Already a movement or still a debate? Framings of the #MeToo hashtag in German, English and Spanish

Mario Bisiada

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Translation in Transition 4
19 September 2019
The language of social media

The empowering effect of social media

Social media

- empower individuals to reach a large audience, change established views
- introduce or perpetuate frames in ways previously impossible
- “undermine the boundaries [...] and challenge the power of traditional news organisations” (Ahmed 2010)
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Hashtags as a linguistic phenomenon of social media

- Why do we use hashtags in social media?
- What are the linguistic functions and effects of hashtags?
Why study hashtags?

Aren’t hashtags the same as any name we give to issues? 😐
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What’s linguistically interesting about hashtags?

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  (unlike “crisis”, “scandal”, etc)
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By definition internationally shared → normally used cross-linguistically

- translation defeats purpose of cross-border solidarity (cf #moiaussi)
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Comment #MoiAussi a changé la face de la musique pop

On assiste dernièrement à une véritable prolifération d’œuvres musicales ouvertement féministes. Laurence Nerbonne souffle sur les braises de #MoiAussi...

1:24 PM - 10 Sep 2019

Si l’actrice américaine Alyssa Milano a balayé la twittosphère et lancé le mouvement #MeToo, c’est pourtant à Tarana Burke, une militante féministe de Harlem, que revient la maternité de cette expression datant de 2006, mais véritablement consacrée dans la foulée de l’affaire Weinstein. Initié par des femmes financièrement privilégiées, des actrices d’Hollywood pour la
The #MeToo hashtag

- coined in 2006 by Tarana Burke as movement for black women’s safety at the workplace (see Garcia 2017)
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- actress Alyssa Milano responded to allegations of sexual assault by Harvey Weinstein
- encouraged “members of the public to join in to showcase the magnitude of the problem of sexual violence” (Mendes et al. 2018: 236).
The #MeToo hashtag

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- began trending on Twitter on 24 October 2017
- actress Alyssa Milano responded to allegations of sexual assault by Harvey Weinstein
- encouraged “members of the public to join in to showcase the magnitude of the problem of sexual violence” (Mendes et al. 2018: 236).
- has so far not been the object of scientific study
Hashtags for community building

Benefits produced by hashtags (Keller et al. 2018: 28–29)

- sense of community, solidarity and support
Hashtags for community building

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→ hashtags channel emotion and form communal activism
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Dialogicity on Twitter (Page 2012)

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- self-branding via hashtags mainly found in one-to-many broadcasts rather than conversational, addressed messages (2012: 187)
Do **dialogic exchanges** (needed for participatory interaction) occur on Twitter?

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- self-branding via hashtags mainly found in one-to-many broadcasts rather than conversational, addressed messages (2012: 187)
- hashtag talk involves multiple participants talking simultaneously about the same topic, rather than individuals conversing (2012: 196)
Hashtags enact three simultaneous communicative functions as meaning in context (Zappavigna 2015)

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- organizing the structure of the post – textual
- metacomment construing an evaluative stance – interpersonal
Research objectives

- to study the semantic prosody of the #MeToo hashtag

Semantic prosody

Pragmatic colouring applied to words by its collocates (=words occurring along with it) (Louw 1993: 158–159, Vessey 2013: 13–14)
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- to study the authors’ evaluative stance in occurrences lacking collocates
- how do discourses around what seems to be the same concept diverge across languages?

Semantic prosody

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Methodology

Exemplary data

- extraction of tweets involving #MeToo hashtag
- time span recorded:
  - German 10 to 23 July 2019
  - Spanish 31 July to 6 August 2019
  - English 6 August 2019
- preliminary quantitative & qualitative analysis based on around 450 tweets per language (Twitter API limits)
- limitation: country identity not always (correctly) given
#MeToo collocates in English

campaign
phenomena
incident
world
false accusation
false accuser
victims
outfits
story
BS
claim
thing
case
survivor
supporter
concerns
leadership
idea
merch
movement
complaint
path
drama
artists
era
violations
#metoo'ed
rhetoric
rebellion
hashtag
hot mess
issues
brigate
architect
moment
nutcase
mass-emasculaton

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#MeToo collocates in Spanish

movimiento

camino ('path')
compromiso internacional ('international commitment')
campaña ('campaign')
caza de brujas ('witch hunt')
caso ('case')
fetiches ('fetish')
carro ('bandwagon')
discursos
iniciativa

mundo ('world')
era
tiempo ('times')
marca ('brand')
trama ('narrative')
fenómeno
chiringuito femirojo ('feminist left-wing beach bar')
red internacional ('international network')
#MeToo collocates in German

Hexenjagd ('witch hunt')
Dorf ('village')
Argumentation
Betroffene ('affected')
Opfer ('victim')
Gegenwart Welle ('wave')
Kampagne
Lügengeschichte ('tall tale')
Kartenhaus ('house of cards')
Diskurs
Sturm ('storm')
Beschuldigten
Hype
Faktor
Inquisition
Debatté
Lynchmob
Vorwürfe ('accusations')
Auswuchs ('excess')
Zug ('train')
Opferkult ('cult of victimhood')
Bewegung
Gschichtli ('little story')
Aktivistin(nen) (f.)
Falschbeschuldigung ('false accusation')
Folge ('consequence')

