"HEY THERE! I AM USING WHATSAPP": THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN A CORPUS OF ROMANIAN USERS' WHATSAPP STATUSES

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Abstract: *Self-presentation and identity construction have been the focus of research both in naturally-occurring conversation and digital communication. With respect to digital communication, a significant body of theoretical and applied research has focused on social networking sites (especially Facebook, Twitter), blogs, chatrooms, etc., while other means of digital communication such as WhatsApp have been largely disregarded. This article addresses the kind of self-presentation Romanian users provide for others in their WhatsApp profile statuses. Its aim is twofold. Firstly, it provides a classification of WhatsApp profile statuses as it emerged from the analyses of my empirical data. Secondly, this work examines the extent to which Romanian users tend to employ humour as a self-presentation strategy on WhatsApp. To this purpose, a corpus of 120 WhatsApp statuses in Romanian was analysed applying both a quantitative and qualitative methodology. This article also intends to make a contribution to the increasing interest in the pragmatic approach to digital discourse.*

Keywords: *self-presentation; WhatsApp; Romanian; profile status; digital communication; incongruity; intertextuality.*

1. Introduction

The title of this article is inspired by Goffman's sociological analysis (1959). In his seminal study, Goffman differentiates between the roles that we play in society and the real identity that is hidden behind the "social facade". This differentiation applies to digital communication,[1] where users' identities often remain backstage in intimacy, while other electronic identities play their role in the visible area of the social stage.

With our ever-increasing use of technology and digital communication, self-presentation takes place not only in face-to-face communication but also digitally on various social media platforms, through applications for text messaging, in the form of the *profile* or *user status*, not

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[1] Traditionally, the term computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been employed. However, this term no longer represents the kind of communication that may take place using other devices such as smartphones or tablets. For this reason, digital discourse and digital communication are increasingly being used.

to mention the more traditional forms such as email or SMS. As argued by Attrill (2015), different settings will lead to different types of self-presentation. This article addresses self-presentation on *WhatsApp*.

In the case of *WhatsApp*, the default status is "Hey there! I'm using WhatsApp". The application also offers users the possibility to choose from a range of automatically generated default statuses, mostly showing their degree of availability (Available, Busy, I can't talk, only WhatsApp, Low bat, Only emergency calls, I'm sleeping) or their location (At School, In the cinema, At work, At a meeting, In the gym). However, most users are likely to edit their own status, by manually typing a status of their own choice in the character gap provided by the application.

This option for personalization is exploited by most users to present themselves in a way which makes them unique and different from the others. Most *WhatsApp* users tend to carefully select the status and their profile picture that other users will see whenever they exchange phone numbers.

This article addresses the kind of self-presentation Romanian users provide for others in their *WhatsApp* profile statuses from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Firstly, it provides a classification of *WhatsApp* profile statuses as it emerged from the analyses of my empirical data. This empirical data is then subjected to a quantitative analysis. Secondly, this work examines whether Romanian users tend to employ humour as a self-presentation strategy on *WhatsApp*. This article also intends to make a contribution to the increasing interest in the pragmatic approach to digital discourse (Yus, 2018; Attrill, 2015; Dayter, 2016; Bou-Franch, 2021).

2. Literature review
Self-presentation and identity construction have been the focus of research both in naturally-occurring conversation and digital communication. With respect to digital communication, a significant body of theoretical and applied research has focused on social networking sites (especially *Facebook, Twitter*), blogs, chatrooms, etc. (cf. Papacharissi 2011; Bronstein 2012; van Dijck 2013; Gruber, 2021; Mey, 2021) with less attention being paid to other means of digital communication such as *WhatsApp* (see, however, Sanchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya 2015a, 2015b; Sampietro, 2019). However, with 2 billion active users worldwide, *WhatsApp* is progressively calling for scholarly attention. The majority of studies up to now approached the topic from a sociological perspective, mainly addressing the social effects of *WhatsApp* on its users (Devi and Tevera 2014; O'Hara et al. 2014; Plana et al. 2015, among others). However, a linguistic approach to online communication via *WhatsApp* adds a wider perspective, "exhibiting interesting interface evolutions *for a pragmatic analysis*" (Yus, 2017a: 75).

