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A Review of *The Linguistics of Social Media: An Introduction*

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Abstract: *Social Media Linguistics: An Introduction* by Andreea S. Calude is set against the backdrop of the digital communication era, integrating traditional linguistic theories with multimodal language practices on social media. From the perspectives of genre, register, audience design and speech acts, among other analytical dimensions, the book analyzes the systematic features, communicative functions and cultural values of social media language. It combines theoretical elaboration with platform-based case studies, and serves the dual purposes of popularizing academic knowledge as a textbook and conducting in-depth academic research. This paper sorts out the framework and core contributions of the book in three parts: fundamental theories, functional analysis and concluding prospects. It also looks into future research directions of social media linguistics, incorporating cutting-edge fields including generative artificial intelligence, platform algorithms and interdisciplinary research.

Keywords: Social media linguistics; Multimodal communication; Internet language; Discourse analysis

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题目：《社交媒体语言学：导论》评介

摘要：Andreea S. Calude 所著《社交媒体语言学：导论》立足数字传播时代语境，融合传统语言学理论与社交媒体多模态语言实践。该书从体裁语域、受众设计、言语行为等维度，剖析社交媒体语言的系统特征、交际功能与文化价值，兼顾理论阐释与平台案例分析，兼具教材普及与学术研究双重价值。本文从基础理论、功能分析、总结展望三大板块梳理全书框架与核心贡献，并结合生成式人工智能、平台算法及跨学科研究等前沿方向，展望了社交媒体语言学的未来研究路径。

关键词：社交媒体语言学；多模态传播；网络语言；话语分析

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Andreea S. Calude's *The Linguistics of Social Media: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2024) is a timely and pioneering contribution to the field of digital communication research. At present, social media platforms have become the main places for public discussion, identity formation and cultural production. Against this background, Calude's work provides a clear guide to understanding such complex language usages in these digital spaces. This book has a reasonable structure and a solid theoretical foundation, so even if it involves complex ideas, the text is still easy to follow. As a senior lecturer in linguistics at the University of Waikato, Calude has linked traditional linguistic theories with the rapidly changing multimodal language on social media. This monograph not only records the online linguistic phenomena, but also strongly proves the necessity of using serious linguistic science to understand contemporary social interaction. The entire book is organized into ten chapters. It helps people of all academic and professional levels understand online language better. College students and experienced researchers can use this work to learn more about how people build identities, persuade others, form online communities, and create novel expressions on social media. This book makes social media language a rich object worth studying for linguists. It shows readers that tweets, emojis, comments and other posts are not short-lived or unimportant language forms, but meaningful materials that can be studied carefully and systematically.

The book is well-structured and easy to follow. It starts from the basic concepts and then gradually transitions to more complex discussions. The monograph is divided into three main parts. The first part is the foundation. As an introduction, Chapter 1 provides a clear overview of linguistics and social media, and emphasizes the importance of integrating the two. The second part is functional analysis. Chapters 2 to 9 explore various aspects of social media language. Chapter 2 discusses the genre, register and styles of online text. Chapter 3 explains the audience design. Chapter 4 focuses on speech acts. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth analysis of identity performance. Chapter 6 studies the use of metaphors. Chapter 7 uses discourse

analysis to understand online communication. Chapter 8 covers word formation. Chapter 9 discusses language revitalization. These chapters together illustrate the multiple functions of language in the social media contexts. The third part is synthesis. As a conclusion, Chapter 10 summarizes the main findings and emphasizes the ethical considerations in data collection. Possible topics for future research are also put forward in this chapter.

The first part, foundation, only contains Chapter 1, which undertakes the basic work. In this chapter, Calude introduces the main areas of linguistics in simple terms, and also eliminates a common misunderstanding that linguistics only focuses on strict grammar rules. More importantly, this chapter explains the necessity of this book. Calude believes that studying social media language is not an unimportant topic, but an indispensable one. Because these platforms have created unique communication genres, which have their own norms, constraints and creative potential. Calude believes that linguistic analysis is the key to understanding the strategies that underpin (un)successful online communication. This chapter clearly clarifies the main point of this book: social media has changed the way we use language, and this change is important enough to establish an independent research field. This chapter also strongly demonstrates the view that our existing linguistic theories are surprisingly useful for understanding ongoing online conversations.

Chapters 2 to 9 constitute the second part of this book, which is the most important analysis part, that is, functional analysis. Each chapter focuses on an important linguistic concept and shows how the concept helps us understand a specific aspect of social media practice. Chapter 2 draws on Doug Biber's multidimensional analysis (1988), focusing on genre, register and style variation. The framework helps to distinguish linguistic features in different social media genres, such as instant messaging, Reddit "Change My View" threads, and Wikipedia entries. This chapter effectively dismantles the overly simplistic notion of a singular "internet language." Moreover, it elucidates the diversity and multifaceted nature of digital genres. Each genre possesses distinct linguistic characteristics, shaped by its communicative goals, intended audiences, and the particular design of the platform.

