

Mabel Giammatteo, Patricia Gubitosi, Alejandro Parini (eds): *El español en la red*, Madrid/Frankfurt, Iberoamericana/Vervuet, 2017, 322 pages

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This work brings together studies by numerous authors into how Spanish speakers are participating in computer mediated communication (CMC). The authors begin with a brief description of some key events in the development of the internet and the justification for this book. As the authors note, although there is a substantial and growing community of Spanish speakers interacting on digital media in all its many forms, compared to English, CMC in Spanish is not well studied. This book seeks to fill this gap.

In this attempt, the work contained in this volume covers a breadth of different technological platforms such as blogs, SMS messaging, Twitter and WhatsApp; and studies communication in several contexts including at work, university and amongst friends and family. The book also covers phenomenon of multilingualism and inter-linguistic contact especially with minority languages.

The authors have included an article by Crispin Thurlow which outlines some key concepts and considerations for researchers approaching the study of online interactions – with reference to English. The book is then divided into three sections: genres and styles; multilingualism; and context, participation and interaction. Each section contains up to four articles and covers a variety of themes.

In their introduction to part one, the authors discuss, although the internet represents a medium of communication in itself it also comprises many different modes of interaction from emails to chat-rooms and even whole virtual environments. Each of these modes has its own advantages and limitations and as such constitutes a separate genre of communication with users adopting styles of communication appropriate to that genre. The three articles in part one serve to compare and contrast the ways in which users adapt their linguistic style to the particular digital medium they are using: blogs, twitter and SMS messaging.

In the first article of this section, Ana Pano Alamán looks at the ways in which users intensify their utterances when writing on cultural blogs taken from two online publications: *La Nación* (Argentina) and *El País* (Spain). The authors note many ways in which the language on these blogs shows many similarities with colloquial, spoken Spanish. They also uncover a

dynamic between the writers of the blogs and those who comment which encourages a higher frequency of intensification amongst the commentators. There were also differences between speakers from Spain and Argentina, specifically a larger diversity of intensification strategies amongst the latter group.

Twitter, where Spanish is apparently the second most used language (after English), is the subject of the second article in this section. Here, Álvaro Recio Diego and Carmela Tomé Cornejo give us an in-depth analysis of the grammatical structure of the most popular Tweets in Spain from 2014. The author's particular interest is in whether the 140 character limit on Tweet length has an effect on the types of sentences produced by users. In fact the study uncovers how Twitter is very much a microcosm of the language more generally albeit tending towards informality and incorporating features of speech within its text.

To conclude this section Lucía Cantamutto looks at how three competing considerations: economy, clarity and expressiveness interact in the composition of SMS messages. What is most interesting here is how speakers give these considerations different weights according to the context of the message: while brevity is important in all contexts studied, amongst friends expressiveness is an even greater priority while within the family clarity is favoured. In work contexts, the author found that the situation was complicated by power dynamics: participants with least power being most likely to use strategies fostering solidarity.

Part two of the book is dedicated to an examination of multilingualism on the net. The internet offers a forum without physical boundaries and thus opens opportunities for interlinguistic contact. This is a particularly interesting feature in the context of Spanish since, as the authors explain, in all countries where Spanish is the main language it coexists with other minority languages. In addition, there are Spanish speaking communities across the US. As a result bilingualism is common in the Hispanic world and merits investigation.

Code switching is a significant feature of bilingualism and it is investigated in two papers in this section: Alba Arias Álvarez studied posts by followers and administrators on four Facebook sites based in Asturias and Patricia Gubitosi observed it within the context of SMS text messages sent between mothers and daughters in an Argentine-Spanish speaking community in the United States. In the former code-switching was found to be motivated by very specific sociolinguistic factors connected with the creation and maintenance of Asturian identity. There was a significant

tendency amongst users to employ Asturian when posting comments about local traditions and cultural practices. There was also evidence that Spanish was reserved for more formal use. The latter study on the other hand showed no such clear patterns in participants choice of language. Indeed the author comments that the factors affecting code-switching in this context, between family members, seem to be so numerous that each of the four participants in the study were unique in their behaviour.

Montserrat Casanovas-Catalá and Yolanda Caodevila-Tomás look at a very different aspect of web-enabled interlanguage contact by investigating the use of online dictionaries and translation tools amongst Spanish university students. Using a questionnaire, they established how the use of physical dictionaries has declined at the expense of online tools and discovered that the most important feature of the online resources available was access to discussion forums and multiple answers to their linguistic queries. Google was found to monopolise in terms of which platforms students found most useful.

The last paper in this section concerns speakers Wichi, an indigenous language in Argentina. Although widely spoken, written documents in Wichi have, until recently, been confined to the religious and educational spheres. Camilo Ballena and Virginia Unamuno show how the internet offers a new outlet for written language and is in fact revitalising the language. The primary focus of the study are interactions on the Facebook pages of three students in Chaco and follows on from a questionnaire which established patterns of Wichi versus Spanish usage on digital media. The work uncovered many interesting phenomena including the clear preference for Wichi in all communication and a settlement in favour of Wichi where non-speakers attempted to negotiate the language-base.

