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Carpenedo, Francielle (2023) Digital and Communicative Affordances in the Translingual Online Space: Insights from Brazilian Food Discourses in the UK. *Modern Languages Open*, 2023 (1). pp. 1-18. ISSN 2052-5397

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.463>

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Digital and Communicative Affordances in the Translingual Online Space: Insights from Brazilian Food Discourses in the UK

FRANCIELLE CARPENEDO 

SPECIAL COLLECTION:
NEW DIRECTIONS
IN DIGITAL MODERN
LANGUAGES
RESEARCH

ARTICLES –
DIGITAL MODERN
LANGUAGES



ABSTRACT

This article will delve into the potential of social media spaces as arenas for processes of identification and community construction, using multilingual data from Brazilian food discourses collected between October 2017 and February 2020 as part of a larger computer-mediated communication (CMC) study. While the study retains its analytical focus on Facebook, and specifically the public company Pages used by Brazilian food outlets in the UK for promotional purposes, it also attends to the interwoven state of online communication. Within this context, digital affordances and actions are part of the accomplishment of communicative goals and thus relevant in everyday meaning-making processes and as a means of getting things done. This article presents a discourse-oriented analysis of CMC from Pages, examining communicative strategies emergent therein. The analysis points to how language use and platform features and structure relate to the production of meaning entwined with processes of identification and the creation of rapid senses of connectivity by communicators in the translingual online space. Drawing from online observation, discursive insights from the dataset and the perspective of interviewed entrepreneurs, this article explores digital and communicative affordances encapsulated in Facebook Pages' posts and "reactions" in relation to everyday online communication practices and actions in the promotional context.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Carpenedo, Francielle 2023
Digital and Communicative
Affordances in the Translingual
Online Space: Insights from
Brazilian Food Discourses in
the UK. *Modern Languages
Open*, 2023(1): 45 pp. 1–18.
DOI: [https://doi.org/10.3828/
mlo.v0i0.463](https://doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.463)

The advent of user-generated communication through social media such as Facebook has changed the mechanics of marketing. Traditionally, companies managed their reputation via marketing logos, slogans and tag lines (Levy 3), through paid advertising and one-way mass media. With social media, companies are now able to tailor their approaches according to niche audiences and with a significant reduction in budget (Scott 6). This creates further opportunities to communicate quickly and directly with customers, and to humanize the brand through a more spontaneous communicative identity, which was not possible through one-way marketing strategies and mass-oriented advertising (see Levy 3–4). Marketing practices in such spaces are performed by a variety of players who produce, co-create and publish discourses at both the consumer and the business level. This generates the conditions for the diversification of circulating public knowledge through the diverse language repertoires that are possible online (see Vásquez and Chik; Cope and Kalantzis; Androutsopoulos, “Bilingualism”). It also allows for identity work, relationship building and conviviality to take place in the online consumption space.

Delving into the potential of social media spaces as arenas for processes of identification and community construction, this article explores digital and communicative affordances in Facebook promotional Pages.¹ During discussions, attention is paid to how identification aspects and connections are managed online, and how business, social, personal and online–offline processes are intertwined. As with other social media spaces such as personal profiles, Facebook Pages present users with digital and communicative affordances which are relevant in everyday meaning-making processes and as a means of getting things done. Within this context, platform features and structure, together with (trans)linguaging practices of companies and consumers, play a role in the production of meaning entwined with processes of brand-/self-presentation and the creation of rapid senses of connectivity.

Against this background and more specifically, I address communicative strategies in Portuguese and English emergent from public Facebook company Pages used by Brazilian food outlets in the UK for promotional purposes. In doing so, I consider social media communicative repertoires and affordances as significant thinking tools to shed light on the relationship between everyday online communication practices and actions in the promotional context. The processes explored here lie within the context of a broader discourse-oriented study (Carpenedo) of computer-mediated communication (CMC) on discursive identity and community emergent from Brazilian food online spaces in the UK.

To contextualize the rationale followed when exploring discourse, I will start by briefly introducing my approach in making sense of social media communicative repertoires and affordances in relation to everyday actions. I then present the data, methods and theoretical approach adopted in analysing Facebook Pages. This is followed by descriptions, examples² and discussions of affordances in posts and “reactions” in relation to language production,³ processes of identification and rapid senses of connectivity. I conclude by summarizing and reflecting on the points discussed.

SOCIAL MEDIA AFFORDANCES AND THE MUNDANE

The discussion in this article concentrates on everyday communication behaviours, that is, ‘on-the-ground micropractices’, emergent alongside ‘major social formations’ in order to zoom into aspects of social life ‘as we know it’ (Blommaert, *Durkheim* 66, *emphasis in original*).⁴ The phatic and multidirectional character of social media allows for attention to be paid to forms of everyday (inter)action which configure scattered, shared senses of reality. This configuration is seen through the ‘ultra-fast sharing of sentiments, instant reactions to events, images and symbols’ and displays of ‘ideological agreement not necessarily

1 The word “Pages” has been capitalized throughout when referring to Facebook public Pages for clarity.

2 Digital data excerpts/examples are quoted as published by original authors online. Sic has not been used throughout to indicate unconventional usage.

3 “Double” quotation marks are used for my emphases in this article.

4 ‘Single’ quotation marks are used for citations from sources, with italics marking the original emphasis.

accompanied by full ideological endorsement' (Blommaert, "Ludic" 5). Blommaert refers to the idea of 'light' groups or communities ("Ludic"; *Durkheim* 63–9, emphasis in original) to describe the emergent malleable and spontaneous connectivity present in the online–offline nexus – for example, the networked and topical groupness implied by Facebook "friending", and brand-focused, lifestyle or foodie interactions. The discussion that follows thus attends to these "light" practices, as opposed to "thick" perceived social organization categories (e.g. social class, race), to allow for an exploration of subtle yet consistent elements that form and complement the complex structure of the globalized sociocultural field from which the data emerges (see *Coupland* 425–6).

