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Exploring social identities in public texts

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1. The concept of social identity

This special issue focuses on the public representations that people create for themselves or others create for them. However, rather than employing the notion of ‘representation’, we utilise a concept originating from social psychology, ‘social identity’, as something constructed by both *self-concept* and *membership* in a social group or groups. According to Tajfel, this means “the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of the group membership” (1972: 292). In other words, it involves psychological belongingness, but also both how we act as individuals and as parts of a collective.

Tajfel – Turner’s Social Identity Theory (SIT; 1979) is based on three separate mental processes¹. The first one, social categorisation, involves the categorisation of objects in order to understand them and identify them. Similarly, we categorise people (including ourselves) in order to understand the social environment by using such (often) binary social categories as black/white, Christian/Muslim, and student/teacher. In the second process, social identification, we adopt the identity of the group we have categorised ourselves as belonging to. For example, if someone categorises themselves as a student, they will adopt the identity of a student and begin to act in the ways they believe students act. They will also conform to the norms of the group, which ties their self-esteem to group membership. The third process entails social comparison. After categorising ourselves as part of a group

¹ The theory was later developed into Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) by Turner et al. (1987). Its main aim was to broaden social identity research from intergroup relations to group behaviour in general.

and identifying with that group, we tend to compare that group with other groups. In order for our self-esteem to be maintained, our group needs to compare favourably with other groups.

The actual content of group behaviour (what people actually think and do as members of a group) is shaped by more macro-level dimensions of social identity processes (Hogg 2005: 208-209). This also involves such processes as building and maintaining different kinds of stereotypes and beliefs. Tajfel (1982) sees stereotypes not only as descriptive but also as functional, in that when we hold a certain stereotype of a group, that stereotype serves to justify and legitimise our actions. In the social identity process we tend to exaggerate differences among groups as well as similarities within groups.

Therefore, it is not unusual for a group to define its identity by its common opposition to some enemy or 'out-group'. While this process can be very effective in strengthening in-group bonds, it does so by significantly intensifying intergroup conflicts. Intragroup consensus can be reached by conforming to group norms. This process is called 'referent informational influence', which occurs in three stages: self-categorisation (in which a person defines a social category or identity for him/herself), norm formation (in which a person creates or learns the stereotypical norms of the social category), and norm representation (in which a person assigns the norms to him/herself and starts behaving accordingly) (Hogg – Abrams 1988: 172). In other words, we are influenced by others to the extent that they are in a position to be knowledgeable about group beliefs, norms and values. That is particularly true of individuals who are most representative (prototypical) of the in-group. They guide and lead discussions about 'who we are' and hence 'what we should do'.

By way of demonstration, we can consider two groups, criminals and non-criminals, in order to exemplify intragroup consensus and intergroup conflict. The members of the non-criminal group, ordinarily a 'respectable' majority, cultivate intragroup consensus by maintaining societal norms as well as behavioural parameters. The members of the criminal group are those who do not observe those norms and parameters to the extent that they break established laws, after which they obtain out-group status. Such deviation results in intergroup conflict. This conflict between in-group and out-group members is intensified if the out-group minority is somehow recognised as a danger to the in-group majority. Criminal status acquires a negative connotation and non-criminal status a positive one.

In language use, social identity can be expressed in various ways. Linguistic studies on social identity have often focused on matters such as

ethnicity, speech accommodation, second-language acquisition, and gender and language². The most typical way of manifesting social identities and intergroup relations is in the so-called in-group and out-group discourse. Often the majority culture comes to be seen, and talked about, as the norm, the 'us', and that of the minority group as the 'other'. Wodak (2008: 61), in her study of discursive exclusion and inclusion strategies, notes that the meaning of who 'we' are varies according to prevailing ideologies and power relations: sometimes 'we' means 'all of us reasonable people' and, at other times, clearly defined and restricted groups. The use of 'us' and 'them' characterises linguistic contexts such as "many debates in all European member states (such as polarized discussions on EU enlargement, gender mainstreaming, on definitions of citizenship, immigration and participation in decision-making, and many more)" (Wodak 2008: 75). Van Dijk (2009: 52) discusses this state of polarised public discourse in terms of "our own place". Such places are where we want to be autonomous socially, politically, and culturally: there we do not want interference from above, or from outside our own place, i.e. group, including invasion into our way of using language (i.e. our idiolect, which is often a sociolect).