Chapter 3 expands the discussion of the above contextual sensitivity through the perspective of audience design (Bell, 1984, 2001). Calude draws on Allan Bell's research to explore how monolingual and multilingual social media users engage in style-shifting. As individuals tailor their linguistic choices to distinct platform contexts, one illustrative example concerns how users respond to unpredictable audiences. Facebook users stand out in the fiercely competitive language market through storytelling, emotional expression, direct engagement and multilingual options. These strategies highlight the complexity of social media communication and also demonstrate users' adaptability to different audiences (Page, 2011; Farina, 2018; Friginal *et al.*, 2017; Tagg & Seargeant, 2014). Code-switching is also a commonly used strategy in TikTok advertising to enhance brand image, reach the target audience and cope with the uncertain audience environments. This chapter clearly shows that the imaginary audience will directly affect the actual language output.

Chapter 4 turns to pragmatics with the help of speech act theory (Austin, 1975). Calude discusses how

people perform different behaviors through language on social media. A case study analyzes LinkedIn users' employment of various self-promotion strategies to shape their professional images. Beyond individual self-representation, the chapter further explores corporate social media practices, revealing notable cross-cultural differences between enterprises (Sun *et al.*, 2021). In digital workplaces, employees work hard to maintain their identity and workplace bonds through language strategies, thus boosting productivity (Darics, 2010; Darics & Gatti, 2019).

Chapter 5 focuses on identity construction. From a performance perspective, Calude explores how people use language, visual and interactive clues to create a flexible and complex online identity. The discussion integrates the views of queer linguistics and the analysis of marginalized groups to show that language can both strengthen and subvert the traditional gender category. Case studies for platforms such as Instagram and TikTok focus on body image and identity construction (Kurtoğlu-Hooton, 2021; Schoofs *et al.*, 2022), as well as the expression of gender and sexual orientation (Sachs *et al.*, 2021; Vizcaíno-Verdú, 2022). These studies point out that identity is not a fixed characteristic, but a fluid construct shaped by contexts and language choices.

Chapter 6 enters the cognitive field, focusing on conceptual metaphors. Calude explains how metaphors shape people's understanding of online and offline abstract experiences. Through some common metaphors such as calling a green lifestyle a "JOURNEY" (Atanasova, 2020), politics a "GAME" (Cervi *et al.*, 2021), or the COVID-19 pandemic a "WAR" (Wicke & Bolognesi, 2020; 2021), she shows how these common frames disseminate via social media, shape public perception, and naturalize specific ideologies. This chapter establishes a close connection between language selection at the micro level and cultural narrative at the macro level.

Chapter 7 focuses on discourse analysis. Calude presents two complementary research methods. One is the top-down move analysis method (Swales, 1981, 1990), which helps to reveal the common discourse moves in a corpus of birth mother letters. The other is a bottom-up, corpus-driven approach, which is used to study the strategic selection of words in media reports related to the Amanda Knox case, so as to reveal how word combinations affect public sentiment (Goulandris & McLaughlin, 2016). Examples from TripAdvisor reviews and YouTube comments further highlight the influence of social media discourse on public opinion and business reputation.

Chapter 8 highlights the creativity and interest of online language by introducing the word formation and grammatical constructions. Two case studies are used to show this: Hashtags¹ can trigger readers' responses, provide complementary comments and emotional content, and often serve humor and wordplay; Internet memes² use specific language strategies to create humorous effects and enhance memory. This chapter strongly argues that the language innovation observed in memes and viral formats is actually a direct extension of human language ability, which is closely related to analogy, pattern recognition and playful

¹ Wikström, P. (2014). "#srynotfunny: Communicative functions on Twitter." *SKY Journal of Linguistics*, 27, 127–152.

² Dynel, M. (2016). "'I has seen image macros!' Advice Animal memes as visual-verbal jokes." *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 660–688.

recombination.

Chapter 9 shows that social media can act as a tool to protect and preserve marginalized languages. The decline in language vitality poses the risk of language endangerment, and in more severe instances, it may result in language extinction. To address this issue, comprehensive language planning is necessary, including status planning, corpus planning and acquisition planning (McCarty, 2018). Some case studies show how speakers of marginalized languages actively participate in this re-imagination process on social media. Digital space has therefore been proven to be used to support endangered languages, promote inter-generational inheritance, and establish speaker communities across geographical distances.

The last part, synthesis, only contains Chapter 10. This chapter connects the themes of the previous chapters and reinforces the main point of this book, that is, social media language is systematic and worthy of attention. Crucially, this chapter raises the discussion to the critical plane of research ethics, emphasizing the urgent need to adopt a responsible approach to protect user privacy and autonomy when collecting and analyzing online data. The chapter ends by laying out a plan for future research, pointing out gaps and opportunities that will inspire the next generation of scholars.

