

MediaCultureLinguistic Perspectives on Social TV: Questions and Desiderata of Analysing TV-Appropriation in Social Media

(... is thinking about ...)

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In the following article it shall be outlined that Social TV, i.e. the spontaneous TV-accompanied communication in social media, can be considered a promising area of MediaCultureLinguistics (MCL) as the study of media linguistic phenomena from an interdisciplinary point of view. The main aim is, then, to sketch out this new research area.

1. Introduction

Watching TV has long been considered a social event, a “campfire” of families and peer groups gathering around the TV set. However, media technological developments with the establishment of second screens (smartphones, tablets etc.) as well as the fragmentation of viewer communities and the tendency towards individualised formats have not only considerably changed the way people watch TV but also how they build reception communities.

What, then, is characteristic of present-day TV-reception? First of all, it is no innovation that people are involved in parallel social activities during the reception process for people have always talked about the TV-programme (cf. Morley 1986; Lull 1990; Matthewson 1992). The most important consequence of the new media technological development is, however, that communication is no longer restricted to privacy, to unobserved private communities, but is relocated to the public sphere when people build virtual social communities by twittering or posting on social media while watching TV. This phenomenon, which has become popu-

lar under the term *Social TV*, can be considered a bottom-up process initialised by the so called “viewers”.¹

Meanwhile, TV-stations are developing more and more concepts for this hybrid TV-reception, which has already become a must-have: stations can no longer afford to do without web-offerings such as Facebook fan sites or Twitter hashtags (cf. Buschow et al. 2013a). What has become particularly productive are live-events that allow a high level of viewer involvement, such as sports, casting shows, game shows or reality shows. TV-serials or scripted reality soaps also gather a considerable number of fans via Twitter and Facebook who participate in lively discussions, who want to contact the stars or participate in events related to the programme. This shows that Social TV has already become an integral part of the modern TV concept.

Considering different TV-formats, categories and Social TV practices (cf. Klemm & Michel 2014a: 5-7), one can say that this phenomenon can be approached from two different angles: on the one hand there is still

¹ The term *viewer* is a contamination of *viewer* + *user* emphasizing the aspect that in social media, the traditional distinction between producer and viewer (recipient) can no longer be maintained.

the bottom-up process with recipients multi-tasking more and more and, therefore, interacting more and more via social media. On the other hand, there's the top-down-strategy of TV-stations and -producers involving recipients and making their comments visible. This could lead to a stronger personalization of the TV-programme, to an increasing pandering to the public by gathering the viewers' likes or involvement frequency and by considering them in the editorial process.

Whereas the latter may cover prospective developments, Social TV is now a growing segment with specific distributions varying from country to country and from format to format: In Germany, about 87% of all users between 14 and 29 of age use a second screen while watching TV² but, as the USA reveals, only 25 to 28% of these activities are directly related to the programme.³

² Initiative-Studie „My Screens 2014/02“. Online: http://www.einfach-besser-kommuniziert.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Initiative-Studie-My-Screens_April2014.pdf.

³ Digital Democratic Survey. A multi-generational view of consumer technology, media and telecom trends. Online: www.deloitte.com/us/tmtrends.

Among these, reality and music shows are by far the TV formats which are shared most.⁴ Nevertheless, in 2014 only 15% of all interviewees in Germany said that they use TV and internet alongside each other each day and 12% indicated that they discuss the programme with the online-community.⁵

When we ask the question of whether Social TV is living-room communication “2.0” resp. “reloaded”, we have to take a closer look at the similarities and differences of these two forms of TV- reception by looking at prior research on TV-appropriation (cf. Holly et al. 2001). If we focus on Twitter as the platform that stands for short, quick and concurrent interaction like no other, we first have to characterize tweets structurally as ‘communication forms’ that are more than simply microblogging. Since we have already dwelled upon this matter elsewhere (cf. Klemm & Michel 2014a: 12-14; Michel 2015b: 54-56), we only need to point out that although tweets are directed to one's personal public, they are potentially to be

⁴ <https://www.marketingcharts.com/television/1-in-6-tv-viewers-said-to-share-content-about-shows-online-54279/>.