As van Dijk (2009: 141) states, giving attributes to the self and others concerns interactional and societal contexts. This means that defining the self is not only governed by macro-level norms or shared knowledge, but is also produced in micro-level interactions and situations. According to Gumperz – Cook-Gumperz (1982: 3), different ideologies affect face-to-face interaction and discourse practices where "subconscious and automatic sociolinguistic processes of interpretation and inference" can lead to different outcomes. No interaction is thus value-free, but is always assessed according to someone's norms and values (as in the 'referent informational influence' mentioned above). As Ochs (1993: 289) understands it, social identity is usually something not explicitly encoded in language use, but rather a social meaning inferred in act and stance meanings. Social identities can be seen to evolve and vary in social interaction in response to the acts and stances of other interlocutors, but also according to the speaker's own attitude towards each interactional situation (Ochs 1993: 298).

Often the values and norms of a particular group are also manifested in the negative labelling of other groups or members of those groups. This means creating and maintaining negative impressions, which can be aided or achieved through the use of 'labels of primary potency' (Allport

² For ethnicity and speech accommodation, see, among the earliest studies, Giles (1978 onwards); for language acquisition, Gardner (1979); and for gender, Hogg (1985).

1986)³. Consequently, certain characteristics, like male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, or normal weight/obese, carry more perceptual potency than others, and signal difference from what is considered mainstream (e.g. moral distinctiveness). In other words, we evaluate other individuals and groups by labelling them one way or the other.

Also in this special issue, social identity manifests itself, firstly, in actual labels and attributes, such as in personal pronouns and terms of reference. In addition, some studies here show a variety of other discursive ways in which interlocutors' social identities are encoded. The juxtaposition of different groups and their members can occur through acts of criticism and praise, or by variation in stance-taking, or otherwise. Another important contextual factor taken up by these studies concerns genre, which ranges from modern blog writing and advertising to historical literature and narratives, and proves to be one of the most powerful tools for creating and maintaining social identities.

2. The concept of public texts

The contributions in this issue share an interest in identities as interactively construed and performed in *public* texts⁴ that offer specific background for an understanding of their manifestations. However, the concept of public texts that these contributions rely on has become increasingly elusive, especially in the digital era. In characterising the new media and the rise of computer-mediated communication (CMC), researchers have underlined the blurred distinction between newsmakers and consumers, as well as between what is considered public and what is considered private⁵, between what is mass and what is interpersonal communication (Landert 2014a, Ratia – Palander-Collin – Taavitsainen 2017). The public vs. private dichotomy proved insufficient to capture the most recent modes of communication, but

³ Nevala (2016) has studied extreme negative labelling of criminals in historical newspapers in terms of 'fiend naming' (from Clark 1992). An opposing strategy of 'angel naming', i.e. sympathising labelling, is used of the crime victims, respectively.

⁴ The notion of *text* is yet another challenge to communication theory and discourse analysis. We do not expand on this, as the papers in this collection do not focus on visual pragmatics or multimodality. We largely follow an understanding of *text* as a coherent specimen of written language that could also be publicised in electronic media.

⁵ The private vs. public distinction as a social concept goes back to ancient Greece and to the opposition between the household and the polis (see Bailey 2002 for a historical overview; see also Del Lungo 2010 and Dossena 2010).

closer investigations have shown that editor vs. user-generated content may still be separated in many cases (Landert 2014a), so that the collaboratively produced matter is in fact a sum of multiple individual (though sometimes anonymous) and editorial contributions. Moreover, a juxtaposition of private and public in a historical perspective is relatively new. Besides, for historical texts and past communication frames it is essential to critically review its applicability and to develop, for individual periods or datasets, some historically relevant notions that correspond to the contemporary understandings of what constitutes the public dimensions of texts. The brief overview below illustrates the complexity of achieving this task for some historical writings.

Historically, as we have mentioned, regardless of period-specific interpretations, the private and public domains remained discrete only to some extent. It was not until the Late Modern period that something of an opposition seems to have emerged with the rise of the public sphere in major European countries (Habermas 1989 [1962]). As for communication, the growth of the public domain has frequently, though sometimes rather simplistically, been related to the major technological developments in text production and dissemination, such as the invention of print, and to the gradual rise in the accessibility of printed material throughout the sixteenth century⁶. Going back to the Early Modern period, the rise of printed press publications (the first English *coranto* dating to 1620) marks the beginnings of *public* discourse in the sense of mass rather than individual communication. However, it is important to bear in mind that informational texts, historically seminal to journalistic genres, such as diplomatic letters and newsletters (e.g. the *avvisi*⁷, Infelise 2007; Brownlees 2011: 25-26) still circulated in handwritten form long after the invention of print. In London, for instance, newsletters that transmitted commercial, military and political intelligence were (mostly professionally) handwritten well into the seventeenth century. Chartier (2007: 60) mentions several profitable staples, i.e. kinds of scriptoria

⁶ Similarly, groundbreaking events (e.g. related to postal services, such as the introduction of the Penny Post in 1840; the postcard revolution in the late nineteenth century; cf. Gillen – Hall 2010; the digital revolution of the late twentieth century) have also been viewed as turning points in the history of (public) communication and the involved modalities.