To connect Pages' features to everyday practices and their social significance, the concept of "affordance" becomes a useful thinking tool. The concept originated in ecological psychology through the work of Gibson in an effort to describe how animals perceive their environment in relation to the possibilities for action that it affords, i.e. "affordances". *Gibson* pointed to the ways in which species perceive the environment according to its possibilities, in combination with its properties (e.g. the surfaces, colours and layouts), as opposed to the properties in isolation (see 67–8). Later applied and adapted across disciplines, including design (e.g. *Norman*) and technology studies (e.g. *Hutchby*), the concept of affordance, as described by Bucher and Helmond, usually refers to 'what material artifacts such as media technologies allow people to do' (235).⁵

The idea that an affordance goes beyond a mere feature is well exemplified by *Bucher and Helmond* (233–5). They describe the public reaction to Twitter's decision in 2015 to replace the "favourite" button (represented by a star) with the more market-aligned "like" button (represented by a heart) to ease newcomers' experience with the platform. At the time, some users were disappointed with the change in meaning implied by the act of "liking" a tweet, as opposed to "favouriting" it, which points to how users related to the star button according to its affordance of expressing their feelings. This also foregrounds how humans and technologies interact and the possible influences technologies may have over users' communication decision-making and actions. Still, since users draw on resources to achieve their own communicative goals, this is a process that varies according to types of users (e.g. end-users vs advertisers). Technology, in this light, does not fully control the ways in which humans behave (*Barton and Lee* 1–2). Consider, for example, how online consumer reviewing spaces can be appropriated according to user intentions to serve purposes such as deception via biased or fraudulent reviewing, as opposed to benefiting the reader through the intended primary function of reviews, which is to evaluate and assess products or services (see *Vásquez* 140, 185–6); or the embedding of threads (*Perez*), the @ sign and retweets in Twitter's design following users' practices (*boyd, Golder and Lotan*). The relationship between humans and technology, as previous research suggests (*Norman* 29–31; *Barton and Lee* 1–2; *Myers* 21), can be understood as an interaction between users and technology systems, which, while mediating people's lives and being appropriated, at times simplifies and at times complicates an intended action.

DATA, METHODS AND THEORETICAL APPROACH

This article is based on research undertaken for a larger PhD study, which included data such as Facebook Page posts, comments, reviews, as well as interviews with entrepreneurs, collected between October 2017 and February 2020.⁶ For the discussion that follows, I will retain the focus on Facebook Page posts (including "reactions") and insights from interviews with entrepreneurs. As such, this article largely concentrates on identification and community work emergent from businesses' discourse and actions, but also on consumer practices, as remarks on posts' "reactions", as well as interviews, will show. The social media data under consideration comes from public Pages of twenty-one Brazilian food enterprises across the UK

⁵ Also see *Bucher and Helmond* for an overview of its conceptualization across disciplines.

⁶ The publishing timeframe of the social media data collection spans from May 2013 to November 2018. The reviews collected were published any time between May 2013 and August 2018, posts and comments any time between June 2016 and November 2018.

and includes discourses from both chains and independent companies.⁷ The semi-structured interviews were carried out with a third of the companies' entrepreneurs either face-to-face or online, and were conducted in Portuguese or English. They covered everything from personal and professional histories to broad and specific communicative practices exemplified by their own published material, and opinions about social media use and significance.⁸

While the analytical focus of this article remains on public Facebook company Pages used by Brazilian food outlets in the UK for promotional purposes, the discussion also attends to the interwoven state of online communication. The theoretical approach adopted draws on discursive constructionist identity theories. Identity is, therefore, seen as fluid, fragmented, public and performative, constructed contextually in interaction, and as a result of lifelong negotiable linguistic and semiotic intertextualities, knowledge and references (see [Benwell and Stokoe](#); [Bucholtz and Hall](#)). Against this socially constructive background, identity is not only seen as personal, but also social and therefore entwined in inferences in the world around us. It is thus understood as situated discursive social negotiations of a sense of self and others, with membership and individuality as co-created and co-occurring ([Tracy and Robles](#); [Edwards 19–20](#); [Joseph 3–5](#)).

While not performing a fully-fledged ethnography in the traditional sense (see [Holmes 125–6](#)), this study takes on board insights from online (discourse-oriented) ethnographic practices (see [Androutsopoulos, “Potentials”](#); [Hine](#)).⁹ Analytically, I centre discussions around the concept of “affordance” (see [Gibson](#); [Bucher and Helmond](#)) and its role in mundane communication in connection to language use on Facebook Pages. To delve into identification and community processes, posts are approached from audience design (see [Bell](#); [Tagg and Seargeant](#); [Androutsopoulos, “Languaging”](#)) and discursive stance-taking (see [Du Bois](#); [Georgalou](#); [Martin and White](#)) perspectives. Both approaches provide helpful insights into identity and community matters. The former is particularly helpful with understanding language use in conjunction with Facebook affordances to address others and thus enact relationships. The latter considers discursive resources which spell out attitudes, opinions, positionings and affiliations in communication.

Against this backdrop, this article will include reflections on the mechanics of language choice, language order, translations, the use of @username, hashtags, code-switching, topic choice and “reaction” practices through posts on Facebook company Pages. The insights that follow thus result from a focus on language use in combination with platform affordances and their role in the production of meaning entwined with processes of brand-/self-presentation and the creation of rapid senses of connectivity. Such a focus allows for attention to be paid to clusters of assumed shared knowledge, speakers' audience perceptions, understandings of digital affordances and online/offline relationships embedded in communicative practices. It

7 The selection of Pages includes establishments in London and other UK cities, of which seven were chains and fourteen were independent companies. Except for one chain called Preto, Pages considered related to a specific branch/location. The chains and the location to which their Page related were the following: [Bem Brasil Restaurants](#) (Liverpool), [Cabana](#) (London), [Fazenda](#) ([Fazenda Manchester](#); [Fazenda Edinburgh](#)), [Temakinho](#) (London), [Touro](#) (London, see [Touro SteakHouse Wimbledon](#)), [Viva Brazil](#) (Cardiff, see [Viva Brazil Cardiff](#)) and [Preto](#) (London, [Chelmsford](#), [Colchester](#), [Leatherhead](#) and [Loughborough](#)). The independent companies included were the following: [Brazilian Gourmet Restaurant](#), [Cantina do Gaúcho](#), [Cantinho do Goiás](#) ([Cantinho do Goiás 2](#)), [Carioca](#) ([Carioca Brixton](#)), [Esfihas Excellent](#), [Kaipiras by Barraco](#), [Lanchonete Mistura de Sabores](#), [Little Brazil](#) ([Little Brazil Bar & Restaurant South Wimbledon](#)), [Made in Brasil](#), [Made in Brasil Boteco](#), [Mineiro Cafe](#), [Mum's Pizzas Brasileira](#), [Tchê Tapas](#), [Tia Maria Bar & Kitchen](#) – all located in London. This selection was made to allow for the communicative potential of different audiences and businesses across the country. While establishments in London range from cafés, restaurants and bars to steakhouses (both independent and chains), those located in other UK cities are all chains and steakhouses.