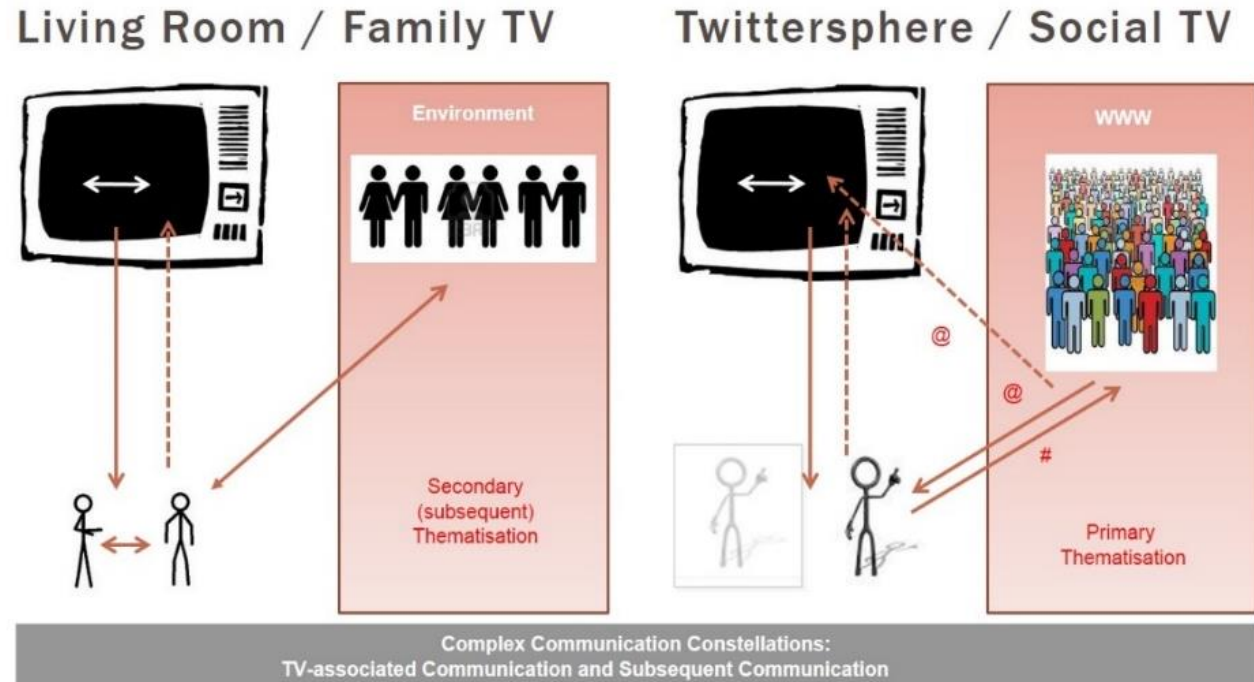
⁵ http://www.ard-zdf-onlinestudie.de/fileadmin/Onlinestudie_2014/PDF/0708-2014_Busemann_Tip-pelt.pdf.

detected by the whole twitter sphere using the same hashtag. Accordingly, tweets can be part of a continuous thematic flow representing “discourse bits” and thus drawing a picture of how TV-topics can turn into complex media discourses by developing a certain kind of discourse power. This is already one fundamental difference to living room talk which is basically private; the general difference between public and privacy is also linked up to the main difference pertaining to the physical presence or absence of the interaction partners. Due to the shared presence in the living room, there is the possibility of spontaneous interaction, where eye contact or a short word might be sufficient. That's why many aspects can be negotiated via direct contact, limited to the living room as discourse arena, however (cf. Holly et al. 2001). Further negotiations have to take place as “secondary thematisations” (Klemm 2000: 205) elsewhere afterwards. Utterances that are seemingly addressed to people in the TV-programme, can actually only be addressed to the co-viewers. Therefore, we have a complex constellation in the living room: there's communication on TV and among the viewers, there's one-way communication and blind communication of the actors to the viewers and maybe a

“pseudo-communication” (cf. Holly & Baldauf 2001) back (see Figure 1).

As far as Social TV is concerned, the constellation is fundamentally different: the immediate interaction in the living room does more or less (presumably) cease to disappear, since viewers with second screens presumably tend to watch TV all alone or at least cannot fully concentrate on co-viewers when they have to track or operate several devices. Nevertheless, the missing co-present interaction is compensated for by a virtual and spatial unlimited twitter sphere. Here, communication is decontextualized since twitterer or user only partly share the same awareness situation and have to add context to their tweets/posts in order to be understood. Additionally, new ways of non-verbal affirmation mechanisms such as re-tweeting/sharing or favouring/liking seem to be different from local co-viewers' affirmative nodding. While in the living room the co-presence of acquainted people results in the negotiation of lifeworld relevant aspects (cf. Klemm 2000), this obligation is missing while twittering and posting.

Hence, it is neither primarily relational management nor the alignment of knowledge and evaluations in the domestic community which are at stake here. Rather, at-



tracting attention and distributing one's own opinion seem to be more important. This takes place within a community which is rather anonymous as well as temporarily coincident. This does not exclude stable discourse communities, though. On the other hand, the commented persona could be addressed or reached directly by the viewers.