Most studies which adopted a linguistic perspective focused on the multimodal nature of *WhatsApp* (cf. da Fonte and Caiado 2014) or its use of typographical variation like *textese* (cf. Sanchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya 2015a). In their seminal study, Calero-Vaquera and Vigara (2014) offer a comparative approach to communication via *WhatsApp*, Messenger and SMS, highlighting their hybrid and multimodal nature. Their study offers a classification of discursive features into *extra-textual*, *intra-textual* and *para-textual* characteristics.

More recently, Yus (2017a) addressed *WhatsApp* "conversations" from a relevance theoretic perspective, focussing on phatic talk. Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez's (2018) study offers a speech act theoretic account of requests in *WhatsApp* interactions among Mexican Spanish users. Their findings document a preference for conventionally indirect politeness strategies and for a consistent use of syntactic modification.

However, most of these studies paid little attention to how *WhatsApp* users choose to present themselves in the profile status (although see Sanchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya 2015a). The present study contributes evidence to self-presentation provided by Romanian users in their *WhatsApp* profile statuses, with special focus on how humour is used as a self-presentation strategy.

2.1. Humour

The study of humour has led to well-established theoretical frameworks for analysis, such as the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) (Raskin 1985) or the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (Attardo and Raskin 1991; Attardo 2001), which is a revised[2] version of SSTH, the relevance-based model proposed by Yus (2003), or the Adaptation-Relevance model (Ma and Jiang, 2013).

In his interdisciplinary work, Palmer (2003) points out that humour is a phenomenon worthy of academic research. Moreover, according to Wyer and Collins (1992), humour plays a crucial role in self-presentation and hence identity formation:

> Humor is a fundamental ingredient of social communication. It is a rare conversation in which at least one participant does not try to elicit laughter at some point or does not respond with amusement to something another has said or done. Jokes, witticisms, and other humorous verbal and nonverbal behaviors are commonplace in social

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[2] Whereas the SSTH is a semantic theory of humour, the GTVH is a more general linguistic theory in the sense that it includes other areas of linguistics as well, such as textual linguistics, the theory of narrativity, and pragmatics broadly conceived.

interaction situations and can have a major impact on the quality of the interactions. For example, one's interpretation of a stranger's remarks as humorous can influence the impression one forms of that person.   (Wyer and Collins 1992: 663)

Linguistic approaches to humour have demonstrated that humour follows certain patterns, being framed in such a way that it can be identified as humour by recipients (cf. Norrick 1989, 1993; Attardo 2001). These studies focused on the linguistic mechanisms of conversational humour, addressing devices such as puns (see Norrick 1993; Otake and Cutler 2013), repetition and pinning (see Tannen, 2007; Bertrand and Priego-Valverde 2011), (fictitious) reported speech (see Tannen, 2010; Guardiola and Bertrand 2013; Bertrand and Priego-Valverde 2011; Priego-Valverde 2016) or *intertextuality* (see Kotthoff 2002; Tsakona 2018), which "occurs any time one text suggests or requires reference to some other identifiable text or stretch of discourse, spoken or written" (Norrick 1989: 117). According to Palmer (2003), a key element of humour is the transgression of normalcy which is closely related to the *incongruity-resolution* pattern proposed by Suls (1972, 1977; see also Dynel 2016 and Yus 2016, 2017b).

2.2 Humour and digital communication

As Baym (1995) points out, digital communication was initially regarded as a "medium inhospitable to humour". In her seminal study of humour in computer-mediated communication, Baym argues that this medium of communication can also be used for humour and that this kind of humorous performance is worth investigating:

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is often seen as a means of distributing information, of increasing organizational efficiency, of creating electronic democracy, or of challenging traditional hierarchies. It is rarely seen as a means of making people laugh. Yet CMC can be, and is, used as a forum for humorous performances […] Analysis of humour is important because CMC research has been slow to address the formation of group identity and solidarity, though such phenomena occur in on-line groups and are negotiated, in part, through humour.   (Baym 1995)

