This talk explores how the transitive verb 'like' has been given new meanings in both online and offline writing spaces ever since the introduction of the 'Like' function on social network sites. My discussion is centred around the so-called 'Facebook Like', a button or a link (often accompanied by a thumbs up symbol) for users to express positive reaction to a post or a comment, or to become a 'fan' of a company, a celebrity or other special interests. Drawing on speech acts research and stance analysis, I first argue that clicking 'Like' on Facebook, similar to writing 'haha' or 'lol', acts as a performative utterance which serves various communicative functions. The study presented in this talk first systematically analyzes a range of communicative acts that 'Like' can perform on Facebook, such as agreeing, endorsing, and indicating that a post has been read. Empirical data come from personal Facebook walls and public fans pages and groups. These acts of 'liking' are also multimodal in nature, involving users interacting with words (e.g. posts, comments), hyperlinks and images.

The spread of Facebook-liking leads to the increasing presence of Facebook Like in non-Facebook contexts. First, a comment with just the word 'like' may be heard or seen in everyday speech and non-Facebook writing. Second, in public spaces, texts in which the Facebook sense of 'Like' is a part are found in advertisements and signs in commercial and institutional contexts. To further examine such commodified use of 'Like', this study has collected and analyzed photographs of public texts in Hong Kong, including bilingual ones. The findings in this study provide evidence for the convergence of online and offline linguistic practices, suggesting that the internet is an important research site for current trends in sociolinguistics, such as linguistic landscapes research.

Keywords: Facebook, language online, communicative acts.