⁷ The *avvisi* originated in the late fifteenth century in connection with trade around the Mediterranean. Similar handwritten newsletters were common in the Netherlands (*gazettes*) and Germany (*Neue Zeitungen*; cf. Barbarics – Pieper 2007: 61). See also a comprehensive bibliography on changing news discourse at <http://www.chinednews.com/>.

with professional scribes catering for the needs of a narrow group of elitist subscribers. Thus, the circulations of public (printed and mass) and private (handwritten and elitist) informational texts ran parallel in the Early Modern period⁸. Frequently, such texts were not independent, but parasitic to other texts, usually diplomatic or commercial correspondence. Infelise, for instance, shows that fifteenth century *avvisi* were either attached as separate sheets to merchant letters as a “by-product of a normal correspondence carried on for other reasons” (Infelise 2007: 41), or drawn as extracts from these and distributed as anonymous newssheets. Thus, in earlier periods, some texts – which later modern times have taught us to view as well delimited, autonomous and widely accessible physical objects – had not had an independent existence, or had not necessarily functioned in the public domain.

A range of models have been proposed in communication studies and discourse analysis research to capture the blend of private and public in different texts and genres (e.g. Weintraub 1997). In historical pragmatics, for instance, Koch – Oesterreicher’s (1985) conceptualisation has become a standard reference point for communicative parameters relevant to the classification of (historical) texts (in terms of the degree of orality vs. literacy, spoken vs. written, intimate vs. public, etc.). The model was initially designed to capture the multidimensionality of private vs. public and oral vs. written domains and their interfaces with the phonic and graphic codes. Thus, it assumes that the language of immediacy (spontaneous and informal, such as a conversation) and language of distance (planned and formal, such as a sermon) may be variously realised in the graphic and phonic medium and need not be viewed as bound to only one medium (Koch – Oesterreicher 1985: 21). For instance, dialogic passages in mediaeval and Early Modern textbooks written in the scholastic tradition may reflect the language of distance, while a partially scripted sermon during a contemporary Baptist Sunday service may come closer to the language of immediacy. Although the model does not account for the most recent interactive and increasingly sophisticated multimodality of electronic texts, it has been helpful in characterising the private to public cline in online letters to editor (Landert – Jucker 2011), while its extensions have been successfully applied to a number of empirical studies into CMC (Landert 2014a and b). In terms of the conceptualisations that it has offered to linguistics more generally, it has proven useful for capturing the direction of the stylistic trends observed

⁸ Cf. Daybell’s discussion on the porous private vs. public, domestic vs. political divisions in Early Modern (female) correspondence (2006: 26-30).

throughout the twentieth century. Thus, increasing informalisation and colloquialisation (Leech et al. 2009; Mair 2006) have led to increasing linguistic immediacy of public discourse (Jucker – Landert 2015).

Models that conceptualise the public vs. private in communication have evolved overtime to meet the demands of the most recent developments in human communication. Table 1 presents an overview of such models in terms of specific parameters and features that belong to different discourse domains.

Table 1. Models and communicative parameters of the “private” vs. “public” cline

Model	Parameters	Parameters	Feature extremes
Koch – Oesterreicher (1985)	two	medium	phonic vs. graphic
		form	language of immediacy vs. language of distance
Weintraub (1997)	two	visibility	open vs. hidden, accessible vs. withdrawn
		collectivity	collective vs. individual
Landert – Jucker (2011)	three	context	not exclusive vs. exclusive to sender and addressee
		content	collectively-oriented vs. individually-oriented
		form	language of immediacy vs. language of distance
Landert (2014b)	four	context	as in Landert – Jucker (2011)
		content	as in Landert – Jucker (2011)
		form	as in Landert – Jucker (2011)
		setting	involving vs. not involving

