group on the one hand (it's possible to count and know the names of people who are members) and "indefinite" on the other hand (each person is a friend/connection/follower of someone who is linked to someone else who knows someone, etc.). As a member of a social network, users position themselves first with regards to this social network: they express themselves, comment, support opinions based on the standards, values and habits of this network (see for example the different identities of Nora on different platforms in Dooly, 2017, in this issue). These norms and values are not clearly set down; they are constantly renegotiated in exchanges between members. The user can also try to

stand out and highlight what makes him/her "unique" (micro-celebrity, Page, 2012b). Second, members of a social network position themselves with regard to people who do not belong to the network: friends/connections/followers, etc. are the "we" as opposed to a more or less well-defined "you" (see article by de Nooy, 2017, in this issue). The social network's software also determines the way one joins a group by simple request and/or a single click by the individual and a "click" of acceptance on the other side. The software makes it just as easy to get out of a relationship or network.

60 Ultimately, social media provide a never-before-seen ability to expand networks that they label as "friendly" (for example, "friends" on Facebook) or "professional" (for example, "connections" on LinkedIn). But behind this labelling, networks can be interconnected and muddled: "friends" from Facebook may be colleagues, neighbours or customers, "connections" on LinkedIn are sometimes more friends or acquaintances. While some networks are based more on shared practices and resemble Wenger's "communities of practice" (see for instance Zourou's communities of Open Educational Practice, OEP, users in this issue, 2017) others are nearly exclusively based on interactive construction of a common identity (particularly the "friends" of French Affair in the article by de Nooy, 2017, in this issue). Additionally, some social networks allow users to create groups. Users "join" a group or show their support for a group which itself accepts them, but rarely takes part as a commenter in users' networks. This is also the case for professional profiles such as French Affair's (see de Nooy's article, 2017) that sells French products and that allows its users-customers to create a Francophile community.

61 Otherness is therefore at the heart of the dynamics of identity. Through social media, identity construction relies also on the otherness of the machine (see 2.3.1) which makes judgements based on what individuals do and say. The machine therefore carries out calculations based on these data, and feeds them back to the individual so that he/she can share them on the net.

4. Conclusion

62 In this article, we have examined the techno-discursive productions in social media and their influences on identity construction.

63 When we take a closer look at the language produced in natural situations, we take into account some of the non-verbal dimensions such as gestures, looks, posture, movement, etc. (Mondada, 2014; Streeck, Goodwin & Le Baron, 2011) as well as the use of objects in interactions (Brassac et al., 2008; Nevile et al., 2014). However, it seems to us that compared to face-to-face interactions, exchanges on social media pose new questions and encourage us to imagine new perspectives, particularly around the idea of authorship (Goffman, 1981). The boundaries of this concept begin to blur; for example, who is the author of a re-tweeted message or a recording of part of a concert posted on Facebook? Who owns certain digital traces that are produced, corrected or shared by various users? The multiplicity of speakers is obvious in the Facebook messages that are followed by comments. It is less obvious in the case of retransmission and/or modifications of fragments, for instance posting an extract of a concert, or a quotation.

64 To better take into account the particular phenomena notable in social networks, in this article we have attempted to deconstruct the uniqueness of the techno-discursive texture of social media productions to reveal their construction along three dimensions: discourse, interaction and traces. For each dimension, we have tried to show which ideas and concepts could be called upon to form a basis of a description of linguistic exchanges. We have also tried to identify, beyond the physical recording of these productions, what is new about them and which new dimensions and aspects

should be taken into consideration in a sub-category of linguistics to be created. Paveau (2015) points for example to the intrinsic difficulty of isolating an "on-line native corpus", the branching and interlinking of different networks, related to the hypertextuality of writing, which refers back to an infinite body of other discourses, interactions and traces.

65 We agree then with the emerging trend in research on "techno-discourse" (Paveau, 2012) while drawing from closely related fields such as psychology (with the use of the idea of affordances, for example, Gibson, 1977), philosophy (with Ricoeur's hermeneutic of the self, 1990), sociology (used by Casilli, 2014, for his work on sociability in media), linguistics of the web 2.0 (Androutsopoulos, 2011; Herring, 2004, 2013) and more generally research on communication in social media (as for instance lead by Ellison, boyd or Zhao). This emerging field is, we think, interesting to linguistics which would benefit from making it an independent field of research, even if that means engaging in reflection and projects that are at the crossroads of several disciplines. For this reason, we have chosen to draw on different linguistic traditions and indeed other traditions in order to identify new directions for our analyses.

66 Within this field, the specific topic for this special edition is the construction of identity. We selected three dimensions that are important for human interactions: temporality, space and otherness.

