’Charred brown daggers’: A multidimensional study of humour in a professional journalist’s creative use of Twitter.

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A major challenge to contemporary sociolinguistics is how to capture and contextualise the ways meanings are constructed through flows across multiple channels and across time. I introduce a study of a professional journalist’s use of Twitter, specifically focussing on the performance of humour. Deploying linguistic ethnography, I recognise "creativity as rooted in, and deriving meaning from, particular contexts” (Maybin and Swann, 2007: 500). To make sense of this practice I needed to trace flows across different media channels, and over time. With examples collected between March 2010 and January 2013, I explore how the performances of humour are keyed and enacted (Bauman, 1986):

Performances are shaped by the affordances of channels (Twitter, radio, writing etc.), yet flows across can be managed creatively, conveying "polysemic content to audiences, actual and imagined” (Papacharissi, 2012: 1989).

Temporal dimensions of the collaborative construction of humour are varied, from the scale of several decades to momentary performances.

The professional performances studied here display diverse framings of identity: of others’ as well as the construction of his own media personality, through dialogic interactions with different dimensions of symmetry.

This case study illustrates some of the benefits and challenges of bringing an ethnographic approach to the study of a specific communicative practice situated within a media ecology (Gillen, 2014).

References


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