Baym (1995) focused her analysis on one of Usenet newsgroups[3] on soap operas and demonstrated that this kind of humorous performance plays an

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[3] Usenet newsgroups were similar to present day forums, *Facebook* common interest groups or simultaneous TV-watching while Twitting.

important role in constructing group solidarity, group identity, and individual identity in CMC. Similarly, Holcomb's (1997) study of spontaneous jokes made by students interacting in a synchronous classroom chat showed that humour plays an important role in boosting group solidarity. Moreover, Holcomb found that humour might trigger asymmetric relationships by leaving out those who (i) did not get the joke, (ii) chose not to laugh and (iii) were laughed at rather than with (Holcomb 1997: 4).

In recent years, a growing body of research on digital humour and its functions documented its pervasiveness and its multifaceted nature reflected in a multitude of forms (and genres) such as GIFs, memes, collages, remixes of videos, YouTube videos, etc. (*cf*. Wen et al. 2015; Dynel 2016; Marone 2017; Yus 2017b, 2018, among others).

Thus, humour has been shown to "pervade the rhetorical process of forming and maintaining online groups" (Hübler and Bell 2003: 278) and to be instrumental in enhancing community bonding, the feeling of connectivity, of peer validation (Norrick 1993; Yus 2018). Apart from its role in boosting group identity, humour also plays a crucial role in constructing personal identity and individualization, e.g., when "creating something beyond the norms imposed by the group" (Yus 2018: 124).

Regarding the display of humour on *WhatsApp* statuses, a main aspect that should be taken into account is that they stand in marked contrast to other types of humour such as the humour in naturally-occurring conversation. *WhatsApp* statuses can be viewed as much less of a "situated discursive practice" (Kotthoff 2006). Unlike, other types of humour (e.g. canned jokes), *WhatsApp* humorous statuses are mostly "disembodied" and users cannot see their interlocutors' reactions or the effect their humour has triggered on others – i.e., whether their status is perceived as funny or not, it is understood as a joke or as a mere obscure comment, etc. Thus, Kotthoff's views on conversational humour do not fully apply to the specific genre of *WhatsApp* statuses:

> Humorous activities are thoroughly dialogical and very context-sensitive. The relationship of those present, along with their disposition and moods, play an important role. When I tell someone a joke, I watch for signs of amusement. If the listener is willing to cooperate, s/he will let me finish, and will then smile, laugh, or respond in some way to the humorous potential. If the listener did otherwise, she would be defining my joke as a dud. It is this dialogicity, which inhibits timid persons, strangers, or people of lower status from joking in many contexts. They fear the embarrassment of not eliciting the appropriate reaction.   (Kotthoff 2006: 8)

The role of humour in *WhatsApp* statuses together with its subsequent effects in self-presentation has been under-researched. Moreover, to my knowledge, there is no such analysis on Romanian users of *WhatsApp*. This present study is meant to fill this gap.

3. Methodology

The present study is based on a corpus of empirical data gathered during a month, with the aid of two other *WhatsApp* users. The corpus includes 120 *WhatsApp* statuses collected from Romanian users of *WhatsApp*. Most of the statuses included in this analysis are in Romanian. However, some are in English and some involve Romanian/English code-mixing. To ensure both the ethics and validity of the data, the following criteria were taken into consideration:

i. Users below the age of 18 were excluded given their vulnerability as minors.

ii. All proper names and photographs that could identify the users were deleted to preserve users' full user privacy. All users were hence tagged according to their age and gender.

iii. To guarantee the validity of the gathered sample, the same number of users was allotted to each cell (i.e. female and male users in each age group)

My corpus includes 120 *WhatsApp* statuses collected from informants belonging to five age groups (20 years-old, 30 years-old, 40 years-old, 50 years-old and 60 years-old) and of both genders, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. The stratification of the sample by age and gender/Age and gender of the informants

Age	Gender	
	Male	**Female**
20s	12	12
30s	12	12
40s	12	12
50s	12	12
60s	12	12
Subtotal	60	60
Grand total	**120**	

4. Data analysis

This section addresses Romanian empirical data both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Section 4.1 includes an overview of the data, taking into account the classifications proposed in the literature (Sanchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya, 2015). In Section 4.2, the focus of analysis is on the content of

statuses and frequency of self-generated statuses in contrast to default statuses such as "Hey there! I'm using *WhatsApp*." Section 4.3 discuses humorous statuses from a qualitative perspective, trying to ascertain the type of humour employed in their *WhatsApp* statuses by Romanian users.