8 Interviewed companies are referred to in the text by the codes CH (chain) and IND (independent): [Bem Brasil Restaurants](#) (CH1), [Fazenda](#) (CH2), [Esfihas Excellent](#) (IND1), [Little Brazil](#) (IND2), [Mum's Pizzas Brasileira](#) (IND3) and [Tchê Tapas](#) (IND4). Company names are only referred to in full in the text when their inclusion is directly relevant to the clarity of the example being discussed. The entrepreneurs interviewed, from whom informed consent was obtained for the interviews, were all born in Brazil and were company directors. Excerpts have been translated by the researcher and presented in English. Where original excerpts were in Portuguese, this is provided in the footnotes.

9 A process which involved navigating the web and getting to know the data through repeated observation, notetaking and data collection. “Observation” in the context of this study refers to the “back in time”, as opposed to “as it happens”, process of systematic observation of Pages' publications (see [Hine 22–3](#)). As [Androutsopoulos \(“Potentials”, par. 11\)](#) points out, systematic observation is often implicit in work on language in new media. Taking the time to take notes and observe in this way assists with making sense of interactions, developing a ‘feel’ for discursive practices, and informs rich sampling for analysis and for potential interviewing routes ([pars. 14–15](#), emphasis in original).

WHAT FACEBOOK AFFORDS: POSTS ON PAGES

Facebook posts are open-ended communicative events first expressed by companies through their Pages and then disseminated further through actions by users, companies and platform mechanisms. Once a company publishes a post, this can be accessed on its Page or in groups where this may have been shared. Users may also encounter these in their news feed if their friends interact with the content of Pages, if they follow the Pages, or are members of groups where the content is shared (see [Constine; Facebook, “How News”](#); [Facebook, “What Does”](#); [Metz](#)).

With this multidirectional scenario in mind, an audience design as well as stance-taking perspective when interpreting discourse allowed for the foregrounding of the various ways in which companies and users position themselves with regard to potential recipients. In this respect, the very act of posting in combination with language use in itself affords ways of taking a stance (see [Barton and Lee 88–91](#)). Additionally, the use of English alone or with deliberate acts of code-switching (e.g. Portuguese words in English sentences) can point to a broad target audience while ensuring the inclusion of non-Portuguese speakers in its design. Across Pages, English as a main language was highlighted among chains but was also significantly present among independent companies. From the companies interviewed, those who used English as their main language had a broad audience in mind. According to the chains interviewed, doing ‘everything in English as much as possible’ (CH1),¹⁰ and the use of English as ‘a company policy’ with Portuguese words ‘already pre-stated’ (CH2) were part of their repertoire. In talking to the entrepreneurs, every business trajectory was different and had an effect on the company’s public voice. Factors influencing audience design included personal trajectories, the business size/investment, sociocultural context and the concept idealized by entrepreneurs. For instance, bigger spaces such as those required for running a steakhouse will also imply the need for a higher flow of customers. In this case, tailoring it narrowly with one group in mind (e.g. Brazilians), as opposed to the wider public, might not fit the market demands and/or the sociocultural context. In considering the significant presence of Brazilian footballers playing for Manchester clubs back in 2007, when Bem Brasil’s first branch opened, as well as the novelty implied by being the first Brazilian churrascaria in Manchester ([Manchester Bars](#)), the director reflects:

what [...] made this the most successful restaurant in Manchester, for at least a year or even more, was because the reaction of the public and the football players was instantaneous, was immediate (CH1)¹¹

In this case, the size, novelty, situational factors and publicity implied by the presence of footballers in town influenced the public discourse of the company. Indeed, picking up on this relationship with sport and Brazil, the company’s branches have walls filled with celebrity pictures, and decorations include items such as football jerseys and replicas of Ayrton Senna’s helmet. Language choice, in this way, becomes intertwined in a net of cultural, social and economic factors. These can also apply to those companies that choose to communicate mainly in Portuguese. In the case of Mum’s Pizzas Brasileira, which started small with a team of two people, the strong focus on Brazilians and thus the use of Portuguese meant securing a connection to the public thought to relate most to the business. However, as the director explains, plans for expansion entail including English in how they manage their public engagement:

I write in Portuguese because the audience is Brazilian [...] when I reach the English audience [...] I will have to do it in English, of course (IND3).¹²

¹⁰ tudo no máximo em inglês possível

¹¹ O que [...] fez isso aqui ser durante um ano pelo menos ou até mais, o restaurante de maior sucesso de Manchester, foi porque foi instantâneo, foi imediato, assim, a reação do público e dos jogadores de futebol

¹² eu escrevo em português porque o público é brasileiro [...] quando eu chegar no público inglês [...] eu vou ter que fazer em inglês, é lógico.

Indeed, posts which communicate mainly in Portuguese point to how companies partition (see [Androutsopoulos, “Languaging”](#)) their audiences for the purposes of targeting specific audience layers. In this sense, an interesting strategy, mainly deployed by independent companies, was the deliberate delivery of main content in both English and Portuguese to achieve a maximizing effect, as in [Figure 1](#).¹³

Figure 1

‘We also have Brahma our famous larger draft Brazilian beer! 🍺
Temos também Brahma chopp bem gelada! 🍺
[drink picture]’ (Little Brazil, 2016)
[*We also have very cold Brahma draft beer!* 🍺]