Three of the four models take into account the context and form and view these separately (Koch – Oesterreicher’s medium vs. form). Only Weintraub’s parameters (visibility and collectivity) conflate the context and the subject matter. Landert’s model employed to conceptualise the most recent phenomenon of personalisation observed in mass media is most sophisticated as it relies on four dimensions (2014b: 24-36 for details). In terms of dimensions, Landert proposes replacing the parameter of visibility and accessibility with the characterisation of the communicative setting as involving as opposed to non-involving. At the *involving* extreme a range of texts are placed which invite users to interact directly, among others, by

contributing their own content, while at the non-involving extreme users have no such opportunity. This approach is particularly useful for capturing the complexity of accessibility and collaboration in the production of CMC; however, the non-involving vs. involving dimension is not entirely determined by the medium. For instance, online news which contains witness statements lies toward the involved end of the continuum, while news accounts in the same medium that do not contain such material lie closer to the non-involved end (Landert 2014b: 30).

3. The studies in this issue

Several papers in this collection, especially the ones which utilise recent digital data, focus on the dimensions of visibility (or Landert's involving vs. non-involving setting), context and content that underpin the models outlined in Table 1.

Beginning from visibility and context, it is obvious that many forms of online communication (social media, blogs, comment sections in news sites, etc.) are open and accessible to the general public, rather than exclusive to the sender(s) and addressee(s). In terms of content, depending on the degree of user-input that a given online site allows, (i.e. its interactive quality), the overall substance of the online communication is a result of joint effort and it constitutes (at least on the surface) a collective assembly of content. All these features render CMC an ideal site for "empowerment" of marginalised communities and even political emancipation of non-dominant languages and their speakers (Deumert 2014). Social inequalities receive due attention and space in the domain characterised by high visibility and easy access. Hence, a greater opportunity arises for successful contestation and protest against these, their underlying causes, as well as for potential change. Identity construction practices are integrated in expressions of dissent and involve specific discursive mechanisms which invite close scrutiny.

Hanna Limatius investigates such practices in plus-size fashion blogs and views such blogs as sites for body positive empowerment. Group practices and norms observed in the 200 posts from 20 UK blogs offer a chance to deconstruct certain mechanisms of identity formation in this marginalised group of fashion-oriented plus-size women. First of all, a purely linguistic element related to the mechanisms of consciously propagated change is involved: plus-size fashion bloggers (and recipients) have clearly reclaimed the word *fat* and have as a result destigmatised its overwhelmingly negative

semantics. Secondly, the posts show that in-group membership expressed by a set of mutual values (e.g. “alternative” ideals of beauty, self-acceptance and affirmation) has been used to create and maintain such a new “empowered” plus-size identity. Moreover, the narrative sections of the posts indicate the importance of such passages (e.g. presenting identity construction as a journey, etc.) for the involved identification processes, as well as for the new positivity attached to the socially marginalised body features and images. Finally, in contrast, a new stigmatised identity against which plus-size positivity is set, and in relation to which it becomes a well-guided and guarded social ground, is the hesitant plus-size person who is willing to lose weight. Limatius combines aspects of text analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis to comment on the recently growing wave of empowerment strategies to which the Internet and virtual communities have provided such a fruitful outlet.

Tony McEnery and Helen Baker too attempt a reanimation of historical voices of socially marginalised groups, looking into the vast range of texts published in Early Modern England, i.e. publically available in the period through the medium of print. This study focuses on the labels describing the poor in the seventeenth century, more specifically the deserving poor or the groups considered worthy of charity by contemporary society. A corpus-based exploration of EEBO focuses on a superficially neutral descriptor, *the poor*, and employs collocation analysis to explore (1) group delimitations involved in this category, (2) forms of poverty, (3) social attitudes elicited by the designation, and (4) the reaction that the call to support the poor was perpetuated by the state and raised to the status of a social obligation. The essay shows that *the poor* are defined mostly by family circumstances (e.g. by being orphans and widows) rather than in relation to a particular profession. Interestingly, the occupation of begging appears to define the group only in the first three decades of the seventeenth century, as the term *beggar* as a so-called terminating collocate decreases in frequency in the 1640s. Overall, the term has positive discourse prosody throughout the period and this positivity intensifies as the century progresses. The paper also shows that, in response to the needs of the deserving poor, *hospitals* and *charitable* activities were notions frequently used by Early Modern English society. These identification processes of the poor, as the authors maintain, originate in church discourse that ascribed the qualities of suffering saints to the group. In official relief mechanisms, however, the mediation in charity, i.e. the personae of *overseers* and *churchwardens* feature prominently. McEnery – Baker interpret this along the lines of the increasingly positive identification

of the poor: if charity is performed through mediating institutions, criticism of the distribution and consumption of resources is directed to the mediators, not to the beneficiaries. The identifications related to *the poor* change from negative connotations to overwhelmingly positive ones; this development reflects a direction of social change and a differentiation of responses to poverty, throughout the century. In the case of the poor in Early Modern England, the study suggests that the group has been in a sense externally and socially empowered throughout the seventeenth century.