4.1. *WhatsApp* statuses: a typology

Founded in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum, former employees of Yahoo!, *WhatsApp* is "a freeware and cross-platform instant messaging service for smartphones." Koum named the application to sound like "what's up". *WhatsApp* allows users to send text messages and voice messages, make voice and video calls, and share images, videos, documents, user locations, and audio files, phone contacts and voice notes.

The application allows users to edit their own profile information by adding a photograph, and a textual (or multimodal) status. The statuses can be either *automatically-generated* or *self-generated*. Automatically-generated statuses are those where users simply choose one of the statuses provided by default. In the case of *WhatsApp*, the main default status is "Hey there! I am using *WhatsApp*", but users may choose from the following range of 11 other automatically-generated statuses. These default statuses can either show the user's degree of availability (Available; Busy; I can't talk, only *WhatsApp*; Low battery; Only emergency calls; I'm sleeping) or places where they might be (At School; In the cinema; At work; At a meeting; In the gym) and which might also determine whether they are available to engage in chat or not.

In selecting an automatically-generated status, my subjects will opt either for the main default one or for one of the 12 automatically-generated statuses, using either Romanian or English, as shown in (1).

(1) a. [Female – 40s] Hey there! I am using WhatsApp
   b. [Female – 50s] Bună! Folosesc WhatsApp.
   c. [Female – 30s] Salut! Folosesc WhatsApp.
   d. [Female – 50s] Disponibil/ă
   e. [Female – 40s] Nu pot vorbi, scrieți-mi pe WhatsApp
         [I can't talk, only *WhatsApp*]

Self-generated statuses are those where users manually type a status of their own choice in the 139-blank character gap provided by the app. A self-generated status affords a wider linguistic diversity. My subjects will employ Romanian, English, Romanian/English code-switching, Italian or German. Within the category of **self-generated statuses**, my subjects have used one of the following options:

(i) They may choose a purely **textual status**, as in (2),[4] which can be in Romanian, English or may involve code-switching:

(2) a. [Female – 50s] *Professional procrastinator*
    b. [Female – 30s] *It seemed forever stopped today …*
    c. [Female – 50s] *Înainte să alergi, trebuie să înveți să mergi* ☺
    [Before running, learn how to walk]
    d. [Female – 40s] *De la ora 4, <u>Job 2 Family</u>*[5]
          [Since 4 p.m., Job 2 Family]

(ii) They may choose a **quote**, explicitly marking it as such (i.e. using quotation marks and author name):

(3) [Female – 40s] *"If you upgrade your projector you can have a better movie." D. Chopra*

(iii) They may leave it **blank**, choosing not to write anything at all.
(iv) They may opt for a purely **iconic status** by using only *emoji*, as in (4):

(4) a. [Female-50s] 🌳 🌈 🌤️ 🌈 🌳
    b. [Male – 20s] 👐

(v) Last but not least, users may choose a **hybrid status** displaying either text and emoji or text (e.g. 5a and 5b) and some other symbol (e.g. 5c):

(5) a. [Male-40s] *Alergic la pufuleți!* 😎
       [Allergic to corn puffs 😎]
    b. [Female – 40s] *Stop dreaming, start doing* 💪😛
    c. [Female – 40s] ****fără stare****
        [***without any status***]

4.2. *WhatsApp* statuses: distribution and frequency

As already mentioned, *WhatsApp* users have two main choices when it comes to editing their profile information and status: (1) using a default/automatically-generated status (i.e. the default status "Hey there! I am using *WhatsApp*" or one of the eleven auto-generated statuses) or (2) editing

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[4] All the examples are taken from my corpus. They are all preceded by sociological information regarding the gender and age group of the informant in square brackets and followed by their translation into English when originally in Romanian.

