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The Language of Pick-Up Artists. Online Discourses of the Seduction Industry. Daria Dayter and Sofia Rüdiger (2022). Routledge, 217pp.

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Recent years have seen a wide interest on the social and discursive configuration of what is known at the manosphere, i.e. a variety of media sites where masculinity is discussed (Marwick and Caplan, 2018; Ging 2019). Dayter and Rüdiger's monograph is one of these studies. Its focus is on analysing the characteristics of the discourse used by one of the groups traditionally identified as part of the manosphere: the pick-up artists (PUA), or men who try to seduce women *at a high speed* by applying a number of routines and techniques which have been 'marketed' within the community as a path to success. The notion of discourse is key to understanding the scope of the book: in the words of the authors this is not "primarily a book about gender. This is a book about language" (185). Still, this book by Dayter and Rüdiger does shed light on how members of this "Community of Practice" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992, henceforth CofP) approach their relationship with women, which is frequently based on male occupying a power position, on objectifying women, and on using several manipulative techniques both on their online and offline communication. As shown by the authors all of these aspects contribute to spreading misogynistic beliefs and behaviours, not only online but also in offline interactions.

Dayter and Rüdiger set out, as the objective of their study, to inspect PUA discourse and they do so from a multifaceted approach, which involves examining different genres (e.g., social media, forums, in-field conversations, or guru lectures), and applying a wide variety of methodological tools, e.g., traditional corpus linguistics, Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (through investigating functional patterns in different types of interactions), conversation analysis, completed with qualitative analysis of specific lexical and syntactic cues. The book

begins with a description of pick-up artists and an overview of how they have been represented in news outlets, which provides the reader with a very detailed contextual description of the group and public perceptions about it. The authors present pick-up artists as members of a specific CofP (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992) because in interacting with PUA, they share a lexical repertoire and they have a joint enterprise, that is to seduce women. However, as the authors successfully demonstrate throughout the book, this is not only a community, but also an industry as it involves the marketization of different techniques by PUA gurus – or ‘coaches’ as they refer to themselves – who use a variety of strategies to keep *hiring* fellow male clients that wish to be trained in the seduction process. This dual nature of PUAs as a Community (of practice) and an industry is also reflected in discursive patterns and in the type of power relations that are built internally between different members of the community, who could be peers or “gurus”. How they interact with one another may reflect not only their need to self-praise – also to be considered a member of the community – but also their attempts at persuading others to become part of the community, by joining in the same enterprise.

As members of a community (and one of practice), PUAs interact through a variety of online and offline channels. This explains the detailed overview of PUA genres which is provided in chapter 2, and which includes the description of in-fields (offline), guru lectures (offline), how-to videos (online), social media (online), field reports in forums (online), as well as a variety of websites and YouTube channels (online). This attempt to provide a “genre ecology” (Heyd 2009) of the community is novel in multiple ways. On the one hand, Dayter and Rüdiger successfully adapt Hymes’ (1974) SPEAKING model of ethnographic description to account for the increasingly relevant digital context, and hence they prove the validity and need of using a digital ethnographic approach. On the other hand, the description of genres provided in chapter 2 is used as the basis for the organisation of the analytical chapters in the book. Because the authors have built a separate corpus for each genre, different data are studied in each of the chapters, and methodological tools are selected to suit the specificities of each of the genres under analysis. In chapter 3, corpus linguistics is used to identify keywords used by PUAs in in-field reports and replies to them in forums. In chapter 4, framing choices in such in-field reports are studied so that it can be explained how they contribute to PUA’s self-praise. These two analytic chapters contribute to explaining how PUAs relate to their peer members in the community. In chapter 5, conversational patterns in the offline counterpart of the reports, that is in-fields, are analysed so as to show how power relations are built and maintained in conversation between a male PUA and (one or several) women. Finally, in

chapter 6, lectures by PUA gurus and how-to-videos uploaded to YouTube are investigated with the aim of identifying how so-called experts substantiate their role in the community while generating further revenue for themselves.

The empirical analysis carried out Dayter and Rüdiger concludes with the identification of four main features which characterise PUA discourse. First, members of the PUA community of practice share a lexical repertoire which not only marks them as part of the group, but also shows their misogynistic view of the world. Similarities in the strategies used here can be found with other discriminatory discourses, such as discourses on immigration (e.g. Hart 2010). Amongst them, we can highlight the use of military, engineering and marketing metaphors together with examples of semantic shift which have a mystifying effect as they discursively deploy women of any agency. Second, while PUA discourse has been identified as persuasive, their aim is not so much to persuade women but rather to acquire potential new clients, hence their need to present themselves as experts in the field with strategies similar to those found, for example, in health-related discourses (Gülich 2003). These two findings show the dual nature of PUAs: as a community and as a (seduction) industry. Third, in interactions, PUAs do not intend to be liked by the women they approach, – as in traditional romantic encounters – but rather they seek to maintain engagement with those women; they do so by exploiting conversational strategies related to social expectations about how women should behave. Finally, there is a mismatch between what PUA gurus promise their “clients” could achieve by using their proposed seduction techniques, and what PUAs attain in real interactions. To counteract this, PUAs tend to rely on a confidence-building strategy. This also aligns with a pervasive framing of narratives as “success”, which is also identified by the authors as characteristic of PUA discourse.

Dayter and Rüdiger’s study of PUA discourse has proved to be an interesting read which sheds light on the complexity of online/offline communities which form part of the manosphere. Its novelty and importance lies not only on that aspect, though. The authors also succeed in their attempt at showing how widening the scope of data to be analysed and adopting multiple methodological tools can help in triangulating findings (Baker and Egbert 2016: 3).

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