In the eighteenth century another type of social inequality, that of genders, underlies the tensions around women's identities in the then public-thus-typically-male domain of literary achievement and print publication. Anni Sairio's paper discusses the socially construed deficiency of women in the world of contemporary literature. In particular, the analysis focuses on the ways in which reader perceptions are guided through the social values promoted in the genre of satire, which was meant to be instructional. In 1760 Elizabeth Montagu, the central figure of the Bluestocking circle, published her writings for the first time: three satirical conversations were printed anonymously, as part of a larger series, the *Dialogues of the Dead*, authored by John Lyttleton. The linguistic window on identity used by Sairio involves stance-taking and the frequencies of first- and second-person pronouns used by the individual characters in Montague's dialogues. However, the anonymity of the writer is the central recurring theme in the deconstruction of identity processes. Also the social meanings that these processes carry constitute another topic that reappears in the study. First and foremost, anonymous publication relieved the female author of gender-related risks in a male-dominated domain and was not uncommon at the time. Secondly, as Sairio notices, the gender-free stance enabled by anonymity reduced the amount of gender work (in analogy to facework) that would otherwise have been expected of a woman (as a writer). Thirdly, as in CMC today, concealing some aspects of identity worked as a protective mechanism through which sensitive and socially-stigmatised contents were expressed, but no responsibility rested on the undisclosed interactant. Finally, the prototypes and expectation defaults could have been skillfully manipulated by means of anonymity, or (semi)anonymity, as in the case of Elizabeth Montague. In a detailed analysis of the three dialogues, the paper shows that, unlike in most communicative settings, where values are promoted through group membership, critical judgment was the main vehicle employed to endorse virtue and learning, rationality, morality, self-discipline and self-improvement. Through her subversive dialogues that used gender-neutral disguise, Montague, a learned

woman known for great emphasis on self-presentation, expressed her own respectable, but deeply reflexive social identity.

Gender stereotypes also lurk in the background of the paper by Daniela Cesiri, which focuses on the social identity of (female) food bloggers by analysing the comment sections of 5 top UK cooking blogs, i.e. exemplifying an instructional genre. Framing her study in the Goffmanian concept of “communication as stage”, the author focuses on bloggers’ direct interactions with commentators. This allows her to place the bloggers on a continuum between the expert and the amateur (albeit experienced) food lover, as the idealised roles to which the creators of such sites relate. The concepts of “self-as-performer” and “self-as-character” are used to differentiate between the identification processes in which the bloggers engage. These concepts also help indicate the correspondence (or the lack of it) between the interactive “mask” and the image that individual blog writers perpetuate in other spheres of their lives. Following a set of criteria for “virtual communities” (Herring 2004), Cesiri shows that the site of interaction analysed is indeed one such community where the identities and roles of the interactants are juxtaposed with, and negotiated in relation to, a specific set of norms, usually originating in the blogger as a sort of a central norm-defining role model. In dealing with the comments from the followers, the strategies employed towards the management of criticism and praise offer some insights into the reciprocal position of the parties involved in communication. Whereas praise is tackled by bloggers individually, criticism tends to be resolved on a community basis, where the core character sometimes withdraws from interaction to give space to their followers. In this way support and defending statements are generated collectively, as are some recipe variants, amendments and extensions.

A similar mechanism of mutual responsibility and responsibility distribution within a specific (discourse) community guides the interaction in an entirely different communication setting described in the paper by Matylda Włodarczyk. The correspondence of the British Colonial Office in the early nineteenth century represents the exchanges of a very specific professional circle in the colonial administration of the Cape of Good Hope. The study focuses on issues regarding alignment with the institution and other parties, as well as on the ways in which multifaceted social/institutional identities are constructed in internal correspondence. A three-decade perspective, i.e. a comparison between a set of letters from 1796 and a set from 1827-30, captures the development of the institution, the growth of its networks and power grids, the changing guidelines and conventions of

