

○ **R. E. PAGE, *STORIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA: IDENTITIES AND INTERACTION***

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Ruth E. Page's *Stories and social media: Identities and interaction* offers an interdisciplinary analysis of various forms of social media to explore how different online contexts shape narrative genres. By examining the unique discursive features of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and considering variation between users of these, the author presents a well-rounded and considered account of the different narrative elements in these technologically-driven domains and their use as identity resources. The research presented in this book is of particular interest for discourse analysts and sociolinguists working in the area of computer-mediated communication, and it is also a valuable resource for narrative analysts examining storytelling in emerging electronic contexts.

While Page's analysis is based on a literary critical approach to narratives, this is firmly rooted in a sociolinguistic and discourse analytic mindset. As emphasised in the book's subtitle, Page rejects the decontextualised frameworks of traditional narratological analysis for a focus on the interactive nature of social media and the identity resources these provide. Chapter 1 provides the author's rationale for this, with an overview of early approaches to social media texts (digital narratology, literary-critical narratology, and early work in computer-mediated communication) which highlights the restrictions of analytical methods based on a close reading of texts and reader-text relations to the exclusion of empirical examination of text production and reception. To fully explore narratives in the burgeoning world of social media, Page convincingly argues for a broadening of digital narratology to incorporate contextualised analyses and for the inclusion of discourse analytic and sociolinguistic approaches found in recent computer-mediated communication studies (p.5). To this end, Page extends her textual analysis of social media genres by providing quantitative and qualitative perspectives (the latter including interviews with users and directors of social media sites).

The book may be considered to be broadly divided into two sections. The first half of the book (Chapters 2 to 5) systematically explores different social media genres (discussion forums, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter), while the second half (Chapters 6 to 8) focuses on aspects of storytelling found across different social media (collaborative storytelling, embeddedness, and narrative authenticity). Such a structure allows the technological and discursive features of each social media platform to be examined in detail, while also providing a focussed analysis of overarching narrative features found across social media.

Chapter 2 is devoted to discussion forums, one of the earliest social media genres. The author, drawing on data from a popular body building forum, highlights the different roles participants may take (newcomer, expert, etc.) and the sequencing and embeddedness of narratives in this domain. Page draws on Sacks' (1995) concept of 'Second Stories', the use of stories in response to a preceding story to promote common ground and shared experiences, to explore the relational face work and different identities participants may take on in this genre.

Chapter 3 focuses on blogs, particularly blogs about personal experiences with illness (Page also samples travel blogs as a comparison). Unlike the previous chapter, here Page introduces more quantitative analyses to explore variation between male and female blog authors in areas such as length of blog posts and number of comments. The author uses Labov's (1972) narrative framework and Martin and Plum's (1997) typology of narrative genres to find gender differences in the extent of evaluative devices employed and the emotional reflections these mark.

Chapter 4 concerns the ubiquitous Facebook 'status update', exploring variation across both gender and age. The author examines these 'small stories' in terms of issues of tellability – primarily the rhetorical resources these provide for interaction between author and audience, as well as judgements regarding subject matter. Page positions her analysis in respect to face needs and interactivity (in terms of 'likes' and comments to posts), drawing out differences in the use of stylistic resources between males and females, and older and younger users.

Chapter 5 discusses the relative newcomer to the social media block, Twitter. This social media genre is unique in that it emphasises immediacy and information sharing, and, as such, the author finds the public, professional identity of the user comes to the fore. Page applies Labov's narrative framework, while also drawing on discourse analytic concerns such as intertextuality, to identify links between 'tweets' and other online content.

Chapter 6 sees a slight divergence, moving from single author storytelling to narratives written by multiple people. Drawing on the now-defunct Wikinovel *A Million Penguins*¹ and online storytelling community *Protagonize* (www.protagonize.com), Page investigates the different participant roles in multi-author texts and the situated identities these entail.

Chapter 7 moves on to embeddedness, exploring space and place as narrative resources in the oral history project [*murmur*] (murmurtoronto.ca). Page examines the multimodality and use of deictics in this asynchronous endophoric and exophoric storytelling.

An intriguing feature of social media is broached in Chapter 8: the question of narrative 'authenticity'. Here, Page considers offline versus online identities and the question of impersonation. She details the case of 'lonelygirl15' (lg15.com), purportedly a 16-year-old American girl, who garnered a considerable following for her video blog entries posted on

YouTube, and the subsequent uproar once it emerged that ‘lonelygirl15’ was actually the creation of aspiring filmmakers and played by an actress. She also examines cases of ‘Facebook rape’ (also referred to as *frape*), where a third party accesses a user’s Facebook account and impersonates that user. The author examines these fraudulent Facebook posts in terms of speech act theory and in-groups, with Page noting that being able to detect inauthenticity serves an ‘authenticating function’ for audience members (p.184). While Page herself acknowledges the lack of validity in her data here (sourced from data collected by a student, as well as interviews with victims), this is nevertheless a key concern of social media users, and one which no doubt will see further scholarly attention.

The book concludes with a chapter drawing together the key narrative elements discussed throughout the text, examining the ways in which linearity, tellership, and tellability are shaped by, and embedded within, particular contexts. It ends with a comprehensive outline of future directions for research in this area, presented as a list of research questions and grouped under key areas (multimodality, mobile use, multilingualism, and so on).

As is to be expected in interdisciplinary studies, Page does not strictly adhere to one methodological or analytical approach, but rather draws on a range of frameworks at different points in the book, most notably Ochs and Capps (2001), Labov (1972), and the APPRAISAL framework developed in Systemic Functional Linguistics (e.g. Martin, 2000). Although this results in a somewhat disparate feeling between chapters, it does allow for a nuanced approach to the different genres under consideration and makes this work of relevance to researchers from a range of orientations.

While Page provides detail on the basics of each social media platform, the book is best approached with at least some familiarity of social media. Likewise, some knowledge of linguistics and/or literary studies is useful to fully appreciate the analyses. The book contains a brief glossary of key linguistic and technological terms which, while providing a handy reference for those either new to linguistics or new to social media, feels rather incomplete and omits many of the terms introduced throughout the book.

With its excellent demonstration of how existing theories and frameworks can be applied to new and emerging communicative genres, this book would make a worthy supplementary resource for advanced undergraduate or graduate students in discourse analysis or sociolinguistics courses (it is worth noting also that each chapter is relatively self-contained, making it highly suitable for reading lists). The many text examples and a lack of heavy theoretical discussion make this a highly accessible, engaging book for students and researchers of narratives and storytelling, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, literacy studies and related fields.

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ENDNOTES

- i A joint project between Penguin Books and De Montford University, *A Million Penguins* was an experiment in online fiction with the aim of producing a novel written collaboratively by anyone who wanted to contribute. Much like online encyclopaedia *Wikipedia*, any individual could register as a user, contribute to the narrative, and edit existing content. The project was open from February to March 2007, with 1476 people registered as contributors (Mason & Thomas, 2008). The original website for the project no longer exists.