

Connecting through divergence: Idiosyncratic relational responses in WhatsApp

A large part of smartphone communication, such as WhatsApp messages, involves relational work, or language geared towards interpersonal connection (Locher & Watts, 2008; Yus, 2021). This relational investment can be observed, for example, in responses—i.e., listener responses, like right and that's amazing (Gardner, 2001). However, studies to date have focused on response use in spoken conversation (e.g., Gardner, 2001; McCarthy, 2003; O'Keeffe & Adolphs, 2008). Through conversation analysis and quantitative comparison, this presentation's study explores some patterns and particularities in the responses of 45 WhatsApp users. As shown in the data, responses pervade the WhatsApp corpus and offer insights into self-presentation and social connection in these semi-synchronous written interactions. The findings point to considerable cross-token similarity, especially in terms of general response strategies, such as acknowledgement, agreement, and evaluation. However, particular forms hint at intra-function idiosyncrasies, especially when participants convey high interpersonal involvement. What is more, individuals' idiosyncratic tokens sometimes appear to encourage other members' original responses and/or form approximation. These findings suggest that individualized language, as with these response tokens, can contribute to interpersonal connection.

References

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