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ORIGINAL PAPER

Communication Mediated by Digital Means

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Abstract

Online communication produces linguistic structures and variations that are challenging to manage both methodologically and theoretically. The languages employed on social media platforms are, in many respects, hybrid, with participants engaging in diverse forms of interaction—from dialogues between one or multiple interlocutors simultaneously in chat environments, to text, image, and/or audio-video posts, with multiple options for feedback, such as likes, shares, or comments. As a result, significant transformations have emerged, both rhetorically—in the broadest sense of the term—and sociolinguistically, given the spontaneous formation of new linguistic communities and the consequent establishment of a genuinely new communicative paradigm.

The effects and realities associated with this shift, driven by digital evolution and widespread internet access, demand predominantly interdisciplinary approaches. Some researchers focus on the psychological implications of these phenomena, while others examine the configuration of digital environments and the distinctive features of emerging communication channels. Linguistic variations are also a central object of study, as innovations at the language level reflect the profound changes taking place across all spheres of life on online social networks.

In response, scholars have proposed concepts such as computer-mediated communication, internet-mediated communication, Net Ligua, and textspeech, among others. In this work, we refer primarily to those terms we will use most frequently, which have the additional advantage of avoiding implicit evaluative or pejorative connotations. Our objective is to provide an analytical, objective description of the phenomenon, without preemptive value judgments or normative stances, as is often the case in discussions of so-called "language degradation" online. While efforts to normalize the languages used in digital spaces are natural, such initiatives must adhere to the principles and epistemological frameworks of linguistic research. Undertaking this requires moving beyond the comfort zones of existing theories and scholarly conventions.

Keywords: *discourse, online communication, digital, Internet, linguistic variations.*

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Introduction

The influence of digitalisation on the dynamics of a language operates through the emergence of a new communicative channel and, simultaneously, through the development of a specialised terminology grounded in computer science and programming, which has subsequently permeated multiple domains, giving rise to a distinct register associated with digitalisation and computer- and Internet-mediated communication. In this context, all fields have undergone an extensive process of popularisation, accompanied by reterminologisation, in which the influx of Anglicisms also plays a decisive role.

It is widely acknowledged, accepted, and extensively studied that the evolution of technologies and practices associated with the digital sphere, as well as the emergence and development of the Internet, have had a significant impact on various types of languages and on languages in general:

1. on online communication, namely on the languages used on websites and those employed on social media platforms or in chat environments; that is, on computer-mediated communication (and that mediated by analogous devices such as tablets, mobile phones, smartwatches, etc.) and by the Internet;
2. on specialised terminologies and professional languages specific to fields whose activities and practices take place in online environments;
3. on scientific languages in fields such as philology (with its wide range of linguistic subdisciplines), philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and the educational sciences, as well as on interdisciplinary discourses through which digital technologies are studied, analysed, and integrated into educational processes.

It should be noted that the field of digitalisation possesses its own specialised terminology, highly rich in neologisms, which interacts with scientific languages by describing new types of activities and objects. This terminology is almost entirely derived from English or, at the very least, is also attested in English.

General characteristics of communication in the digital age

Baricco argues that "the digital revolution emerges from three broad gestures that outline a new playing field." (Baricoo, 2018:32)

These are, in fact, a series of innovative technological solutions and achievements:

"A. The digitalisation of texts, sounds and images, «the liquefaction of the world's fabric». This is a process that ranges from CD to DVD, passing through MP3, between 1982 and 1995, roughly parallel to the development of the PC.

B. The invention of the personal computer. This is a process with distant roots, which becomes truly remarkable in the mid-1980s—alongside three PCs already mentioned [Mac, Commodore 64, IBM]—and becomes irreversible in the mid-1990s, with the emergence of Windows 95.

C. The interconnection of all computers through a network. This is a process that begins in 1969 with ARPANET and, passing through the invention of the Web, reaches its culmination in 1998, with the launch of the Google search engine". (Baricoo, 2018:64)

There is already a generation of digital natives who have completed secondary and, in part, university education and have entered the labour market. The previous generation also adapted quickly, as technological changes were not so abrupt as to create

a real generational divide. In 2014, David Crystal also stated that it is still too early to say what lasting effect the Internet will have on languages:

"Electronic mediated communication (EMC) has been in routine use for only twenty years, and this is a blink in the history of a language. It takes time - much time - for a change to emerge, for individuals to become accustomed to its novelty, for them to begin using it in everyday speech and writing, and ultimately for it to become so widely used that it becomes a permanent feature of a language, recorded in dictionaries, grammars, and style guides. There are already some telling signs of what may happen, but everything must remain provisional." (Crystal, D., 2014:65)

A descriptive and objective perspective reveals that technology enriches language with new components, and language, as a means of communication, ultimately behaves in a natural way. A language assimilates the necessary new lexico-semantic constructs, while also allowing for a range of borrowings.

