



'I just found your blog'. The pragmatics of initiating comments on blog posts

Ursula Lutzky ^{a,*}, Matt Gee ^b

^a Vienna University of Economics and Business, Welthandelsplatz 1, 1020 Vienna, Austria

^b Birmingham City University, Cardigan Street 4, B4 7BD Birmingham, United Kingdom



ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 September 2017

Received in revised form 23 December 2017

Accepted 15 March 2018

1. Introduction

The widespread medium of blogs is generally regarded as comprising two main constituent parts: posts which are composed by blog authors and comments which may be left by the readers of these posts. While the former are an essential defining criterion of blogs, which are updated with new posts at regular intervals, comments are usually of an optional nature. Nevertheless, both posts and comments are today typically associated with blogs and it is therefore important to uncover the interplay between these different components and to explore the pragmatic ties that exist between blog posts and their associated reader comments, which have not been studied extensively from a linguistic perspective to date (but see e.g. Hoffmann, 2012). This study investigates the opening sequences of words in comments on blog posts to gain further insights into the linguistic constructions used, the textual and interpersonal relations established and the interactive potential of the medium of blogs.

The data chosen for this study comes from the *Birmingham Blog Corpus* (BBC, 2010),¹ a diachronically-structured collection of blogs covering the period 2000–2010 and totalling 600 million words. Our analysis is based on the Blogger and WordPress sub-corpus of the BBC (<http://www.webcorp.org.uk/blogs>), in which blog posts and their associated reader comments were identified with high accuracy, thus facilitating our study. The commenting feature of blogs provides a framework that allows for interaction between blog authors and readers or between individual readers, which makes this sub-corpus amenable to the analysis of pragmatic phenomena such as speech acts (cf. Searle, 1976, 1979).

The aim of this study is to investigate the introductory signals of blog comments which linguistically mark a change in speaker, from blog author to commenter, and which are separate from the metadata usually provided by the blog interface, such as the username of the commenter or the timestamp indicating when a comment was published. In particular, our study focuses on the pragmatic means appearing in preface, or very first, position of comments to discover the interactional patterns that exist between blog users. The methodological approach used, which not only restricts our focus to a specific

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: ursula.lutzky@wu.ac.at (U. Lutzky).

¹ *Birmingham Blog Corpus*, 2010. Compiled by the Research and Development Unit for English Studies at Birmingham City University, <http://www.webcorp.org.uk/blogs>.

medium but further confines it to a specific position of attestation in the data, facilitates this analysis and has the potential to reveal patterns of speech acts, that is linguistic constructions with a specific illocutionary force, such as that of an apology or a request, and even “hidden manifestations” of speech acts (Kohnen, 2007) in large corpora, as will be shown below. Thus, our study also contributes to the ongoing endeavour of enhancing ways of accurately identifying and studying speech acts in big data collections (see also Lutzky and Kehoe, 2016, 2017a,b).

Our article begins by taking a closer look at the medium of blogs and its interactive nature in Section 2, including the development of blogs, the importance of comments to the medium, as well as previous insights into pragmatic differences between posts and comments. In Section 3, we discuss the preface position in blog comments and its crucial role in the context of blogs, where turns at talk may not always appear adjacent to each other. We introduce the distinction between speech external metadata that characterises blogs and speech internal perspective shifters (see Moore, 2011) which signal the beginning of a new direct turn at talk and may establish cohesive and pragmatic ties to preceding turns. The analysis of our sub-corpus is presented in Section 4 and moves from discussing single words appearing in initial position in blog comments (e.g. forms of address, greetings) to three- and five-word clusters. By expanding the window in this way, we are able to uncover longer interactional constructions functioning as different types of speech acts. In fact, in addition to rather general uses of speech acts, we find several medium specific uses, which shows how speech acts may adapt to an online medium such as blogs (cf. Verschueren and Brisard, 2002).

2. Blogs as an interactive medium

Blogs are a means of computer-mediated communication that has evolved significantly since the first use of the term weblog – later shortened to blog – to refer to a log or collection of links to noteworthy websites (Garden, 2011: 485; see also Blood, 2002). While the established definition of blogs today refers to them as online journals or diaries (see e.g. OED s.v. blog *n.*), research has shown that it is in fact already outdated and confirmed the increasingly diverse nature of blogs (see e.g. Kehoe and Gee, 2012). That is to say that in addition to blogs which are regularly updated by single authors sharing personal reflections on their lives and interests, there are many further uses to which the blog format is put, including, for instance, large corporate blogs with multiple contributors and vast audiences (see e.g. Puschmann, 2010, 2013). Given their variety of uses, blogs are today regarded as an online medium, rather than a genre (see e.g. Herring et al., 2005, boyd, 2006, Kehoe and Gee, 2012).

The facility for comments was introduced in 2002 and has since come to be typically associated with blogs. It allows readers “to actively engage in an exchange with the blogger and/or other readers by writing one or several comments” (Bolander, 2012: 1609). Consequently, the comments feature turns blogs into “an online space where discussion and debate can take place” (Garden, 2011: 485) and contributes to viewing the medium as being interactive and dialogic in nature. Commenters do, however, not have to react or respond to a post immediately as this asynchronous medium allows for a theoretically infinite time lag between post and comment, thus creating a degree of modulated interactivity or “interaction-at-one-remove” (Nardi et al. 2004: 46). Additionally, blog comments are generally of an optional nature: blog authors have the option of disabling the comment function, while commenters can choose whether they want to actively participate by contributing to an interaction or not. That is to say that blogs allow for interactivity but they do not inherently request it, unlike other online media such as email or chatroom conversations.

Nevertheless, previous research has shown that comments play a significant role in blogs. Kehoe and Gee (2012) studied reader comments as an aboutness indicator in blogs and demonstrated the importance of comments to the medium. When compiling the BBC, they created a 181 million word sub-corpus downloaded from the WordPress and Blogger hosting sites² in which they accurately separated blog posts from comments. Of the 181 million words, comments constitute 48% (86 million tokens) and thus account for a significant proportion of the textual content of blog sites, comprising almost as many tokens as posts, which make up the remaining 52% (95 million tokens). Additionally, they found that 78% of posts have at least 1 comment, with a blog post receiving 10 comments on average, and that all the comments on a page, on average, contain more text than the post itself (498 tokens versus 427). On the basis of a large corpus comprising a variety of different types of blogs, Kehoe and Gee (2012) therefore showed that the comment facility takes up a prominent position in the blogosphere and provides access to interactional material.

Studying a comparatively smaller corpus sample, Hoffmann (2012), on the other hand, observed that the interactive potential of blogs may not always be fully exploited by its users. He found responsive exchanges between blog authors and commenters to “barely exist” (Hoffmann, 2012: 199) in his Augsburg Blog Corpus, comprising 10 personal blogs and a total of 123,242 words. That is to say that one-to-one interaction does not frequently form part of his sample of blogs. Although generally rare, when commenters engage with a blog post, they commonly respond “in an acknowledging and appreciative manner”, which entails a higher incidence of expressive speech acts through which “users express their (usually positive) evaluation toward one of the focal topics or elements introduced in the related entry” (Hoffmann, 2012: 200–201).

Concerning speech acts, comments have also been found to differ from blog posts in their use of specific pragmatic features. When investigating the speech act of apologising in blogs, Lutzky and Kehoe (2017a) noticed that the Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) *sorry* showed a significantly higher density of attestation in the comments of the BBC’s

² WordPress: <http://www.wordpress.com/>; Blogger: <http://www.blogspot.com/>.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7297354>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7297354>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)