This shows that there are already fundamental differences between the living room setting on the one hand and Social TV on the other hand from a structural point of view (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Family TV vs. Social TV.

It should become obvious that Social TV as an evolving research area for linguistics has to overcome a reductive analysis of tweets but cover all producer and recipient-related as well as -intertwined (“viewer”) aspects that are part of a holistic micro- and macro-level approach to media culture based on linguistics to a large extent. This means that linguistics can profit considerably by interacting with neighbouring fields such as sociology, communication and media science,

Living Room / Family TV	Twittersphere / Social TV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physical co-presence • private constellation • direct mutual communication (group communication) • non-medial communication • rudimentary communication commitment (open state of talk) • synchronicity (spontaneous, blurtings) • contextualized communication • volatile communication • negotiations (knowledge, interpretations, opinions) • aim: approval / reconciliation with interpretive community • discourse extension by secondary thematisation • rudimentary discourse power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • virtual co-presence • (potentially) public constellation • indirect monologic communication (one-to-many) • inter-medial communication • no communication commitment (self-initiative) • quasi-synchronicity (reflective) • decontextualized communication • stored communication • basically subjective messages and self-displays • aim: attention and distribution (via re-tweets) / approval • discourse extension by primary thematisation • modest discourse power (public visibility, de-located interpreting communities)

2. Methodological Approach

- Live-events can trigger millions of tweets worldwide. In 2015, the *American Super Bowl*, for instance, evoked more than 28 million tweets and the *Eurovision Song Contest* more than 6 million tweets around the globe. It is evident, that a purely qualitative analysis of this amount of tweets seems quite impossible and, if one does not look solely for single lexical or grammatical phenomena, unnecessary. What, instead, seems appropriate to linguistically analyse these “**big data**”, is a mixed methods approach which combines quantitative statistical results with qualitative methods (cf. Klemm & Michel 2014c).
- **Quantitative methods** focus on data from a top-down perspective, which is true, for instance, of quantitative content analysis, where topics are determined in advance and statistically checked using a large bulk of data. **Qualitative methods** in our sense can cover bottom-up pattern-related hermeneutical case analyses of tweets (e.g. of statistical “peaks or valleys”, focussed on key words or striking physiological occurrences in eye-tracking, for instance) as well as ethno-

ethnology etc. – and vice versa – in order to adapt theoretic and methodological insights for what we call “MediaCultureLinguistics” (MCL) (cf. Klemm & Michel 2014b). This approach intends to overcome a purely product-related media linguistics approach to media culture by integrating the perspective of the producer, the product and the recipient. In this way, the whole cycle of media communication shall be considered pertaining to the anthropological notion that media

Figure 2: Living room appropriation vs. Social TV.

linguistic structures, topics, actions, discourses are the results of contextualised verbal and non-verbal practices and patterns of producers and recipients.

A MediaCultureLinguistic approach to Social TV might then cover the following aspects and research questions:

graphic studies such as attending observance, interviews, media diaries etc. depending on the individual theoretical issue and – of course – on the limits these different approaches impose.

3. Theoretical Approach

Basically, all grammatical and semantic, i.e. system-related aspects can be analysed corpus linguistically with data from Social TV. Nevertheless, we do not want to go into detail with respect to this matter here but focus on **pragmatic and usage-based** aspects from a micro- and macro-level instead:

3.1 Micro-Level

- How are tweets and posts, referring to a programme, **structured**? Do they show structural features of spontaneous oral communication or thoroughly planned written communication? What limits do media technological dispositive features (character limits on twitter, for instance) set on the creation of tweets and postings? What influence does the public sphere exert on the way tweets are structured, especially from a lexical and stylistic point of view? How are missing contextual cues that are present in local reception communities (concurrent reception context) compensated for verbally (cf. Klemm & Michel 2014b)?
- What **topics** are referred to in tweets and posts? How is the spectrum of subjects distributed? Are there deviances from or extensions to the topics presented in the programme? How are topics interactively developed, what kind of isotopies and thematic progressions are visible?
- What kind of **appropriation activities** can be deduced from tweets and postings? Studies of living room activities show that there are basically seven acquisition categories (cf. Klemm 2000: 209): ORGANIZING, PROCESSING, ASSURING COMPREHENSION, INTERPRETING, TRANSFERRING AND INTEGRATING, EVALUATING and AMUSING. Do they correspond to those categories in Social TV or are adjustments, modifications or subcategories necessary? How frequent are these activities and how are they distributed with respect to different TV-formats? E.g.: is the ironic modality of many viewers' tweets significant across all TV-formats?
- **“Doing Social TV”**: How do users **produce** tweets and posts? This question comprises aspects of the context (e.g. alone or in local communities) as well as aspects of the progression (are tweets and posts deleted and rewritten? How often do users correct certain aspects and what conclusions can be drawn from this for the spontaneity of Social TV)?
- Is Social TV embedded into further **parallel activities** such as conversation or interaction in local groups? Which activity, then, predominates? In what respect are there differences between people communicating in both Social TV and local communities and those only communicating in Social TV or only communicating in local groups? What does this indicate for the authenticity of individual involvement (cf. Androutsopoulos & Weidenhöffer 2015)?
- What can we learn about the **reception** of tweets and posts about a TV-programme? What indication can indirect interactional icons such as re-tweets/shares or favours/likes and fur-