The third part of the book concerns context, participation and interaction on the internet. In this way, the articles in this section cover themes of politeness, appropriate online behaviours and the structure and development of virtual conversations. What comes through most clearly in this section is that while communication over the internet is mediated through writing it is not a written medium in the traditional sense: users treat it very much as a stand in for face-to-face communication and this gives online conversations a very different feel to either written or oral communication. Not only are there medium specific communication strategies such as emoticons but it also enables unique patterns of participation and requires users to negotiate appropriate ways of interacting.

This last point is the main topic of Eliana Lucían Vargha's article which looks at interactions on a virtual forum at a University in Uruguay. The author notes in particular how participants self-regulate their behaviour largely without the intervention of site moderators and that while communication on the forum has evolved an informal tone this is an active strategy of solidarity politeness recognised by all to aid efficient, courteous communication.

The theme of politeness is continued in Agnese Sampietro's article which looks at how emoticons are used in Whatsapp messages sent between participants in Spain. The author makes direct comparison between the politeness strategies found on WhatsApp and those in oral communication and shows that they have much in common. The author describes how emoticons are in themselves used as a strategy of solidarity politeness and indeed to reinforce other linguistic strategies to create closeness and group identity.

The two other articles in this section are both concerned, to some extent, with how users structure their conversations and manage the fragmented often non-linear nature of online communication. Cristina Vela Delfa looks at exchanges on Facebook and notes how, in place of the linear progression observed in other forms of communication, multimodality and topic relevance form the intrinsic part of maintaining coherence in online conversations. Manuel Alcántra-Plá's article follows the conversation which developed after one particular tweet – a furious and vitriolic debate which ended a political career. The article highlights the ease with which digital media can re-contextualise content: taking text from one source and retransmitting it on another platform and how authors can easily lose control of their output.

The authors state that one of the aims of this book is to broaden a field of study that has historically been very anglo-centric. *El español en la red* is a timely and important contribution to the study of CMC and its focus on Spanish makes it particularly worth reading for students and researchers in the fields of Spanish pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics.

Unfortunately, the book does perhaps suffer from attempting to do too much: CMC is a very wide area and Spanish has many variations. Many of the articles contained in this volume are very interesting in themselves however they are both very diverse in theoretical approach and subject matter that the book lacks coherence. It is also a shame that the book only deals with a very limited range of Spanish variants: Argentine (speakers in Argentina and the US), Uruguayan and Peninsular Spanish.

Of course, this book is presented as an introduction to this area of study. As the authors suggest, the field itself is immature and indeed many of the articles appear to be pilot studies or use an extremely small corpus (two participants in one instance). This being the case, however, there is even more of an argument for there to have been greater emphasis on making the book work rather better as a whole by perhaps narrowing the focus. As it is the reader is left wondering at the range of ideas and approaches but a little disoriented. The conclusions of individual articles are too tenuous alone and the surrounding articles neither support nor question the findings of others in the field.

The book also fails in some ways to justify its central premise: that the Anglo-centric focus of work on CMC needs to be challenged. Unfortunately I don't think this book does this in any great measure. Indeed, Crispin Thurlow's introductory article which uses English as the language through which to study the medium really begs the question why bother with other languages? Any language apart from English will be in a minority and therefor be minimally influential on patterns of behaviour.

I don't happen to believe this conclusion but there was a missed opportunity to genuinely justify the study of Spanish online and make an assault on Anglo-centrism. For a book concerning Spanish, there was a surprising reliance on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. The study of (im)politeness has moved on considerably from this, highly criticised, Anglo-centric theory. I am aware of a great deal of work which is uses far more cross-culturally acceptable theories on politeness; work by Hispanicists (some of which is referenced within the articles in this book) challenging some central concepts in Brown and Levinson, and indeed certain large-scale studies of online behaviour which use far more versatile frameworks to model (im)politeness.

A further criticism of this book is its bias within the book towards peninsular Spanish and that of the Southern Cone: the majority of studies contained within the book come from either Spain or Argentina. Of course the book is already taking on an enormous brief attempting to look at the whole gamut of CMD however I feel that a book purporting to look at Spanish should make more effort to cover that spoken up and down Latin America. There are several studies of which I am aware which look at other variants of Spanish in online contexts. This includes work completed at Indiana University on Mexican Spanish on various platforms (Glide, 2016; Merino-Hernández, 2016; Zahler, 2016); work on the Ecuadorian pages of the ecommerce site Mercadolibre (Placencia, 2015, 2016) and work

concerning the nature of identity amongst Spanish speakers on the internet (Placencia & Fuentes Rodríguez, 2014).

Having said this, the book does have something for everyone. There is certainly food for thought for any researchers embarking on a project in this area and the individual articles are potentially good jumping-off points for further study.

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