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# Cross-linguistic framings of #MeToo

## #MeToo as an organised pressure group

- merch (3), false accusation (2), false accuser (2), drama artist, architect, brigade, leadership, gang
- Hexenjagd (‘witch hunt’) (3), Aktivistin(nen) (f.) (3), Kampagne (2), Inquisition (2), Falschbeschuldigung (‘false accusation’), Lynchmob, Lügengeschichte (‘tall tale’), Opferkult (‘cult of victimhood’)
- marca (‘brand’) (2), caza de brujas (‘witch hunt’), carro (‘bandwagon’), red internacional (‘international network’)

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Introduction
Communicative effects of hashtags
Functional linguistic studies of hashtags
This study

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Cross-linguistic framings of #MeToo

Exaggerating the scope of #MeToo

- rebellion, survivor, mass-emasculaton, battle, hot mess
- Hype, Zug (‘train’), Auswuchs (‘excess’), Sturm (‘storm’), Welle (‘wave’)
- fetiche (‘fetish’)

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Makes sense. Men are the key to the streets & have been propaganda targeted by #WhiteFeatherMedia & political #gaslighting; by #MeToo mass-emasculcation & dehumanisation of men - ready to "trigger" & mobilise a global army...

Ist ja nicht der erste Fall, bei dem eine Karriere und nicht zuletzt ein Mensch zerstört wird, weil Frauen oder auch Männer auf den #metoo Hype aufspringen, um daraus Kapital zu schlagen oder wenigstens EINMAL in den Medien erwähnt zu werden.

Que bonito que se vaya normalizando el fetiche #MeToo 🖤

Gaslighting Gilligan @GasGilligan
Replying to @QUINNWAG1648884
@irlembberlin @bpol_b 250617

Shine, guilt, humiliation, demoralisation, dehumanisation, demonisation, depression - "extremely potent" #DarkTriad...
Cross-linguistic framings of #MeToo

Questioning the veracity of #MeToo

- rhetoric (2), nutcase, BS, idea, madness, claim
- Argumentation, Unsinn (‘nonsense’), Kartenhaus (‘house of cards’), Gschichtli (‘little story’), Dorf (‘village’)
- chiringuito femirojo (‘feminist left-wing beach bar’)

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#MeToo without collocates: Four stance categories

**Criticise**

Dr Amy Kavanagh
@BonnieHistorian

This morning I will be on @BBCWomansHour to talk about how I experience unwanted touching as a disabled woman.

Disabled women & non-binary people keep being excluded from #MeToo & my new project with @DrHannah seeks to change this.

Amalia Blanco
@AmaliaBlanco2

No se como podemos ser tan imbéciles. Muy harta. Si. Tb del #metoo 🙈

La Razón @jarazon_es
#Cultura | La "Traviata" del MeToo: Paco Azorín estrena en Peralada una versión de la obra de Verdi en la que la protagonista es una mujer empoderada, con pantalones y que deja los talones a un lado Irzn.es/pbacx2

12:00 PM - 5 Aug 2019
1 Retweet 11 Likes
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**Reject/hijack**

SPIEGELVERKEHRT (@ChinSpiegel)

Die übliche Täter-Opfer Umkehr der linken Presse. Stimmt die Herkunft der Täter, ist es mit #metoo plötzlich nicht mehr weit her. spon.de/afwi2 via @SPIEGELONLINE


11:00 PM - 10 Jul 2019

16 Retweets 39 Likes

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#MeToo in English

Without collocates (n=73)

- Support (n=29) 40%
- Criticise (n=4) 16%
- Reject/hijack (n=12) 5%
- Mention (n=28) 39%
#MeToo in German

Without collocates (n=91)

- Support (n=20) - 22%
- Criticise (n=15) - 16%
- Reject/hijack (n=29) - 32%
- Mention (n=27) - 30%

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#MeToo in Spanish

Without collocates (n=141)

- Support (n=36) - 26%
- Criticise (n=10) - 7%
- Reject/hijack (n=34) - 24%
- Mention (n=61) - 43%
Comparison of #MeToo hashtags without collocates

English (n=73)
- 40%
- 39%
- 16%
- 5%

German (n=91)
- 22%
- 30%
- 16%
- 7%

Spanish (n=141)
- 26%
- 43%
- 24%

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Some tentative observations

- German discourse: semantic prosody frames #MeToo more reluctantly (“debate”) or even negatively (“hysteria”) than in English and Spanish (“movement”, “movimiento”)
- mirrored by authors’ stance where no semantic prosody is used
Conclusion

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- mirrored by authors’ stance where no semantic prosody is used

Thank you for your attention!

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References I


References II


References III