The advantages of Calude's monograph are reflected in its contemporary relevance and excellent readability. The book focuses on present-day language practice across social media platforms, which provides timely analysis for digital communication. It is also successful in helping readers who have not received formal training in linguistics understand complex concepts. The author shows an in-depth understanding of the subject and current research, while always giving priority to teaching.

The work is carefully structured to scaffold understanding. The first chapter provides the necessary foundation to explain the core linguistic principles in clear terms. The following chapters apply this framework in a variety of digital environments to transform abstract theories into concrete applications in reality. Calude always provides a clear operational definition and illustrates it with platform-specific examples. Eight analytical chapters together constitute a clear and comprehensive overview of the field, combining strong empirical evidence with in-depth case studies. The last chapter summarizes these insights, points out the gaps that still exist in the existing knowledge, and puts forward the direction of future research. Through this interdisciplinary integration, Calude effectively repositions social media language from a transient cultural phenomenon to a legitimate and fertile field of language innovation. Therefore, this work has become an important resource for people engaged in the systematic research of language in the digital environment.

Although this book has made considerable achievements, the rapid changes in digital technology inevitably raise new discussions on the future research direction.

Firstly, the publishing process inherently involves a time lag, which creates an unavoidable gap between writing and publication. Calude's work was completed in 2024. It captures a specific moment, but platform dialects never stop evolving. For example, slang and inside jokes on apps such as TikTok may be updated every week, which makes it difficult for any analyst to follow up accurately. We can even see these expressions transferred from one platform to another. Take "TikTok Refugee Language" as an example, this

expression has been modified and remixed on *rednote* (a Chinese social media app). However, the biggest change to come is the rise of artificial intelligence. This book only touches on the edge of the fundamental change that tools like ChatGPT and DeepSeek are bringing about. We're entering a world where a convincing comment, a passionate post, and even a consistent online persona may not be created by humans at all. When a viral tweet or a good review could be made by a robot, we have to rethink some of the most basic questions. Nowadays, what counts as authenticity? How do we define the author's "voice" when it can be manufactured? Studying users' language is not only to figure out how people speak, but also to learn to navigate in an increasingly blurred space between reality and falsehood. This prompts us to think about what makes our digital communication human. The rapid rise of generative AI tools is a paradigm shift that this book can only mention slightly. AI has the ability to generate a large number of persuasive and human-like social media texts, from comments and posts to full-fledged personas, which fundamentally challenges our core concepts of authenticity, authorship and voice. These facts drive people to further explore the nature of trust and the uniqueness of human beings in digital communication.

Secondly, while this book accurately analyzes the language from the user's perspective, a more in-depth examination of the technical intermediary that shapes the user's language still constitutes a key frontier field. Platform algorithms shape our language environment. Investigating this "algorithmic shaping" of discourse is essential for comprehending not only the content expressed online but also the factors contributing to its amplification. This is what makes the synthetic media grow. The increasingly widely used digital human in news, marketing and live streaming is not only a new technology, but also a major change in linguistic performance. The speech and appearance of these entities are digitally constructed, and they create new interactive scenes. In these contexts, authenticity is intentionally created, and user input (such as the code in the comment section) may change the output of digital human in unexpected ways. These scenarios have expanded the discussion on performance, audience and co-construction in unprecedented ways. This leads to a third and more urgent challenge, that is, the dissemination of false and misleading information accelerated by algorithms. Calude's work offers valuable instruments for discourse analysis; however, there is a growing necessity to employ more exact linguistic frameworks to address this issue. These frameworks can include critical discourse analysis, framing theory, and in-depth research on epistemic markers. This method can help people not only spot manipulative content, but also learn how it spreads and influences the audience perception. It ties directly into one of our most pressing social needs: building a public that can better navigate today's messy information landscape. The next wave of social media linguistics should not only teach people how to spot patterns in language, but also enable users to critically evaluate the credibility and intention of what they read, and improve their awareness and control of digital life.

Finally, at the methodology level, the field is developing in a more integrated direction. Calude's employment of case studies and corpus analysis is exemplary and establishes a benchmark for subsequent research. The next step is to combine these macro-level quantitative insights with deep micro-level qualitative understanding. The integration of computational analysis of extensive social media corpora with

ethnographic methods, such as in-depth interviews, digital diaries, or participatory observation, provides a promising path. The combination of methods allows researchers not only to identify a wide range of language trends in millions of data points, but also to retain the subjective meaning and personal intentions of individual users.

While the book has some flaws that are worth noting, it also provides valuable insights and significantly enhances our understanding of the subject. Calude's *The Linguistics of Social Media: An Introduction* is an excellent book for both students and scholars. Its ten chapters integrate theoretical frameworks with real-world cases, offering a well-rounded overview of linguistics within social media contexts. With accessible case analyses, the book enables readers with limited linguistic background to grasp core theories and relate them to everyday digital experiences. Meanwhile, its in-depth discussion of online linguistic practices also makes it a valuable reference for researchers exploring the intersection of linguistics and digital media.

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