communication, as well as the dynamics of the ways in which institutional authority is exercised. When constructing their identities, the participants foreground their institutional rights, obligations and relative positioning in the locally constructed grid of mutual relations. At the same time, some general factors, such as the values of genteel society, characteristic of Late Modern Britain, and the growing professionalisation of the civil service shape linguistic expression in the exchange. The analysis focuses on self- and addressee reference and the distributions of the relevant pronouns and nouns according to the direction of institutional distance crossing. Contrary to the predictions of social distance theory, where person deixis and self-presentation through first person pronouns are constrained in letters sent up the social (and family) hierarchies, the institutional inferiors in the Colonial Office do not avoid self-reference in the letters sent 'up' (its incidence is similar to the frequencies of 'I' in personal correspondence; cf. Palander-Collin 2009: 112). On the other hand, institutional superiors do not use more, but considerably fewer, self-referential pronouns in the letters sent 'down'. Consequently, Colonial Office correspondence emerges as a local domain characterised by unique patterns of self- and addressee reference, corroborating the precedence of institutional factors over other determinants of person reference, i.e. the domain where language and identity interface is most profound.

Minna Palander-Collin and Ina Liukkonen also focus on powerful institutions and their regulatory mechanisms that very closely guide identification processes for well-specified institutional roles, such as that of a defendant in a court of law. The data for the study are drawn from the Old Bailey corpus. In this database, the witness is the dominant speaker in quantitative terms, with the victims, defendants, lawyers and judges taking up much less space in the interaction. The authors of the paper focus on the positioning of one of the less prominent roles, the defendants against the court and the crime they have (allegedly) committed. This position is investigated via the mechanisms of stance-taking operationalised in two models that rely on evaluation, positioning and alignment, orientation, attitude, and generality respectively. The latter, i.e. the model of discourse stance, is investigated via keyword and cluster analysis. The analysis results in a stance cline ranging from guilty, to factual and ignorant, to not-guilty positions. Stance-taking, viewed as an identity construction process, emerges as a complex act which can be observed on several levels: starting with broader social and societal practices, and ending with specific contexts in place and time where defendant discourse and individual speech turns are seen to occur.

Finally, Isabel Ermida investigates conflictual stance-taking in comment sections of the British *Mail Online* newspaper website, another public site functioning as a forum for grievances. The paper scrutinizes the case of a young unemployed couple with six children asking Social Security for a four-bedroom flat. The participation setting is a complex one: the plurality of CMC results in the commentators venting their own frustrations over issues of unemployment, housing or parenting. As a result, the online conversation becomes a “multi-topic argument”, where polarised social ideologies are voiced, sometimes in a violent and unrestricted manner such as hate speech. In the paper, three types of disagreement are analysed: backgrounded, hedged, and foregrounded disagreement are manifested through more or less explicit linguistic and discursive strategies. Ermida provides a comprehensive overview of linguistic forms through which disagreement is expressed while she matches the degree of disagreement with the conventional Brown – Levinson (1987) take on superstrategies of politeness. Moreover, the analysis is set against the discursive theory of (im)politeness in that it approaches relational work in the perspective of face management. The contribution also offers a useful overview of approaches to disagreement and conflict in the more general perspective of (public) discourse(s).

The papers in this collection are based on texts that belong to (public) discourses on account of their accessibility, high visibility as well as the communicative setting that occasions from the joint efforts of specific communities, or mutually interconnected groups. Through the public medium, regardless of time or space, many such groups have engaged in identity construction processes integrated in the expression of dissent against specific social ideologies or beliefs. Frequently, and typically in CMC, interaction reveals polarised social ideologies that willingly exploit convenient and consequence-free discussion sites (Ermida). Not only mainstream mind-sets and beliefs, but also marginalised identities have achieved a degree of empowerment through public discourse, either in a relatively short time span through group internal strategies (Limatius), or as part of a profound, general social transformation that had taken decades (McEney – Baker). Some contributions have shown that the potential for such empowerment lies within identity construction strategies that seem universal, such as for instance, concealing aspects of identity or full anonymity, norm-setting stance or manipulating the prototypes and expectation defaults (Sairio and Cesiri). Some settings, like institutional ones, however, feature some less common, locally-bound identity strategies that involve responsibility sharing and hierarchical distribution of authority (Włodarczyk). In general, all identity construction occurs on multiple levels of human activity and

is manifest on different levels of language and discourse at the same time (Palander-Collin – Liukkonen). We hope that the evolving notion of social identities within the public sphere will continue to attract an increasing range of linguistic approaches in the future.

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