Contribution ID: **29**   Type: **individual papers**

Accounting for mode choice in WhatsApp transmodal interaction

Despite increasing attention from linguists to mobile communication, voice messages (VMs) remain an area that has not been thoroughly explored (König, 2019). Little is known about the linguistic design of audio postings and users' perspectives on this mode of communication. This paper aims to bridge this gap by focusing on mode choice in several corpora of WhatsApp chats that contain text and voice messages from Spain and Germany, two countries where voice messaging is widespread.

The analysis examines the conditions in which users are expected to give an account for their mode choice and the media ideologies surrounding it (see also Busch & Sindoni, 2022). The methods use digital conversation analysis to triangulate a first coding of the content and number of accounts in the corpus with a sequential analysis of their interactional embedding (Meredith et al., 2021).

The study reveals that senders and recipients of VMs differ in their accounts of mode choice. Senders are more likely to volunteer accounts and apologize for longer messages, while recipients account less and typically justify if they cannot answer quickly or listen to a voice message right away. Moreover, users associate different media ideologies with text messages and VMs, as each mode is considered better suited for different purposes and triggers varied responses depending on the effort required.

Overall, the study opens new approaches to the study of transmodal interaction and media ideologies, shedding light on a little-explored area of mobile communication.

References

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