As confirmed by this company’s director during the interview, the provision of content in both languages is for the purpose of embracing all potential audiences (see [Androutsopoulos, “Languaging”](#) 67), while removing any potential language barriers. Having noticed that sometimes posts like the one above would display Portuguese on top followed by English underneath, I became curious about any possible underlying reasons. In speaking to the director, I learnt that the order of language display is sometimes influenced by specific communicative intentions and spaces on the platform. He explains that ‘In the beginning, it was like this, like, I used to put English and [then] Portuguese [...] But I post a lot in Brazilian communities, so sometimes I swap, because since it is going to the Brazilian groups the person then sees it in Portuguese’ (IND2).¹⁴ In line with this rationale, language order will match the primary audience in mind for a given post. In choosing to tailor the use of different languages according to intentions to post within Facebook ‘groups’ ([Facebook, “Groups”](#)), language code and Facebook affordances of space for the emergence and maintenance of ‘light’ communities ([Blommaert, “Ludic”, emphasis in original](#)) become evident.¹⁵ Text, in this way, is produced accordingly and moved across the virtual spaces available, which themselves are a result of a level of collective awareness in the sociocultural field in the first place (i.e. shared interest, concerns, and language abroad). In such instances, linguistic decision-making in creating posts is causally related to the existence of a platform feature (i.e. Facebook groups) as well as to sociocultural awareness (e.g. Brazilians abroad), and feeds into the flow of online actions which create a sense of ‘togetherness’ ([Schrooten](#)).

Such linguistic decision-making intertwines perceived worldviews of both content creators and receivers. Similarly, translation in light of translanguaging displays processes of bricolage by which successive moments of interculturality and the repertoire of communicators are at play (see [Baynham and Lee](#) 39–40). In the above example, although the main content is provided in both languages, these are not literal translations and involve bilingual ‘creative and critical meaning-making’ ([Sato](#) 450). On the one hand, using the pronoun ‘our’ and evaluating the Brahma beer as ‘famous’ in English works to make explicit its cultural significance and authenticate the company abroad. This also collectively refers to Brazilians in relation to the “host” audience. Indeed, Brahma, as a cultural credential, also emerges among reviewers, for example, ‘We loved the food, the dessert and the best Brazilian beer (Brahma)’, indexing a circuit of value co-production ([Kelly-Holmes, “Linguistic”](#) 43). The Portuguese sentence, on the other hand, highlights that the beer is served ‘very cold’. In doing so, it signposts Brazilian ‘like-mindedness’ (see [Planchenault](#) 94–5), reminding the Brazilian audience that the temperature of the beer served by the company aligns with Brazilian expectations, a value also emergent in Portuguese reviews – for example, ‘ceva gelada, boa comida e boa música!’ [*cold beer, good food and good music!*]. Highlighting their own culture to the in-group abroad therefore allows receivers to connect content to the different sociocultural fields they are familiar with, which may not be directly evident given emergent sociocultural assumptions that take place abroad (e.g. UK vs Brazil beer temperature). Against this backdrop, the process of making explicit the

¹³ Digital data conventions applied in this article: images have been described where relevant for the discussion; translated text is provided in square brackets and in italics – [translation] – where applicable; underlined text – Underline – indicates main features being discussed in a given example.

¹⁴ No início, era assim, tipo inglês e português que eu colocava [...] Mas eu coloco muito nas comunidades brasileiras, então às vezes eu inverte, porque como vai nos grupos brasileiros aí a pessoa vê em português.

¹⁵ Groups can be created by individuals or Page admins for various purposes such as exchanging information in Portuguese about events, services, jobs and so on (e.g. [Tudo Londres](#); [Londres Brasil](#)).

implicit in a superdiverse (see [Vertovec](#)) context can be seen as twofold, as distinct languages and nuances are connected to distinct imagined audiences according to different presumed expectations.

Strategies to connect to audiences may also involve less culture-centred approaches. In line with the above example, [Figure 2](#) below (on Facebook, accompanied by a picture of the mentioned items) maximizes reach by providing content in both languages. However, as opposed to making explicit the implicit to the “host” audience in the English sentence, it resorts to reduction strategies to deal with constraints in communication.

Figure 2

‘Combinação perfeita, Costela Tchê & [Antartica Original](#) @tchetapas Perfect combination of Beef Ribs & [Beer](#) #itstchetime’ (Tchê Tapas, 2017)

As the Brazilian beer brand ‘Antartica Original’ is likely less often encountered in the UK, but is popular in Brazil, its name is kept in Portuguese but not in English. Under the assumption of the lower popularity of the brand in the UK, the English sentence omits the brand and generalizes the product as ‘beer’ instead. Generalizing meaning in this way occurs in an effort to promote a connection to the “host” audience by removing linguistic obstacles in the process of alignment with the intended reader. As a risk-avoidance strategy, it works to overcome a potential lack of cross-cultural awareness by avoiding confusion ([Baker 23–8](#)). As explained by the director who created the post: ‘to someone who is not Brazilian, they may look at this and think that it is a soft drink, a juice, have no idea, so, I tried to generalize what it is, you know, so they can understand’ (IND4).¹⁶

In relation to the platform, the @username in this post suggests that this was originally produced with affordances available on Instagram and cross-posted onto Facebook (see [Mechanised](#)). In terms of functionality, the @username, if clicked, will direct the user to the company profile in Instagram but not on Facebook, though its locational preposition function ([Barton and Lee 179](#)) remains. Although not all companies publish this way, being able to link platforms (see [Instagram](#)) points to the interconnected character of virtual spaces, meaning that communicative decision-making in the context of one platform is then seen as fit to navigate the wider polymediated space ([Madianou](#)). This process resonates with Jones and Hafner in suggesting that creating ‘coherent reading pathways through complex collections of linked texts’ (1) is part of the cognition implied by digital literacies.

Similarly, the use of hashtags, while deemed fit across different spaces, may also emerge under the influence of affordances of a different platform. Within Facebook and Instagram, hashtags can be clicked and searched in order to filter topics through posted content, though since December 2017 Instagram has also allowed users to follow hashtags ([Instagram from Facebook](#); also see [Facebook for Media](#)). Indeed, with reference to how followed hashtags may appear in users’ feeds when followed, while commenting about his use of hashtags, one of the entrepreneurs remarked that on Instagram, ‘the people who follow that hashtag, they will maybe see if they [accounts followed] post’ (IND2),¹⁷ indicating how hashtags seen on Facebook posts can be posted primarily with Instagram’s functionalities in mind. Across the posts analysed, examples of hashtag use by companies include product description (e.g. #feijoada, #brazilianfood), establishing credentials through social stance-taking (e.g. #refusethestraw, #MariellePresente), performing a phatic function (#enjoy, #bomdia, #goodmorning), evaluations (#delicious, #yummy) (see [Zappavigna, “Evaluation”](#); [Bhatia, Analysing](#); [Bhatia, Worlds](#)) and company-specific hashtags (e.g. #itstchetime). These were also noted to appear in both languages in the same post, as is the case with dish descriptions (i.e. barbecue) in [Figure 3](#).