In 1998, the Google search engine was launched, an innovation that would significantly transform the field of digitalisation and contribute to an increased influx of Anglicisms. This development addressed the need for efficient information retrieval in the online environment, which had expanded considerably and had given rise to a computational paradigm providing new tools for the collection, analysis, and processing of diverse types of data. From a linguistic perspective, search engines were to foster corpus-based studies, enabling rapid access to a vast range of journalistic texts.

Words from the lexical family of "digital" appear in an extremely wide range of contexts, forming, through the lexical fields developed around them, a subfield of information technology. The polysemy of the term "digital," however, requires a more extensive discussion, as it accumulates meanings due to its interdisciplinary status, in particular, but also through its popularisation and its oscillation between different lexical levels.

"Digital", with the meanings acquired through the development of information technologies and the Internet, is not derived from the older meanings of the term originating in French; rather, in cybernetics and computer science it should be treated as an Anglicism, "which consequently also requires the delimitation of two adjectives digital - etymological homonyms within the lexical system of contemporary Romanian." (Păcuraru, V., 2015:78)

Thus, the two approaches, in terms of polysemy and homonymy respectively, are not mutually exclusive; instead, they can be correlated in order to distinguish the meanings that these highly dynamic words acquire across various registers.

Communication in online environments and the "linguistic variations of the Romanian language in the digital age" therefore require multiple levels of analysis. They also require an overarching, systematic perspective on the modes of interaction and mediation offered by the Internet over time. Of particular importance are the transformations that this macro-network has undergone, providing increasingly complex tools, supports, and methods for information access and dialogue. Thus, in the third decade of the 21st century, applications based on Artificial Intelligence have become ubiquitous, marking the entry into a new era of the digital domain.

The interdisciplinary approach is therefore inherent, opening, on the one hand, analytical perspectives on the Internet as a macro-network comprising multiple types of supports for textual and/or audiovisual content, as well as multiple types of communication channels. On the other hand, researchers have focused on the specific nature of text productions mediated by the Internet, on what has been referred to, as

previously mentioned, as “textspeak” and “Net Lingua.”

The Web has undergone several structural changes, providing increasingly complex models for information management and interaction (socialisation). Based on the most general of these models, different stages in the evolution of the Web, as proposed by researchers, have been identified.

From online search platforms to artificial intelligence, there was only a single step. At present, people use artificial intelligence in almost every area of their lives. With its help, we plan our holiday itineraries, and we obtain information - more or less reliable - regarding weather forecasts, medical treatments, the education of children, pets, and so on.

Artificial intelligence (AI) plays an increasingly important role in contemporary communication, transforming both the way messages are produced and the way they are interpreted. Through natural language processing algorithms, AI systems can generate texts, translate automatically, correct, or adapt discourse according to context and user needs.

In digital communication, AI contributes to accelerating interactions and personalising content, facilitating rapid access to information and optimising communicative exchanges in online environments. For example, chatbots and virtual assistants enable continuous interaction between users and systems, to some extent mimicking human dialogue.

However, the use of artificial intelligence also raises important challenges, such as technological dependency, excessive standardisation of language, or the loss of expressive nuances specific to human communication. In this context, AI does not replace human communication but transforms it, becoming an intermediary medium that profoundly influences the dynamics of language and social interaction.

In short, artificial intelligence seems to deliver the final verdict. It is accessible to anyone, can be used at any time, day or night, answers any question, and almost never contradicts us. Artificial intelligence seems to know everything and to be able to provide us with a solution to any problem.

In conclusion, whatever search engine is used, we must ensure that the information provided is plausible. We need to inform ourselves rigorously about any topic, and we should not take for granted everything that any search engine offers us at the first click.

Digital technology - based online education

Digital communication can be used in several fields. If we were to refer to the use of digital tools in schools, this raises a significant discussion.

The abrupt transition to online education highlighted a contrasting pedagogical reality, in which the adaptation of pupils and students oscillated between digital resilience and cognitive vulnerability. From a critical perspective, although Google Classroom provided structure, learners’ adaptation was not uniform. It was observed that pupils and students who already had autonomy in their work turned this crisis into an opportunity, developing effective self-directed learning strategies. In contrast, for a considerable part of the class, the absence of the teacher’s physical support generated a sense of isolation. The management of asynchronous learning was often perceived as a cognitive overload, in which the boundary between school time and personal time became blurred, requiring learners to develop organisational skills that they had not yet fully acquired.