ther comments give of the acceptance/refusal and finally the virality of Social TV? What can we learn about the “traffic” or activity with respect to individual tweets or posts indicated by statistic analytics such as the overall frequency of impressions, interactions, clicks etc.?

- How is the **type-token-relation** of users and tweets/posts distributed? One observation from previous studies is that in many cases (and TV-formats) the same users contribute with numerous tweets/posts in Social TV. Among these, “lead users” (Buschow et al. 2013b) generally comment on the TV-programme, but the programme itself, at the present at least, does not animate users to become twitterer or Social TV activists. So, is Social TV a widespread phenomenon or reduced to a small – and if so: which – community? What impact does the social status, interconnection and/or location (country etc.) of users have on the virality of tweets and posts? In other words: Can we establish sociograms of typical/successful Social TV users that are related sociolinguistically to the way they communicate?

- What can then be said about the **social stratification** of users and communities throughout the different formats? As is shown in Michel (2015b), reality formats such as *I’m a celebrity...Get me out of here!* attract more younger users than political talk shows (cf. Klemm & Michel 2013, 2014a).
- How complex are tweets/posts from a **multimodal** point of view? Which ones are more viral: those including pictures/films or those that are purely language-based? What are the specific relations between language, pictures and films, i.e. are any processes of “transcriptivity” (cf. Holly 2011) visible and what additional sense do they produce?
- As illustrated above, living room studies show that viewers interact steadily in order to “negotiate” certain views or aspects or simply to support/contradict each other. What, then, can be observed in Social TV concerning **direct interaction**?

3.2 Macro-Level

- To what **text linguistic category** do tweets and posts belong? What are the

fundamental differences between Social TV covering written “texts” and living room communication covering talk/ dialogue? Finally: How does this difference help to establish a general typology of TV-accompanied communication?

- To what extent can Social TV contribute to initiate **(cross) media discourses**? How do these discourses progress and how are they constituted linguistically? In what respect are discourses in Social TV interwoven with **traditional media**? This covers two aspects: (1) How do traditional media integrate Social TV in practice? (2) How do they interact with the viewers? (3) What can be said about the extent to which TV stations or editors draw feedback from it?
- In what respect are there general peculiarities, similarities or differences in appropriating different **TV-formats**? As studies show, live mega events such as sports (e.g. *Super Bowl*, cf. Baker et al. 2014) or reality formats (e.g. *I’m a celebrity...Get me out of here!*, cf. Michel 2015b) differ in some respects from series (e.g. the German criminal series *Tatort*, cf. Androutsopoulos & Weidenhöffer 2015) or political talk shows

(cf. Klemm & Michel 2013, 2014a; Michel 2015a), which are in many cases more subject-related. Nevertheless, detailed in-depth case studies of these and other TV-formats still have to be conducted.

- What insight can we gain from TV-reception and -appropriation for general **media cultural** aspects? Are there intercultural similarities or differences in the way viewers talk about the programme on Social TV and – finally – in the way they appropriate it?
- With respect to the approaches of **Cultural Studies** (cf. Fiske 1992) or **Discourse Analysis** (cf. van Dijk 2008): is Social TV one prominent exemplification of communication-based deliberative democracy online, triggered off by a new sense and kind of public, or only an “updating” expression of viewer’s oppositional TV-readings by other means?

To conclude, Social TV as an emerging field of media linguistics offers many aspects to cross the border of pure product analysis to an integrative analysis of producer, product and recipient from many inter- and transdisciplinary angles. From this holistic per-

spective, Social TV appears to be a promising study area of MediaCultureLinguistics. Considering this holistic point of view, the above discussed research questions and desiderata can only be conceived as a first step of a complex and interdisciplinary research paradigm of Social TV (cf. Buschow & Schneider 2015).

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