67 Users must deal with this materiality, both in what its technical characteristics will allow (screen size, image resolution, keyboard, etc.) and in what they impose. We therefore have to question the role(s) of digital objects, particularly screen-based ones, in human activity. Some digital tools seem to have become extensions of the human being: telephone and computer memory as an extension or even a mnemonic prosthesis; software that provides recommendations or aid in decision making in social media; software to record our exercise activity or our food consumption in order to encourage reflection, etc.). Do they, through the mathematical power they represent and their memory capacity, extend human agency or do they possess their own agency? For example, a videoconferencing tool that malfunctions can significantly disrupt a discussion between individuals, to the point where "the computer is a social figure in interactions" (Develotte, Kern & Lamy, 2011: 198 or an actant in the sense used by Latour, 1996).

68 Finally, when considering the role of objects in human activities, particularly digital ones, we end up, like Paveau (2015), defending a position that combines activities with and without technology, and thereby refusing the dualism that for so long opposed the material (or real) world and the virtual world. Our conception of identity is fully part of this perspective. We therefore took an approach that attempts to highlight different aspects that show the continuity and similarity between activities with and without technology, while leaving aside other aspects, particularly sociolinguistic ones, also important in the construction of identity (in social media).

69 The articles in this special edition are part of this same approach. They come from many varied fields, use different data analysis tools, rely on different methodologies and study several languages and cultures, but they all study the situation in this unique, non-dual world. The articles address the topic of private life with reflections on post-mortem digital identities (Georges) and Australians' construction of a Francophile identity (de Nooy) as well as the topic of education, considering it to be both a field of work with questions about social media in OEP (Zourou) and also a field of learning with the construction of learners' online identity in a foreign language (Dooly). Herring and Demarest use the data recorded in a pedagogical context to ask questions about the connections between type of expression and gender on a massively multimodal website. The authors use quantitative methodologies (Herring and Demarest) and qualitative methodologies (Dooly, Georges, de Nooy, Zourou), they rely on recordings (Dooly, Herring and Demarest), discourse analysis (Georges) and comparison (Herring and Demarest). Comparison

between languages is not the authors' main goal, but the articles look at different languages (French-speaking communities seen by Australia, learning English in Spain, English in the United States, French in France, the use of OEP with a questionnaire in English) and raise questions for future research, particularly on the emergence of "shared international digital identities." Can a tool like Facebook, Wikipedia or Twitter play a role in creating a community of its users around the world? Can it in this way create a shared identity that extends beyond the border of languages? Should we consider several levels of observation and analysis when talking about digital identity, distinguishing between the individual and the group? And, in the face of these different identity dynamics, as well as the diversity (sometimes even divergence) of the forms of digital identity made possible through social media, is the very notion of the individual not being called into question?

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Notes

1 Most of the articles in this issue and indeed the idea behind this special issue came out of the international conference "Multimodal Interactions via Screen," held in Lyon in 2014 (http://impec.sciencesconf.org/resource/page/id/18).

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Auteurs

Heike Baldauf
Dr Heike Baldauf-Quilliatre is an Associate Professor at the Department of German and Scandinavian Languages at the University Lyon 2 Lumière. Her main interests are in the field of interpersonal interaction and interaction with and through digital objects. She recently works on different aspects of interaction in videogame sessions.
Affiliation: université Lyon Lumière, laboratoire Icar, UMR 5191 (interactions, corpus, apprentissage, représentations), équipe Interactions, situations, pratiques et outils (InSitu), France.
Email: heike.baldauf@univ-lyon2.fr
Address: laboratoire Icar, École normale supérieure de Lyon, 15 parvis René Descartes, BP 7000, 69342 Lyon Cedex 07, France.

Christine Develotte
Christine Develotte is a Professor of applied linguistics at the École normale supérieure-Ifé in Lyon. Her research includes two aspects: the semio-linguistic aspect of online communication and the social aspect (focusing on the analysis of human behavior). More recently her research interest focuses on screen-based interactions through the research group Impec within the Icar lab. https://impec.sciencesconf.org/resource/page?id=23&forward-action=page&forward-controller=resource&lang=en
Affiliation: ENS de Lyon-Ifé, laboratoire Icar, UMR 5191 (Interactions, Corpus, Apprentissage, Représentations).
Email: Christine.develotte@ens-lyon.fr
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Magali Ollagnier-Beldame
Dr. Magali Ollagnier-Beldame is a senior researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). As a researcher in the field of human interaction, she is interested in the emergence and the creation of "shared worlds", whether in the context of the use of digital systems (role of traces and screens) or in situations of interaction between two people. She is leading a scientific program on intersubjectivity with a psycho-phenomenological approach, using first person interview epistemology and methodology.
Email: magali.ollagnier-beldame@ens-lyon.fr
Address: laboratoire Icar, École normale supérieure de Lyon, 15 parvis René Descartes, BP 7000, 69342 Lyon Cedex 07, France.

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