This period also highlighted inequalities in access to the digital environment, often grouped under the concept of the "digital divide." Not all learners had the same material resources (stable internet connection, personal computer) or the same digital skills. This disparity directly influenced participation and academic performance. Thus, some pupils and students found themselves in situations of pedagogical marginalisation, not due to their linguistic competences, but because of technical constraints. This reality underscores the fact that the integration of ICT in education cannot be considered independently of learners' socio-economic conditions.

Alongside this organisational management, the Zoom application was the preferred tool for restoring the human and interactive dimension, so fragile during the COVID-19 lockdown. As a synchronous tool, Zoom recreated the communicative space essential for the development of oral skills. The use of specific features such as breakout rooms was crucial in maintaining the action-oriented approach despite physical distance. These virtual subgroups made it possible to simulate authentic communicative situations, breaking learners' social isolation. This period of crisis also highlighted the need to rethink the teacher's role, who shifted from being a knowledge transmitter to a digital mediator, constantly adjusting methods in order to prevent cognitive fatigue and school dropout in the virtual environment.

In order to restore the human and interactive dimension, teachers alternated between Zoom and Google Meet, two synchronous tools with complementary functions.

According Bălănescu E. O., "since motivation is key in the process of learning, it is worth stressing the idea that the use of the mother tongue creates a relaxed and positive learning environment, as it reduces the stress and anxieties associated with new, perhaps difficult to understand issues." (Bălănescu, E.O., 2023:89).

However, a critical analysis of these live sessions reveals ambivalent results. The use of Google Meet in education brought a dimension of simplicity and fluidity, due to its native synchronisation with the Google Workspace ecosystem and learners' calendars. Unlike other more complex tools, direct access via a single link reduced technical barriers, allowing a faster transition between asynchronous work on Classroom and synchronous interaction. From a critical perspective, this platform fostered a form of normalisation of online courses: the simplified interface and instant screen sharing facilitated the real-time presentation of authentic materials (videos, articles, images). This technical proximity enabled the maintenance of a regular rhythm, essential for stabilising learners' study habits during the period of uncertainty caused by the health crisis.

However, the analysis of Google Meet usage also highlights limitations related to emotional engagement and group dynamics. While the tool is excellent for information delivery and lecture-style exposition, it was observed that it could induce a certain passivity among learners, often "hidden" behind turned-off cameras. The main challenge was to break the "linearity" of videoconferencing in order to recreate genuine social interaction. Without integrated gamification features, students' progress depended heavily on the teacher's ability to devise alternative strategies, such as intensive use of the chat for micro-writing tasks or the organisation of structured debates. In conclusion, Google Meet acted as a mirror of the teacher's pedagogical competences: an effective tool for continuity, but one that requires rigorous instructional design in order not to turn language classes into a merely passive lecture.

The use of Zoom for synchronous sessions enabled the maintenance of verbal contact; however, the critical analysis of students' progress shows ambivalent results. At the level of oral competence, breakout rooms fostered more spontaneous expression

among some shy learners, protected by the screen interface. At the same time, a decrease in spontaneous engagement was observed in other learners, a phenomenon often described as digital disengagement. Linguistic progress was real in terms of reading comprehension and asynchronous production, but the fluency of spontaneous oral interaction suffered due to technological mediation. Non-verbal language, essential in learning for resolving semantic ambiguities, was largely sacrificed, making the acquisition of pragmatic nuances more difficult.

In this perspective, as Daniel Peraya emphasizes, "it is essential to distinguish between **mediatisation**, which concerns the scripting and dissemination of content, and **mediation,** which refers to the relational dimension of any pedagogical communication situation". (Peraya, D., 2010:155)

Indeed, teaching does not consist merely in transmitting information, but in establishing a meaningful social interaction between teacher and learner. This distinction is fundamental in digital environments, where there is a risk of privileging content over the relational dimension.

Thus, digital tools should not be seen solely as technical supports, but as communication environments that enable the reconstruction of a pedagogical presence at a distance. The effectiveness of the system relies, in this case, on a balance between the mediatisation of content and the mediation of the relationship, as well as on the teacher's ability to foster both functional interactivity (interaction with the tool) and intentional interactivity (interaction with the author and with other learners). This dual level of interaction constitutes a key element in meaning-making and in learners' engagement within a digital learning environment.