¹⁶ pra alguém que não é brasileiro, pode olhar isso aqui e pensar que é um refrigerante, que é um suco, não tem noção, então, eu tentei generalizar o que é, né, pra eles poder entender.

¹⁷ as pessoas que seguem aquele hashtag, ela vai ver de repente se eles postarem

Figure 3

🌟🍴 Hoje em vez da nossa tradicional Feijoada teremos churrasco para o almoço 🌟🍴
Bom apetite 😊
🌟 Today instead of our traditional Feijoada we will serve Brazilian Barbecue 🇧🇷 🍴 😊
#enjoy
#brazilianbarbecue
#lanchonetemisturadesabores
#churrasco [#barbecue]
#delícia [#delicious]
[food picture]’ (Lanchonete Mistura de Sabores, 2017)

In relation to language choice in hashtags, an entrepreneur explains: ‘I try to translate everything in this way to gain more views, you know? To open it up. So, sometimes, I put like this, “almoço” and I put “lunch”, I put “comida brasileira” and I put “brazilian food”, you get it?’ (IND4)¹⁸

Following these interview insights, the use of hashtags can be motivated by both linguistic reach potential (i.e. to gain more clicks and views) and by potential Instagram following practices, in case of posting across platforms. Through the (bilingual) use of hashtags, companies anticipate users’ different hashtag searching preferences, hence topic affiliations (see Zappavigna, “Ambient”), and thus connect linguistic decision-making to potential affordances.

Deliberately or otherwise, translanguaging takes place by creative and dynamic engagement with multiple languages and signs (see Sato 450; Baynham and Lee; Wei 27). The many practices encountered across Pages, from inserting words in different languages, to translations, to switching and merging languages, signs and styles, point to the translanguing character of the Pages (see Baynham and Lee 20). In posts predominantly in Portuguese, English words such as “phone”, “free” (Figure 4.1), pizza “topping”, “please”, “enjoy” (Figure 4.2), and “delivery” (Figure 4.3) were often merged into meaning-making systems.

Figure 4

Posts’ Excerpts

1. ‘Promoção deste final de semana. Qualquer pedido free uma sobremesa’ (Mum’s Pizzas Brasileira, 2017)
[This weekend’s offer. Any order, a dessert is free]
2. ‘Reabre amanhã [...] com a deliciosa Feijoada que vc já tanto sentia saudade.
#lanchonetemisturadesabores #enjoy’ (Lanchonete Mistura de Sabores, 2017)
[We reopen tomorrow [...] with the delicious Feijoada that u already missed so much.
#lanchonetemisturadesabores #enjoy]
3. ‘todas as quartas e quintas feiras o delivery é grátis’
(Esfihas Excellent, 2018)
[every Wednesdays and Thursdays the delivery is free]

As Wei points out ‘Multilinguals do not think unilingually in a politically named linguistic entity, even when they are in a *monolingual mode* and producing one namable language only for a specific stretch of speech or text’ (18, emphasis in original). In line with this, when asked about the use of English words in Portuguese sentences, directors of Esfihas Excellent, who publish content primarily in Portuguese, explain (note: interview in Portuguese) that the use of words such as “delivery” in their posts (as in example 4.3 above) is not deliberate:¹⁹

¹⁸ eu tento traduzir tudo assim pra ganhar mais visualizações, né? Pra abrir. Então, às vezes, eu coloco assim, “almoço” e eu coloco “lunch”, coloco “comida brasileira” e coloco “brazilian food”, entendeu?

¹⁹ It is worth mentioning that “delivery” is not absent from the marketing vocabulary in Brazil as a loanword (see Gonçalves). However, this is not a rule and alternates with its Portuguese equivalent “entrega” (see Dicio), which is also in use within Pages as well as its verb form “entregar” (“to deliver”).

Interviewee 1: It's automatic.

Interviewee 2: Automatic. [...] Same as customers, they call and say "I'm in NW9 [spells in English]" [...]

Interviewee 1: Yes. That's true. [...] And another thing that we also say is "driver" [in English], we don't say "entregador" [delivery boy] anymore.²⁰

Interviewee 2: [Or] "Motoqueiro" [Motorcyclist/delivery boy].

Interviewer: You say "driver"?

Interviewee 1: Yes. We write "driver". (IND1)²¹

These are practices which, as part of the mundane, enclose common repertoires and intertextual links to language use emergent in the context of 'translocality' (see Greiner and Sakdapolrak; Kytölä). Indeed, as pointed out by interviewee 2, customers also switch to English when speaking in Portuguese. The use of language in certain ways by certain people in a given context (see Castellari), therefore, creates intertextual links between the voices of those who, even if for a moment, feel part of a group or connected at some level.

In addition to the connectivity made possible by the intersection between language systems in the act of posting, further insights into how a sense of community might also be created through topic choice were gained through the interviews. In personal Facebook accounts, posters have in mind a group or groups of people seen as their active circle who are more likely to respond to certain communicative events (Tagg and Seargeant 175–6). In combination with "hints" at shared or localized knowledge (Tagg and Seargeant 173), similar processes occur in the public promotional context analysed. In this respect, Fazenda's managing director described the thought-process involved in creating content with different groups in mind:

Interviewee: sometimes we do speak of specific things that we know that are for specific groups. So, when we talk about wine, wine is not for everybody, but we talk about wine, so the wine lovers of Fazenda, yeah, they will probably react more to that.

Interviewer: Yeah, so you notice that that can happen, a repeat reaction of a certain group of people and things like that.

