

Political Science

G. R. Boynton's New Media and Politics

University of Iowa

10-25-2010

Use of Language and Play in Global Communication

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Use of Language and Play in Global Communication

Question: How do people communicate through sarcasm or jokes about serious topics?

Globalization of Language: Cultures are beginning to interact with each other on more than just a regular basis. Globalization has become a necessary and ingrained part of our society and societies around the world. One way that this has occurred is through the globalization of language. English has become a predominant or second language in most European countries as well as other nations. Additionally, this generation has more people than ever who speak at least two languages. The terrorist attacks in the United States made world news, and people all over the globe have different opinions about Osama Bin Laden and the Iraq war. Because more people understand a variety of languages, it has become easier to communicate with people from other cultures about world events.

Globalization of Culture through Play: As the world continues to become more globalized, information is shared across many different countries. Recently, people have begun to use Twitter to make sarcastic or joking comments about world events. For example, when our group researched the Twitter messages posted about Bin Laden, we found that the majority of the messages were made as a play off this serious matter. In order to understand the humor of the joke, people need to know the background concerning Bin Laden, the United States, and terrorism. Without this knowledge, a majority of the comments on Twitter would be meaningless. Even though many of the messages were clearly jokes, they still indicated that the topic of discussion was serious.

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Languages: The data that had been collected, was sorted by language. Subsequently, the data in English was examined whether it was a message or a joke, and the total number of real messages and jokes were counted. As the data was sorted by language, the use of languages was noted.

There were in total:

Language	Number of messages
Af - Afrikaans	2
Br - Breton	1
Da - Danish	2
De - German	127
En - English	1301
Eo - Esperanto	7
Es - Spanish	128
Fi - Finnish	1
Fil - Filipino	1
Fr - French	4
Gl - Galego	27
Hu - Hungarian	7
Id- Indonesian	20
It - Italian	4
Jv - Javanese	1
Ku - Kurdish	1
Ms - Malay	77
Nl - Dutch	18
No - Norwegian	3
Oc - Occitan	2
Pt - Portugese	355
Sq - Albanian	2
Sv - Swedish	2
Tr - Turkish	1
Uz - Uzbek	2
Vi - Vietnamese	1

Number of Jokes and an Example: Out of 2,100 messages, 874 were found to be recognizable jokes in English. That is about 41.6% of the total messages. While this may seem like a rather

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high number as it is, the percentage of jokes would probably have been even higher, had there not been a *South Park* episode featuring Bin Laden. A majority of the tweets in our search were either announcements about the episode, or were retweets about it, which skewed our results. An example of the types of jokes in our search results would be “Osama Bin Laden rescued as 34th trapped Chilean Miner <http://bit.ly/aNqqXb>.” In this joke, someone capitalized on the rescue of the Chilean Miners and tweeted that Bin Laden was the 34th miner rescued. This was retweeted hundreds of times in our search results.

Use of Jokes: The surprisingly large amount of jokes being tweeted about Bin Laden, versus serious messages, says something rather profound about our society. Because we have been searching for Bin Laden for so long, people are confused as to how to feel about the situation. While they find it inconceivable that our military still has not found Bin Laden, people are also worried about what that means for the safety of our country. Because of this, they resort to joking about it in order to feel more at ease. This has two results; the desensitization of people to such a serious issue, and the continued conversations about the issue, keeping it in the news.

Conclusion: English was the major language used to carry messages across Twitter and it sometimes even showed up inside the messages in another languages. Most messages were written in imperfect English in which slang languages were used. The messages in Twitter contained mostly jokes instead of real messages.