[5] Underlining shows the part of the sentence involving in code-switching.

their status themselves (i.e., self-generated status). Table 2 sums up these results:

Table 2. Distribution and frequency of *WhatsApp* statuses for Romanian users

	Type of realization	Number of tokens (n=120)	Ratio
I	**Default/Automatically-generated**	60	50%
II	**Self-generated:**	60	
II a.	Textual	25	20.83%
II b.	Textual – quote + quotation marks & author name	2	1.66%
II c.	Iconic	6	5%
II d.	Hybrid	14	11.66%
II e.	Blank	13	10.83%
	TOTAL	**120**	**100%**

As **Table 2** shows, automatically-generated statuses (including the default one) and self-generated ones are evenly distributed. Within the category of **automatically-generated statuses**, the overwhelming majority of the users opt for the "Hey there! I'm using *WhatsApp*" by default (54 tokens, 45%). The rest of the automatically-generated statuses have minor occurrences such as "Available" (2 tokens, 1.66%), "I can't talk, only *WhatsApp*," (2 tokens, 1.66%) and one token for "At work," (0.83% of all the automatically-generated statuses), "At the gym" (0.83%). With regard to **self-generated statuses**, 22.49% of my Romanian subjects opt for editing their status using purely textual means – i.e., they write their own text in the 139-character available blank, without resorting to emoji.

Most of these users who opt for the default status are above the age range of 40 years old. When asked why they chose the default option, their answers showed that they find editing such information irrelevant or that they didn't know editing is possible. Alternatively, there seems to be a preference among younger users for hybrid or purely iconic statuses. However, it is beyond the scope of the present study to correlate age and gender with the specific preferences of users in terms of status realization.

In the next section, my analysis will focus on how Romanian users use and exploit self-generated statuses for a humorous effect with a view to presenting themselves. It is important to point out that blank and purely iconic statuses are outside the scope of the present analysis. The former, for reasons too obvious to be mentioned, the latter, due to their wide open, often

ambiguous interpretation. For instance, the example in (4a) shows the user as displaying an emotion of serenity and joy, while she might be describing a place, some scenery, a state of mind, or all of that simultaneously. Thus, my analysis will exclusively focus on **textual** and **hybrid statuses** (i.e. 41 tokens, 34.15%) where humour or attempts at it are likely to be encountered.

4.3 Humorous statuses

My corpus of Romanian users' statuses includes 14 tokens of humorous statuses (11.66%). This section focuses on the analysis of these 14 tokens with the view to identifying the resources employed by Romanian users to trigger humour (either successfully or not). My analysis furnishes empirical evidence that Romanian users of *WhatsApp* resort to two macro-strategies to trigger humour: **intertextuality** and **incongruity**. However, these two macro-strategies should not be viewed as **dichotomous**. Rather, these strategies overlap, as users may employ them simultaneously. However, for the sake of methodological clarity, I will address them separately.

4.3.1 Intertextuality

We owe the concept of intertextuality to the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who writes in his classic work, *Rabelais and His World*:

> Medieval parody, especially before the twelfth century, was not concerned with the negative, the imperfections of specific cults, ecclesiastical orders, or scholars which could be the object of derision and destruction. For the medieval parodist everything was without exception comic. Laughter was as universal as seriousness; it was directed at the whole world, at history, at all societies, at ideology.
>
> (Bakhtin, 1984: 84)

In his seminal essay on intertextuality and humour, Norrick (1989:117) expands this notion arguing that intertextuality "occurs any time one text suggests or requires reference to some other identifiable text or stretch of discourse, spoken or written".