Interviewee: Totally, yes. (CH2)

Embedded in a net of practices through which companies authenticate their brands, this is not an isolated attempt to connect to audiences, but a dimension of relationship building and maintenance blurred within online and offline processes (see Yus 119). As noted through observation and confirmed by the entrepreneur, wine culture is a significant part of the company's identity. As its offline activities also include wine tastings and masterclasses, they therefore create a circuit of conditions in which different moments of conviviality and 'light' communities (Blommaert, "Ludic", *emphasis in original*) with their audiences can be formed. Accordingly, as he further explains, posts can also be tailored with professional relationships in mind:

we have brand partnerships, so we work with a number of other brands across the areas, some national, some local. I will give you an example, we work very closely with [...] a ballet company [...] and they do things everywhere. But when we talk for them or with them or we talk about things in social media that have to do with ballet or with arts, we know that not everybody is picking up, only the people who we may have a connection with (CH2)

As such, offline professional ties are also maintained online. A further interesting point in terms of how information circulates and thus entwines the online and offline was made by another

²⁰ E.g. excerpt from a comment in the corpus: 'admitindo driver' [hiring driver].

²¹ Interviewee 1: É automático.

Interviewee 2: Automático. [...] Igual frequê, liga e fala "Eu tô no NW9" [...]

Interviewee 1: É. É verdade. [...] E outra coisa também que a gente fala é "driver", a gente não fala mais "entregador".

Interviewee 2: "Motoqueiro".

Interviewer: Fala "driver"?

Interviewee 1: É. Escreve "driver".

entrepreneur, who noticed a level of interaction online from customers who had previously asked for a specific dish, the parmigiana:

Interviewee: a client arrives and say “Ah, you don’t have the parmigiana?” – which is a special – [...] then I say, “We will try to do it this weekend.” Then, we post it there and the person “Ah...” [...] There is, there is an interaction.

Interviewer: [...] So you already know that a certain number of people who want the parmigiana exist?

Interviewee: Yes, the parmigiana. Uh-huh, that happens. (IND2)²²

Through the oral representation of the client’s response “Ah...”, the entrepreneur is here implying that an interaction such as a comment or reaction to a post such as Figure 5 can follow a previous, separate and offline exchange. In this sense, the flow of content published within the Page can work to create a sense of continuity and connection with consumers.

Figure 5

🇧🇷 Weekend special: Beef parmigiana - escalope beef with tomato sauce and mozzarella cheese, served with white rice and chips. 🍷👍👍

🇧🇷 Especial do fim de semana: Bife à parmegiana - carne empanada ao molho de tomate, coberto com queijo mussarela, servido com arroz branco e fritas. 🍷👍👍 (Little Brazil, 2018)

In considering how language circulates on Facebook, and before we move to reflections about “reactions” to posts, it is worth bearing in mind that responses to a promotional post, whether via commenting or clicking a button, can appear in the news feed of the interactant’s friends. This means that consciously or otherwise, and intertwined with the platform’s marketing logic and mechanisms (Facebook for Business; Facebook, “Your Info”), nuances of users’ activities or tastes may be consumed by friends. This connective flow of information may reinforce users’ ties by means of alignment, familiarity or mutual trust while fuelling the word-of-mouth (WOM) potential of the platform (see Fisher 62). In line with this, a combination of language use, tangible and/or intangible technological affordances may lead to moments of connectivity with content and other users.

WHAT FACEBOOK AFFORDS: PAGE “REACTIONS”

Overall, an expected high use of “likes” over other “reactions” was noted in the Pages. As the aforementioned Twitter decision to switch from the “favourite” to the “like” button suggests (see Bucher and Helmond 233–5), its presence in the communicative repertoire of users and its communicative significance goes beyond Facebook and across to other spaces on the web (see also Peyton 113). Barton and Lee explain that users’ communicative intentions through the “like” button can vary from expressing a positive stance, interest, support, alignment, acknowledgement of reading to replying in the affirmative. As the authors rightly point out, meaning therefore resides in the act of clicking the button as opposed to being encapsulated in the word “like” alone (Barton and Lee 88–9). In doing so, it is the interaction between language, humans and technology that affords an action. Other frequently clicked “reactions” observed across posts were “love” and “wow”. The former can be interpreted as the expression of a level of affect, while the latter may convey amazement or surprise. “Reactions” such as “haha”, “sad”, “angry” were also noted; however, these were not as prominent. In the cultural food marketing context of this study, posts nuance nostalgic, novel and experiential meanings. Against this backdrop, the frequent use of the affective “love” and “wow” buttons then seems to reinforce and complement a circuit of product value creation (Kelly-Holmes, “Linguistic” 43) while affording emotional expression. In this regard, the presence of temporary “reactions”

²² Interviewee: chega um cliente e fala “Ah, você não tem a parmegiana?” – que é um especial – [...] aí eu falo, “Vamos tentar fazer esse final de semana.”. Ai, a gente posta lá e a pessoa já “Ah...” [...] Tem, tem uma interação.

Interviewer: [...] Então você já sabe que existe uma certa quantidade de pessoas que querem a parmegiana?

Interviewee: Sim, a parmegiana. Aham, isso acontece.

within Pages was interesting. In Figure 6, as the company expresses its wishes for International Women's Day, a stance towards gender equality is taken. By choosing to define the company within the post box as "feminist" in capital letters and in low saturated pink colour, often construed as an indexical of femininity in Western cultures, the company loads the letters with subtlety and sociocultural meanings (see Kress and van Leeuwen 229–33, 269; Koller 32). In this way, meaning goes beyond lexical forms, creating an ambience where positioning is simultaneously affective and political.

Figure 6

[text outside the post box] 'Happy Women's Day!'