Extending this reflection on the balance between mediation and mediatisation, it becomes necessary to situate this pedagogical device within a structuring framework of reference. In this regard, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages provides a relevant analytical grid, allowing the alignment of proposed activities with clearly defined linguistic competences. This perspective not only ensures the didactic coherence of the learning design, but also enables a more precise assessment of learners' achievements in a digital environment. To concretely illustrate this articulation between digital tools and linguistic competences, the following comparative table highlights the pedagogical specificities of each platform used.

The use of digital tools in teaching enables a precise alignment of pedagogical activities with the CEFR levels (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), thus providing a coherent and progressive structuring of online learning. The CEFR defines clear descriptors for each level, from A1 to C2. Each linguistic competence - listening comprehension, reading comprehension, spoken and written production, interaction, and mediation - is addressed in a targeted manner according to the learner's level, while integrating available multimedia resources. Digital environments such as Zoom and Google Classroom make it possible to translate these theoretical descriptors into concrete and adapted tasks, while also developing learners' autonomy and motivation in a distance-learning context.

In the face of these challenges, the role of the teacher has profoundly changed. It is no longer merely about transmitting knowledge, but about designing learning experiences adapted to the digital context. The teacher thus becomes an instructional designer, a facilitator, and a guide. This evolution requires the development of new professional skills, particularly mastery of digital tools, as well as the ability to maintain learners' motivation and engagement at a distance.

Thus, synchronous oral comprehension activities carried out via Zoom are particularly well suited to B1/B2 levels in terms of spoken production and interaction. Learners participate in guided discussions based on news articles, authentic videos, or simulated everyday situations such as booking a hotel, attending a professional meeting, or exchanging ideas within a collaborative project.

These activities mobilise not only the vocabulary and grammatical structures specific to B1 and B2 levels, but also strategic competences such as reformulation, argumentation, and clarification of ideas. The use of breakout rooms allows the class to be divided into subgroups, fostering active speaking participation and reducing anxiety among less confident learners. These subgroups also enable the creation of more natural and authentic interactions, simulating real communication contexts, which is essential for the action-oriented approach promoted by the CEFR.

Online learning is a form of education mediated by digital technologies, which enables teaching and learning activities to take place in virtual environments, independent of physical presence in a classroom. This mode of learning relies on the use of educational platforms, synchronous and asynchronous communication applications, as well as interactive multimedia resources, which facilitate access to diverse and up-to-date educational content.

From a pedagogical perspective, online learning involves a reconfiguration of the traditional relationship between teacher and learner, with the teacher becoming a facilitator of learning, while the learner assumes a more active and autonomous role in the educational process. This shift promotes the development of self-directed learning skills, critical thinking, and the ability to manage one's own learning pathway.

An essential aspect of online learning is flexibility, which allows access to education regardless of space and, often, time. However, this flexibility is accompanied by challenges, such as the need for a high level of self-discipline, potential difficulties in maintaining motivation, and inequalities in access to digital resources, commonly referred to as the "digital divide."

Furthermore, online learning makes use of digital interactivity through tools such as video conferencing, discussion forums, learning management systems, and collaborative applications. These enable both synchronous and asynchronous communication, contributing to the creation of a dynamic and collaborative educational environment.

In conclusion, online learning represents a key component of contemporary education, characterized by the integration of technology into the teaching process and the redefinition of traditional roles within education, while offering both new opportunities and significant challenges for educational systems.

Conclusions

Communication in the digital age is characterized by a profound transformation in the way individuals produce, transmit, and interpret information. New technologies have enabled the emergence of rapid, multimodal, and global forms of interaction, in which text, image, and sound coexist and complement one another.

An essential aspect of this evolution is the democratisation of access to information, as well as the growing dependence on digital platforms and the algorithms that filter content. In this context, digital skills and critical thinking have become indispensable for navigating the online space effectively and responsibly.

Digital communication has also generated new linguistic practices marked by

flexibility, creativity, and hybridisation, but also by tendencies toward standardisation and simplification of language. The rise of social networks and artificial intelligence has further amplified these transformations, influencing both language registers and the dynamics of social interaction.

At the same time, the digital environment promotes both the expansion of access to information and the emergence of new challenges related to content validation, information overload, and the influence of algorithms on the communication process. Thus, the user becomes an active but also responsible actor in the management of information.

From a linguistic perspective, digital communication generates new forms of expression, marked by adaptability and linguistic economy, as well as by tendencies toward global standardisation. These transformations are amplified by artificial intelligence and social media platforms, which profoundly influence both language and human interaction.

In conclusion, digital communication is not merely a technological tool, but a complex socio-linguistic phenomenon that continuously redefines the relationship between language, technology, and society.foundly influence both language and human interaction.

Authors' Contributions:

The authors contributed equally to this work.

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