The analysis of my data shows that intertextuality is the strategy most frequently employed by Romanian *WhatsApp* users when they choose a humorous self-generated status (71% of the cases). Within this group, the most frequent kind of intertextuality consists of those statuses whose users re-enact source texts belonging to computer jargon or mobile phones, like (6) or (7) or catchy sentences used in advertisements (8) or romance novels (9):

(6) [Male-30s] *Mă resetez* 🙂

[I'm resetting] 🙂

(7) [Female-50s] *Mi se descarcă bateria*
[Low battery]

(8) [Female-40s] *Prețioasă și unică asemenea unui diamant*[6] ☺
[Precious and unique like a diamond ☺]

(9) [Female – 50s] Înainte să alergi, trebuie să înveti să mergi ☺
[Before you can run, you have to learn how to walk ☺]

As shown in examples (6)-(9), such cases are, in general, framed by emoji (or classic emoticons) signalling the user's humorous intention. It can be argued that intertextuality may generate feelings of mutuality, alluding to mutual experiences, and hence of connectivity, thus adding an emotion-laden emphasis on relationships. For example, in the case of (6), the user resorts to computer jargon, which might link him to those friends of his with whom he shares relaxing timeout from everyday stress. In (8), the jocular status relies on the Teilor advertisement for diamond jewellery heavily broadcasted on Romanian TV Channels during the Christmas holidays. The status is intended as a humorous reminder addressed to the user's partner that she would like a diamond ring as a Christmas present.

On a somewhat similar note, the status in (9) brings to mind a quote from E.L. James' erotic romance novel *Fifty Shades Darker*, while reversing the order of the two clauses in the sentence and adding a slightly humorous flavour to it by means of the smiley face emoticon. Thus, a somewhat serious implicit meaning ("we have to be patient when learning; we cannot do difficult tasks before we can do easy tasks") is conveyed in a more playful manner.

Also related to popular culture are those statuses which mock inspirational statuses/quotes (see Section 4.2), as in (10):

(10) [Female-60s] Smile… that kills the enemy ☺

In (10) the user is mocking a(n) (inspirational) quote, adding a humorous touch by means of the emoji. The emoji manages to mitigate its face-threatening nature, with the effect that part of its aggressiveness is softened.

Finally, a significant part of the sub-set of self-generated statuses (with 28% of the occurrences) includes statuses which creatively re-enact the default statuses the app actually offers, as in (11) to (13):

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[6] The status is an allusion to, and a slight variation, of the Teilor advertisement for diamond jewellery broadcasted on Romanian TV Channels: "De Crăciun, fii asemenea unui diamant: prețioasa și unică"(On Christmas, be like a diamond: precious and unique).

(11) [Male-50s] *Hey there! I'm NOT using WhatsApp*

(12) [Female-40s] ****fără stare****
    Without Status
    [***Without any status***]

(13) [Female-30s] *În sedință cu pisica*
    In a meeting with my cat
    [At a meeting with my cat]

This type of creative intertextuality illustrated in (11) - (13) is the most frequent one my users resort to. The explanation behind this choice might be related to the fact that the source text is easily recognizable by most *WhatsApp* users (except, perhaps, for those who ignore how to edit their profile information). Thus, this strategy seems to be a simple and effective way of presenting oneself not only as witty, creative, but also as having the know-how to play with default statuses.

Incongruity
Etymologically derived from the Latin word "*incongruus*" (< in- 'not' + *congruus* 'agreeing, suitable'), being *incongruous* is synonymous to lacking harmony, conformity, consistency or propriety[7]. Incongruity has traditionally been considered, in the literature, a core aspect of humour (Suls 1972, 1977, 1983; see also Koestler 1964; Shultz 1972; Forabosco 1992; among many others).

       However, it should be pointed out that incongruity on its own cannot trigger humour. On the contrary, incongruity on its own may only lead to non-humorous puzzlement. Incongruity involves some element of confusion, tension, doubt, disagreement, or some kind of discord, all of which can be, as Kant argues, rather displeasing. In order for incongruity to generate humour, *resolution of incongruity* is required. It is accepted in the literature (Attardo, 1994; Dynel, 2011, 2012, 2013; Forabosco, 1992, 2008; Martin, 2007) that humour comprehension processing involves incongruity detection and its resolution:

> *Incongruity* and resolution is defined as cognitive mastery. Seen from this perspective, both the perception of the incongruity and its resolution are essential components for the humour process.
>
> (Forabosco 1992: 45)

Thus, incongruity is considered a *sine qua non* for triggering humour, and it is also used as the 'acid test' for it (Dynel 2016).

