Introduction

Networked practices of emotion and stancetaking in reactions to mediatized events and crises

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This introduction to the Special Issue on Networked Emotion and Stancetaking summarizes the individual and collective contribution of the included five research articles. We argue for the relevance of discourse-pragmatic theories, methods, and concepts for furnishing cross-disciplinary perspectives into the study of emotion online. Such perspectives are arguably needed in order to clarify the intricate connections between (re)presentations of emotion online and changing practices of news-making and news consumption, story sharing and participation, and public stancetaking in social media and beyond. We propose that empirical analyses of *networked practices of stancetaking* – epistemic, affective, or narrative – can pinpoint the construction and dissemination of different types of participant positions and stances, including multimodal ones, as well as the creation and uptake of specific frames for interpreting events and crises affectively.

Keywords: networked emotion, affect, mediatization, stance, stancetaking, participation

1.   Introduction

This special issue grew out of a panel on the mediatization of affect in reactions to global events and crises presented at the 15th International Pragmatics Association Conference (IPrA 2017), which took place in Belfast, Northern Ireland (16–21 July 2017). The panel focused on empirical, language-focussed approaches to the study of emotion, sharing, and participation and examined specific cases of reactions to highly mediatized events and crises across different social media platforms.

   The present collection includes five research articles developed from that panel, which both individually and collectively argue for the relevance of

discourse-pragmatic theories, methods, and concepts in the cross-disciplinary study of networked emotion. Such perspectives are arguably needed in order to clarify the intricate connections between (re)presentations of emotion online and changing practices of news-making and news consumption, story sharing and participation, and public stancetaking in social media and beyond.

2.   Reactions to crises and emotions

All the articles in this Special Issue examine reactions to events in the "real world" that people learn about through the media. These range from sudden, unexpected events, such as death events, including terrorist attacks and celebrity death to specific socio-political crises, such as Brexit, which have attracted intense reactions from local and global publics. The connection between offline disruptive news events and their online reactions create *affective publics* (Papacharissi 2015), whose reactions – from condolences to solidarity or from sadness to anger – stem from their private spheres and are made public in social media (Giaxoglou et al. 2017; Johansson 2017).

In digital cultures of participation and sharing, emotions – understood, here, as inter-subjective and situated – are experienced and (re)presented in *mediated* ways, i.e. they are transmitted and communicated via different media. In addition, emotions are *mediatized*, that is they are submitted to, or become dependent on, the media and their logic (Hjarvard 2008, 113). Increasingly, they also get closely intertwined with social media affordances and logics (Georgakopoulou and Giaxoglou 2018).

Despite a growing body of work on *networked emotion* (Benski and Fischer 2014; Giaxoglou et al. 2017), there are still open questions about how emotion is used as a resource for participating to social life online and how such uses are related to processes of mediatization in social media. To address these questions, this collection of articles provides empirical perspectives into networked practices of emotion and stancetaking. 'Networked practices' refer to the two interrelated processes of "being *networked*, i.e. digitally connected to other individuals and groups and being *in the network*, i.e. embedded in the global digital mediascape of the web" (Androutsopoulos 2015, 188). The centrality of emotion in networked practices is particularly evident in the case of reactions to global events and crises on and via social media, where participation takes the form of *networked affect*, a mode of intense and value-laden communication (Hillis et al. 2015).

So far, research in new forms of journalism on and via the micro-blogging platform of Twitter points to how the coverage of events unfolds in *affective news streams* (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012). This shift to participatory

news-making and sharing is also attested in changes in the platform structures of social media: since November 2009, Twitter's tagline changed from "*what are you doing*" to "*what's happening*", reflecting networked users' increasing orientation to the microblogging platform as a reporting machine, rather than as an ego-machine (Weller et al. 2014, xvi). Users post messages, photos, and videos from the ground in the immediate aftermath of breaking news events, such as natural disasters, political crises, attacks, thus providing live coverage in the absence of journalists on the ground (Hermida 2014). Users also retweet and comment on events as they happen, and by doing so, they disseminate the news and (re)frame their interpretation of these events with and for affective publics in modes of interaction that are preferred in that context.

In online environments news is being collaboratively constructed by blending "subjective experience, opinion, and emotion within an ambient news environment" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012, 273) and thus, contribute to the formation of public vernacular discourses (Johansson 2017). News environments attract users who are aligned with each other and get a sense of temporary belonging, while in social media discussions, there are also social actors who disagree and disalign with the stances expressed (Bolander and Locher 2017, 621–624).

A case that illustrates the emergence and spread of stances in participatory news streams is the public reaction to the terrorist shooting at the editorial office of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris, France, on the 7th January 2015. The event was followed by a Twitter conversation that received several millions of tweets worldwide. The reactions were, however, divided: there were expressions of solidarity and sympathy with the magazine and its victims, but also ironic and parodic comments (Johansson & al. 2018). In the week following the attack, the hashtag #JeSuisCharlie quickly trended on Twitter alongside #CharlieHebdo as a narrative resource, creating dividing lines and attesting to the emergence of *ecstatic sharing* as a new mode of witnessing global events online (Giaxoglou 2018). The hashtag #JeSuisCharlie has since received increased media and scholarly attention (see Bouko et al. 2017; Giglietto and Lee 2017; Smyrnaios and Ratinaud 2017).

