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Stance, Same-Sex Marriage and Space:

An Analysis of Self-Referencing on YouTube

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

By mid-2018, YouTube engagement reached 1.8 billion users per month, making it almost as big a platform as Facebook. Despite its popularity, little is understood about the user-generated comments written below the videos as a form of engagement on the site, with most linguistic research focusing on language found in the videos themselves. This study is a Mediated Discourse Analysis which explores what YouTubers say about themselves in textual responses posted under videos showing the passing of the same-sex marriage law in New Zealand. Using Du Bois’ (2007) Stance Triangle as its fork, it analyses the function of self-referencing stances and the sharing of personal information to a potentially large and unknown audience.

In order to understand YouTube as a context for self-referencing, I propose a new framework called Participatory Spaces. The Participatory Spaces framework identifies three salient areas of YouTube interaction: the shared interest that brings a diverse group of participants together (the Membership Layer), the different members of the audience that are addressed (the Audience Layer), and the technical affordances and constraints of the Space (the Spatio-Temporal Layer). The three Layers of a Participatory Space outline the interactional practices within and provide key perspectives on the mechanics of stance. The Membership Layer focuses particularly on the centrality, weighting and interpretability of the discourses, Discourses and particular locations shared by a geographically dispersed, diverse, audience. Self-referencing is used to increase credibility of an argument, to warrant participation and to express the right to belong. The Audience Layer reveals how commenters design their contribution for specific audiences. Here, examples of self-referencing can function as a means of (dis)aligning with other members on YouTube, and creating the Space itself. Finally, the Spatio-Temporal Layer uncovers the influences of time and space on participatory norms, including how participants’ histories and imagined futures are embedded in the Discourses they
present. The participants’ self-referencing creates context and meaning for both their own, and the other participants’, interpretation of their comments.

The Participatory Spaces framework also highlights the need for revisions to Du Bois’ Stance Triangle. Specifically, I argue that adapting the Triangle to include multiple objects of stance, segmenting the audience, and including participants’ histories, provides a tool for understanding YouTube interaction and the role self-referencing plays in these practices.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University’s Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor John O’Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz
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