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[7] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/incongruous

Puns are a classic case of incongruity. As an illustration, we have already considered example 10 above, where the pun is used in combination with other resources, repeated below as (14), for convenience:

(14) [Female-60s] Smile… that kills the enemy ☺

The incongruity in (14) is self-evident: the script initially activated, in the first part of the status, is unexpectedly confronted by its humorous second part.

Incongruous statuses may also involve paradox, where users divide their status into two parts which convey two opposing meanings, causing, thus, a certain surprise. As an illustration, consider the oxymoron in (15), where the emoji contradicts the verbal part of the status:

(15) [Male-40s] Without glasses ... 😎

Conclusions

Self-presentation and identity construction have been the focus of research both in naturally-occurring conversation and digital communication. With respect to digital communication, a significant body of theoretical and applied research has focused on social networking sites (especially Facebook, Twitter), blogs, chatrooms, etc., while other means of digital communication such as WhatsApp have been largely disregarded. Moreover, to my knowledge the topic of self-presentation in digital communication has not been researched so far in Romanian linguistics. This article attempted to fill this gap by focusing on the kind of self-presentation Romanian users provide for others in their *WhatsApp* profile statuses, making thus a contribution to the increasing interest in the pragmatic approach to digital discourse.

The aim of this study was to answer the following research questions: (1) what are the most common discursive realisations of WhatsApp statuses Romanian users employ?, and (2) do Romanian users employ humour as a self-presentation strategy on *WhatsApp*?

To answer these research questions and achieve my objectives, I collected a corpus of 120 *WhatsApp* statuses in Romanian. The participants belong to five age groups (i.e. 20s 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s+). In each age group, they are equally distributed in two gender groups (males and females). They represent a wide range of age, sex, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. My empirical data were then subjected to both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis.

With regard to the first question, *WhatsApp* statuses employed by Romanian users can be grouped in two major categories: automatically-generated (60 tokens) and self-generated statuses (60 tokens). Then, within

the latter, five sub-typologies were identified: textual (25 tokens; 20.83%), quote + quotation marks & author name (2 tokens; 1.66%), iconic (6 tokens; 5%), hybrid (14 tokens; 11.66%), blank (13 tokens; 10.83%).

Thus, 50% of the total sample made an attempt to modify the default status provided by *WhatsApp*. This can be interpreted as revealing the need that most users have to fully complete this character-limited, rather innocent communicative space in order to construct their "online persona", (on digital identities, see also Thompson, 2008; Thorne et al., 2015).

With regard to the second question, results show that Romanian users who contributed to my corpus employ humour on 14 out of 60 occasions of self-generated statuses, rendering a ratio of 11.66%. Humour, therefore, cannot be argued to be a preferred strategy for self-presentation. This choice may be accounted for in terms of the potential risks it entails, i.e. being misunderstood, appearing to others as an ironic or sarcastic character, etc.

As for the strategies employed to display humour in their profile statuses, Romanian users mostly resort to two major strategies: *intertextuality* and i*ncongruity*. However, it is difficult to draw a clear-cut dividing line between intertextuality-based statuses and those involving incongruity. Rather, these strategies overlap, as users may employ them simultaneously. My informants often resort to intertextuality when they re-enact source texts belonging to computer jargon or mobile phones, or catchy sentences used in advertisements or romance novels.

An analysis of the possible humorous effects these statuses might trigger on other *WhatsApp* users was outside the scope of the present study. Subsequent discussion with my informants revealed that the main reason why they chose humorous self-generated statuses was to attempt to boost their own image as fun and witty. Future research, however, is intended to elicit these reactions via questionnaires and interviews to find out the effects self-presentations intended as humorous or witty might trigger on other *WhatsApp* users. Moreover, a wide range of such effects may be hypothesized: propositional, non-propositional, positive or negative (cf. also Yus 2018).

Furthermore, in completing their statuses my informants used Romanian, English, Romanian-English code-switching, Italian and German. Thus, it would be worth exploring the reasons why many users express their statuses in a language that is not their mother tongue. Explanations behind this choice may be varied, ranging from an attempt to construct a more sophisticated digital identity to an attempt to prevent part of the contacts from understanding the message.

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