3.   Acts of stancetaking as a socio-discursive phenomenon

In online news streams, instantaneous and collaborative sharing turns global events into news and promotes particular frames for their interpretation in and through *acts of stancetaking* (Du Bois 2007; Jaffe 2009). Stancetaking is defined by Jaffe (2009, 3) as "taking up a position with respect to the form or the content of one's utterance" and it is considered to be a central property of communication.

The act of taking a stance is, thus, not just a linguistic act, but a social act, which involves an evaluation at one level or another (Du Bois 2007, 140). Du Bois further argues that stance processes mobilize and deploy sociocultural value invoked in the evaluative act with a focus on a precise target that gets selected as salient. As he notes, "stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field" (Du Bois 2007, 63). Acts of stancetaking in interaction are, thus, not solely speaker-centred language phenomena and speaker-centred; they are sequential in that the act of taking a stance often becomes a target for the next speaker's stance. Du Bois (2007, 140) observes that "in many cases the current stance act resonates both formally and functionally with a stance taken in prior discourse. Thus, the value of any stance utterance tends to be shaped by its framing through the collaborative acts of co-participants in dialogic interaction". This social, dialogic conceptualization of stancetaking proves particularly useful for the study of interaction and participation online. Focusing on stancetaking in digital communication, Barton and Lee note (2013, 31) that stance refers to "a position taken by a speaker in relation to what is said and to whom the utterance is directed".

Based on the above, this collection of articles proposes that it is worth studying stancetaking not just as a linguistic phenomenon, but also as a socio-discursive phenomenon embedded into other communicative acts, such as conversing, arguing, (dis)aligning, or narrating. In social media environments, stance is not taken by a single speaker or writer, but it is co-constructed by networked audiences through specific linguistic choices for expressing one's opinion or feelings, using cognitive and/or affective verbs, such as 'I think', 'I feel' as well as drawing on the medium's affordances (e.g. liking a post or reposting it). Stancetaking online is also related to digital narrative practices, whereby tellers take a narrative stance, which allows them to link the telling with the ability to tell now. In the small stories research paradigm, this type of stancetaking has been termed *narrative stancetaking* and it is seen as a form of new media literacy, linked to social media affordances and constraints (Georgakopoulou 2017).

4.   Presentation of the articles

This collection includes articles that analyze a range of global events and crises. Their focus ranges from the exploration of reactions to the Charlie Hebdo attacks in the context of changing forms of journalism and modes of public participation to the examination of reactions to other events that attracted increased media

attention between 2015 and 2017, including reactions to the refugee crisis, the death of David Bowie, and Brexit.

The different papers are concerned with networked practices of (re)presenting and sharing emotion in mediatized contexts where global events are co-constructed as news drawing on and reworking specific kinds of frames of interpretation. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the different articles collectively examine the following questions:

1. How do different actors (e.g. journalists, politicians, and users) tell and share stories of global events and crises?
2. How is emotion represented and shared in these diverse types of online reactions to global events and crises? And more specifically, how is the sharing of emotion online related to social media affordances and constraints?
3. What kinds of stances are being (re)produced in reactions to global events and crises? And how do such stances circulate and get shared?

One of the connecting threads of the articles is the authors' approach to digital communication and news sharing as polymedia, multimodal, and situated interaction, be it on Twitter, Flickr, or Instagram.

A second thread is the concern of individual authors with the notion of stance, even if in slightly different ways. We argue that *networked practices of stancetaking* – epistemic, affective, or narrative – offer a productive way for clarifying how specific frames and interpretations emerge, are taken up, disseminate, and sediment into more or less stable positions and identities. In what follows, we present the key insights of each paper before we conclude with a brief discussion of their collective contribution.

In the first article of the collection, *Marjut Johansson and Veronika Laippala* look at the large-scale social media event #JeSuisCharlie following the terrorist attack in Paris, 2015. Despite the fact that since then, there have been a number of terrorist attacks and mass shootings sadly resulting in even higher numbers of life loss, this event has turned into an emblematic event that somehow foreshadowed reactions to many subsequent events of death 'at home'. The authors examine closely the different types of public affectivity in the context of Twitter 'discussions' (in French) around the event and point to the range of emotional stances and positionings produced, i.e. the way social actors are (inter)subjectively positioned and whether they align or disalign with other participants.

Their study reaffirms the predominance of demonstrations of 'togetherness' expressed in the hashtag #JeSuisCharlie, which are associated with the display (as well as prompting) of alignment with other participants. More importantly, though, the authors also note the lack of uniformity and sustainability of such displays of togetherness. They discuss the emotions of anger and hatred shared

in reactions that some participants voiced either against the values underlying alignment positionings of 'togetherness' or against the practice of ecstatic sharing, i.e. sharing in the instantaneous proximity of the here-and-now. Such acts of stancetaking have less to do with the events, and instead serve to signal group boundaries and identities and to mark disalignment from collective emotional movements through the demonstration of skepticism and even irony.