[pink text on post box] – **TEMAKINHO IS FEMINIST**

["reactions" to post] – "like", "love", "grateful/thankful" (👍❤️🙏)

(Temakinho, 2017)

In this post, users' affect and/or alignment with the company stance are expressed through "liking" and "loving" the post, but also through the "grateful/thankful" temporary "reaction" 🙏. This "reaction" was a result of a campaign by Facebook originally created to provide users with the ability to react with gratitude to mothers in countries where Mother's Day matched that of the US (see Know Your Meme; Harrison). This is interesting in reflecting on the relationship between users and platform affordances, as the adoption of the temporary "reaction" indicates that levels of accuracy in communicating feelings online matter for some. Given the global reach of content, this is also highlighted off the platform in queries and blog posts expressing a level of disappointment by those able to see but unable to click/use the "reaction" (see Facebook Help Community; Brown; Harrison), such as in the UK and other countries where the celebration takes place on a different date. Another "reaction" encountered was the temporary "Pride" "reaction" 🏳️🌈, which Facebook created for 'major markets with Pride celebrations' (Schultz). In resonance with the previous example, the platform was criticized by some for the ways it conditioned access to the "reaction" (see Holter; Montgomery; Matias, Rickman and Steiner), highlighting how "reaction" buttons can be perceived by their affordances of self-expression as opposed to their properties in isolation. Even so, user-platform relationships can also come with obstacles, as noted in another post through a self-correction by a user. Having clicked the "angry" "reaction" 😡 in response to a picture of chicken hearts, a common element in Brazilian barbecues, the user proceeded to comment 'Not angry mean 🤢 yuck' under the post. As the platform complicated the user's intended action (see Norman 29–31; Myers 21), they resorted to the comment boxes and the use of an emoji to steer possible interpretations towards a level of rejection rather than anger, managing face with resources available.

A final observation before moving on to concluding remarks relates to the significance of Page "likes" (as opposed to post "likes") from a company standpoint in the professional and marketing social media context. As a form of customer engagement, these may also work as a type of endorsement for companies (see Bhatia, Worlds). In Figure 7, evidence of customer satisfaction and company success is provided through social media metrics. By attributing gratefulness to customers through the direct address "you", and celebrating customer "likes", the company highlights its achievements, treating platform engagement and mechanisms as endorsements.

Figure 7

'Uhuuuuu! 🎉 2.000 Curtidas. 🙏🙏 Obrigado á todos vcs pelo carinho. 🙏 Ninguém é perfeito mas espero nunca decepciona-los ❤️' (Mum's Pizzas Brasileira, 2018)

[Uhuuuuu! 🎉 2.000 Likes. 🙏🙏 Thanks to you all for the affection. 🙏 Nobody is perfect but I hope to never disappoint you ❤️]

This virtual conceptualization of success points to the interwovenness of the online and offline in current society, and the tangible significance of platform affordances embedded in everyday social media practices. In speaking to the director of the company specifically about this post, not only the market, but also personal entrepreneurship significance emerges:

Facebook, when it was at 1900-odd, notified me that it was getting close. Then when it got to 2000, then I could not hold on, I said “I have to share this.” I said, “This is so lovely, everyone needs to know.” (IND3)²³

We thus capture here how user engagement and platform mechanisms can be entangled in daily company positioning, entrepreneurial satisfaction and strategic marketing actions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article, I have paid specific attention to the communicative strategies emergent from public Facebook company Pages used by Brazilian food outlets in the UK for promotional purposes, where the use of Portuguese and English occurs. This included reflections on the mechanics of language choice, language order, translations, the use of @username, hashtags, code-switching, topic choice and “reaction” practices. By combining analytical insights with the perspective of entrepreneurs, I have demonstrated the multiple ways in which communicators, language production and platform affordances intersect in everyday processes of business-/self-presentation and rapid senses of connectivity.

The combination of language use by companies with the posting feature affords them the opportunity to position themselves and to publish tailored materials at their own leisure. Language choice in this sense plays an important role in maximizing or partitioning intended recipients (Androutsopoulos, “*Languaging*”) as posts are disseminated. In relation to the motivation for delivering materials primarily in one language or the other, this article has pointed to personal trajectories, the business size/investment, sociocultural context and the brand concept idealized by entrepreneurs as influencing factors. These factors are intertwined with a combination of market demands, the necessary flow of customers implied in the realization of a given brand concept, and the available circulating knowledges in the sociocultural arena. As such, while a heightened use of English can often correlate with larger companies or those in areas with a free-flow and varied customer potential, a more significant investment in the use of Portuguese may secure a smaller company a more direct connection with the niche market required for sustaining the business. Against this backdrop and among the aforementioned factors, language choice then becomes entwined in a net of cultural, social and economic factors. An alternative addressivity path examined is the provision of bilingual posts (i.e. with equivalent informative content in both languages). These aim at maximizing potential reach by removing language barriers, while embracing different layers of audiences and thus expressing an inclusive identity. One significant insight provided by the exploration of bilingual posts is the way that the platform’s affordances of space (i.e. groups) may motivate the display of languages in posts (i.e. according to primary audience of groups – as discussed in Figure 1). This brings to the fore how language codes and technology intersect in the emergence and maintenance of ‘light’ communities (Blommaert, “*Ludic*”, *emphasis in original*) and in the flow of online actions which create a sense of ‘togetherness’ (Schrooten). Bilingual posts, as Figures 1 and 2 revealed further, also shed light on how different nuances of meaning are conveyed in different languages, that is, how sentences in different languages with similar overall meanings can be tailored to spark connotations according to the recipients’ assumed knowledge (gap) or expectations. This highlights the connection between language and collective clusters of knowledge, and thus awareness of different ways of being, in the ‘online-offline nexus’ (Blommaert, “*Ludic*”).

Within posts, the relationship between digital affordances and language production also brought to the fore the polymediated (Madianou) character of the communicative space, and how certain practices such as the use of hashtags may take place through one SNS and also be published in another. Where this happens, contexts of language production then seem to overlap, meaning hashtag practices seen on Facebook posts may have been produced with Instagram’s functionalities (e.g. following) in mind. Hashtags were also observed as devices for stance-taking, product description, phatic function performance, evaluation, and as a marker of users’ topic affiliation. They were seen as potential amplifiers of reach, as indicated by one of the entrepreneurs, when used bilingually.

²³ o Facebook, quando tava no 1900 e tanto avisou pra mim que tava chegando. Ai quando deu 2000, aí eu não aguentei, eu falei “Eu tenho que compartilhar isso.”. Eu falei, “É tão gostoso, todo mundo tem que saber.”

To contextualize the diversity of practices encountered throughout, it is worth noting the relevance of the freedom of streaming and affordances of access of platforms as these can play a significant role in facilitating an entry into the publishing space for a variety of players and translingual practices. As with one of the independent companies' interviewee remarks on their rationale for having started with social media as opposed to a website:

the website was also an extra cost. So, since everyone uses Facebook and Instagram nowadays, so, we thought "No, we will at least be able to use the social media." [...] And we started small, like, with a limited budget and all. So you already know that Facebook and Instagram will do the trick, you know? Logically, afterwards is good to have a website. So later over time we set up the website. (IND2)²⁴

These many-to-many communication social media settings in which advertising practices can take place create a public space where different repertoires can diffuse and thus connect with different clusters of recipients (see [Herring; Lomborg 56](#)). Deliberate or otherwise, the multilingual practices discussed go from those most common in advertising such as Portuguese words in English sentences to, as [Figure 4.3](#) exemplified, automatic switches resulting from non-unilingual thought processes and repertoires of translocality (see [Kelly-Holmes, Advertising; Santello; Wei](#)). Advertising in such contexts then allows for the awareness of a variety of repertoires available in the sociocultural field to be expressed instantaneously. This, combined with the mechanics of the platform, as the review examples supporting discussions under [Figure 1](#) hinted, can foster the conditions for a circuit of value co-production to emerge ([Kelly-Holmes, "Linguistic" 43](#)).

In this sense, an interesting aspect regarding the mechanics of promotional social media audience design discussed relates to the connection between creators, active circles of recipients and the online-offline nexus. As with personal Facebook accounts, awareness on the part of content creators of certain audience groups and active circles of recipients ([Tagg and Sargeant 175-6](#)) also influences communication processes in the public social media promotional space. As revealed by interviews, this can happen in moments of specific topic choice, hinting at professional partnerships, key brand identity themes, services or activities that stem from and to offline events, conversations, encounters and practices. This highlights the layered communicative actions across the online-offline nexus and their continuous role in creating daily senses of connectivity.

This offline-online interwovenness of communicative actions was also highlighted by the tangibility of social media metrics (e.g. Page "likes" – [Figure 7](#)) in translating company success while entangled in daily entrepreneurial satisfaction, and by the significance of "reactions" to posts as a self-expression affordance and in connection to specific ways of feeling (e.g. "grateful/thankful", "Pride" and "angry" "reactions"). The latter provided a glimpse into aspects of the relationship between users and technology systems. On the one hand, the ability to see temporary "reactions" as potential communicative resources and the technical inability to resort to them would have caused a level of disappointment for some. On the other hand, a user self-correction of the use of an "angry" "reaction" with the posting of a "yuck" emoji in the comment boxes would indicate that the availability of a given resource may not always fulfil the exact communicative intention of a user.

This article has provided insights on digital and communicative affordances in the translingual online space, specifically by concentrating on Facebook promotional Pages of Brazilian food businesses in the UK. While attending to communicative strategies at play, reflections have highlighted "how", as opposed to specifically "what", identification aspects and connections are managed online, and how business, social, personal and online-offline processes are intertwined. This involved combining elements of observations guided by a digital ethnographic sensitivity and interviews (see [Androutsopoulos, "Potentials"; Hine](#)) with linguistic interpretations, moving analysis beyond the log-data possibilities and into how language use and platform

²⁴ o website também já era um custo a mais. Então como todo mundo hoje em dia usa Facebook e Instagram, então, a gente pensou "Não, a gente vai conseguir pelo menos usar a social media." [...] E a gente começou pequeno, assim, com um capital limitado e tudo. Então você já sabe que o Facebook e o Instagram vai fazer o serviço, entendeu? Lógico que depois é bom você ter um website. Então depois com tempo a gente colocou o website.

features afford expressions and actions online. This approach allowed capturing insights on communicators' decision-making and perspectives, in a social reality in which online and offline dimensions are fused, speaking to sociolinguistic debates on senses of light communities and conviviality in and through the online space (e.g. Varis and Blommaert; Blommaert, "Ludic"; Blommaert, *Durkheim*). In exploring a promotional and professional environment, as opposed to personal profiles, discussions add to existent identity and community research on translingual (multimodal) stance-taking (e.g. Georgalou) and audience design (e.g. Tagg and Seargeant; Androutsopoulos, "Languaging"). This study also furthers understandings of the use of Portuguese and English online in the UK, while revealing the presence of a Brazilian business participatory culture in the UK made tangible through digital and translingual practices.

To conclude, the affordances manifested within Facebook promotional Pages are interlinked with social, technological, algorithmic and commercial practices.²⁵ Social media plays a central role in how society communicates and how knowledge circulates. Its complexities are, therefore, relevant for discussion from many angles and across diverse disciplines and contexts. In the context of this study, the aim was not to applaud, or otherwise, any glories or misfortunes of the advent of social media (see Demata, Heaney and Herring ii-iv), but to systematically analyse its mechanisms, resulting transformations for communication, and affordances of engagement for those involved. Technological innovation and transformations are, after all, constant in our society and have always been powerful forces in the lives of those who are simultaneously influenced by them and appropriate them (Barton and Lee 1-2). From a language use perspective, then, the aim of this article was to reflect on how language use and platform features and structure relate to the production of meaning entwined with processes of identification and the creation of rapid senses of connectivity by communicators in the translingual online space.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Digital Modern Languages section of Modern Languages Open and King's College London for their joint efforts to bring this special collection into existence. I also wish to thank Professor Jane Winters for her valuable time and suggestions during the drafting stages of this article. I am thoroughly grateful for the participation and insights from entrepreneurs interviewed, and to the Institute of Languages, Cultures and Societies (ILCS), formerly IMLR, at the School of Advanced Study (University of London) for having me on board as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Open World Research Initiative (OWRI) 'Translingual' strand of the 'Cross-Language Dynamics: Reshaping Community' research programme, which made the doctoral work connected to this article possible.

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²⁵ This study is guided by a discourse-oriented ethnographic sensitivity and a focus on mundane language use in combination with platform features. Historical and social perspectives on Facebook and social media features and algorithmic developments (e.g. Brügger; Bucher; van Dijck and Poell) have therefore informed contextual understandings, but in-depth explorations in this light are beyond the scope of this study.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Carpenedo, Francielle 2023
 Digital and Communicative
 Affordances in the Translingual
 Online Space: Insights from
 Brazilian Food Discourses in
 the UK. *Modern Languages
 Open*, 2023(1): 45 pp. 1–18.
 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.463>

Published: 18 December 2023

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Modern Languages Open is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Liverpool University Press.