De Cock and Pizzaro examine the polyvalence of the stem *#jesuis*. More specifically, they focus on its productive use followed by a toponym and show its function not only for texturing affective publics around displays of mourning in reaction to terrorist attacks or other disasters, but also for claiming attention to events often outside the West that are seen as under-represented in the media and social media. The authors suggest that the mass-scale circulation of the hashtag *#JeSuisCharlie* as an act of showing solidarity established a sense of networked affection, which could then be mobilized in many other cases for claiming affective displays and challenging Eurocentric or ethnocentric views. More specifically, the authors found that events that took place in Europe tended to be presented with a higher degree of specificity when compared to events in locations in Africa or even America and Asia. In their study, the authors underline the importance of images, hyperlinks, and emoji in making the case for the worthy mediatization of a particular event.

The analysis of multimodal images is pursued systematically by *Catherine Bouko*, whose article proposes a mixed-methods multimodal approach to the study of 'emotion talk' (Bednarek 2008, 11) on Flickr in the period immediately after the Brexit referendum results. Bouko looks at three categories of emotion talk: *inscribed* (emotion displayed through lexis), *signalled* (emotion displayed through linguistic effects of emotion) and *supported* (emotion displayed through the cognitive evaluation of the cause of emotion). She shows that emotional expression relies on image-text combinations and the use of symbolic or metaphoric content that describes emotion using specific labels or that contains linguistic markers signalling the effects of emotion. Among the main findings of her study are that the expression of *supported emotion* is prevalent, particularly in metaphorical images that fall into five different types: fences and storms, sinking or falling objects, dawns, and torn British flags. These visual metaphors play a central role in the circulation of emotion in ways that are recognizable in specific social and cultural moments that become characteristic of a generation or 'a time'. Like memes or hashtags, such affective posts are described by the author as structures of feeling, which are shareable and amenable to be interpreted in specific ways or further infused with meaning: they are, thus, *socially solvent* (Papacharissi 2015, 116).

David Matley's article also applies a multimodal perspective to the study of affect displays and sharing, in this case the public mourning for a celebrity. Looking at the Instagram posts labelled '#bowie' between 11–16 January 2016, the author points to the range of multimodal affective stancetaking strategies of users as an integral part of indexing online mourning and grief work as a reaction to the death of 'legend' David Bowie (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 2005; Stroebe and Schut 2010). Affective stancetaking strategies in this context are found to form an integral part of constructing fan identities with an online community of mourners. Matley notes emerging norms of online grieving in this case of celebrity death, where the object of stancetaking is not solely the persona(e) of Bowie, but also the mourners themselves, as grieving subjects or as authentic(ated) fans. In celebrity death, then, it is considered appropriate for the persona of the mourner, rather than the mourned, to take centre-stage.

Giaxoglou and Spilioti look at affective stancetaking in the case of public mourning in reaction to the death of three-year old Alan Kurdi in September 2015. The focus, here, is on how the image of the boy's body turned into a shared story that mobilized public emotion and became the symbol of the so-called 'refugee crisis'. This arguably contributed to a shift of negative portrayals of migrants to more positive representations of them as 'refugees.' The authors take a narrative lens to the study of discourse representations of refugees and their uptake and sharing in online contexts. More specifically, the authors focus on identifying story frames in a corpus of Tweets posted as immediate reactions to the image of the drowned boy. The story frames indicate the orientation of the verbal or visual components to the *Taleworld,* that is the world where characters move and live, the *Storyrealm,* that is the storytelling event at the center of which the taleworld lies, or the *Outside world*, i.e. comments about general issues or values (see Young 1987; De Fina 2016).

The authors' interest in story frames is linked to their understanding of these frames as the expression of participants' situated stancetaking and positioning. Story frames are said to index acts of stancetaking which are realized both verbally and visually through the sharing of what is called in this study *visual small stories.* Participation to these stories unfolds in individual contributions or *inter-reactions* that affirm particular modes of participation online. These modes contribute to the creation of a shared story made up of evaluative comments and assessments of the relevance and importance of the death of the boy and the tragic plight of refugees that this death came to symbolize. The sharing of this type of stories is based on the (re)production of iterable stances, through which affective frames for interpreting the story of the boy's death are constructed and disseminated more widely. The focus on story frames is shown to be a productive lens into the dynamics of interaction and participation online that sheds light into the system-

atic ways in which some aspects of stories in circulation in the media and social media get picked up by audiences and reworked in various ways for sharing.

In this special issue the authors collectively show how the notion of *networked practices of stancetaking* – epistemic, affective, or narrative – can clarify different types of participant positions and stances, including multimodal ones, as well as different practices of creating specific frames and interpretations, sharing them, and sedimenting them into more or less stable positions and identities. This special issue calls for further empirical and theoretical work in networked affect that can connect sharing and social media affordances with specific kinds of emotion and stancetaking practices and their associated 'structures' or regimes of feelings that these invoke or crystallize.

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