

BARBARA LEWANDOWSKA-TOMASZCZYK  
(STATE UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES, KONIN)

## NEGATIVE EMOTIONS: CONFLICT AND CROSS-LINGUISTIC CONTRASTS IN ONLINE COMMENTING DISCOURSE

The paper focuses on the dynamics of online exchanges in English and Polish posts related to the Greek political and economic crisis in 2015 and European Union membership. It introduces and defines the concepts of *emotion* and *conflict*, and discusses quantitative and qualitative methods and tools used to analyse corpus materials of Polish and English online communication, primarily in terms of the *Interconnectivity Index* and emotion *valence* as perceived by the users as well as the degree of their emotional *arousal*. The data reveal significant differences in the *conflict dynamics profiles* between the two groups of commentators, more interactional, and interactant face-saving discourse strategies in English, manifested by means of self-mockery and jocular style, significantly less frequent resort to verbal abuse and vulgar language on the one hand, and a more aggressive, confrontative and mutually hostile attitude, with instances of verbal abuse types recorded in the Polish data. An attempt to interpret the results in terms of cultural dimensions and characteristics concludes the paper.

KEYWORDS: Compensation Hypothesis, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), conflict, Interconnectivity Index (Value), (negative) emotions

### ONLINE RADICALIZATION

The present paper<sup>1</sup> focuses on a growing body of conflicting exchanges in online discussions of the political character (Kleinman 2012). It proposes to investigate the claim that although the conflicting exchanges which can be observed in online discussions, comments and debates grow in their radical character, the degree of their radicalization is not universal across all Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) users, but has a rather more culture-specific character. The next observation which will be studied is that the radicalization manifested in online comments is correlated with the degree of emotional arousal represented by particular groups of CMC users, which is visible in the type of language used in the comments.

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to extend my gratitude to the reviewer for the valuable and helpful comments on the paper.

CMC radicalization can be considered as a *dynamic* phenomenon. As this process is visible in internet discussion/communication mainly on the level of communicative, mostly verbal and/or visual, exchange, it is justified to analyse CMC communication from a language discourse viewpoint, particularly with reference to online press articles and comments following them, which consist mainly of verbal rather than graphic communication (e.g., emoticons). The comments typically represent a discussion around conflicting political and/or social issues.

### VERBAL COMMUNICATION TYPES

It is postulated that the CMC communication types (see Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2015 for details) can be presented as three distinct communication categories. The first one, whose main objective is to win *verbally* in the word game and which I call *ping pong* communication, is typically addressed *ad personam* to the direct interlocutor(s), and uses significantly more radical formulations in some cultures when compared with others. At least one of the other communication types (*snow-ball communication*), although also typically correlated with confrontative arguments, is not addressed to direct interactional opponents but to an external body/individual. Its main aim then is to win not only in the CMC verbal game but in real life. The third of the major types (*loose-balloon communication*) is less conflict-bound. It does not present solely the interactants' fight for *conversational leadership* (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2016) but focuses rather on digressive comments and the commentators' own experiences.

Thus *ping-pong* communication takes place between interaction participants who represent the most confrontational profile, targeted towards two polar judgments. Exchanges there include a relatively high number of feedback loops, i.e., replies of various kinds, and are framed in terms of an argumentative and rather aggressive discussion type. *Snowball communication* has a communicative profile targeted towards a clearly defined ultimate objective and an external opponent. The moves and turns are equally or even more strongly confrontational than in the ping-pong type, but are typically addressed towards one (external) opponent. Its structure has an observable magnifying axis – stimulated by an increasing flow of energy present and rising, which leads to a climax, and not infrequently success, in real life (as e.g. in ACTA and other mass-scale movements). Type three exchanges, of the *loose-balloon* communication category (in some studies an alternative term, *string-balloon*, is used), present a looser interactional structure, often around issues of social and moral value. Rather weakly polarized, it contains not one climax but – instead – represents sets of interactional moves back and forth along a controversial theme, with frequent reminiscences of the individual's personal life experiences, in which users often digress from the main topic of the exchange.

Both in real and CMC encounters there occurs a frequent conversion of one type of communication (e.g., *ping-pong*) into another (e.g., *snowball*) communication, in which a conversational victory translates into a real-world victory. In pure ping-pong encounters a contingency which can be observed is that the exchange exerts rather weak, or even no, persuasive effect on the opponents.

The conversational victory and support can be quantified over a number of interactive exchanges of the most active (in some cases denoting the most influential) commentators, who are identified in terms of an Interconnectivity Index (Value) (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2012), calculated for each of the commentators, and presenting the number of the active interactants involved and the number of interactive turns each of the users makes (see 2, part of a graph generated from the analysed CMC interaction).

One of the observations in the online comments is a strong relationship between processes of conflict initiation and increase and attempts to emphasize the sense of individual (and group) *leadership*, observed particularly in the interactional ping-pong communication (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2016). In the loose-balloon interaction type on the other hand it is the power of the massive online community which is visible (on *visibility* see Graham and Wright 2014) as a (frequently stronger) side of the conflict. The emotionality-founded utterances, particularly those associated with negative emotions such as hate, anger, hostility, are particularly visible and, together with the language of strong negative evaluation value, serve also as a compensatory tool (see Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk in press for the *Compensation Hypothesis*) for the absence of direct prosodic and paralinguistic properties of language which, in face-to-face contexts, serve as important channels of communicating evaluative and emotional attributes related to the conveyed content.

To be observed online a conflict has to be *noticed* by the users, and depends on the degree of online *visibility* of its participants. As proposed in other studies on varying online contexts, be it political, social, cultural or sports matters, the conflict discourse is typically a discourse characterized by a high degree of *emotionality*. To make themselves visible and recognizable by other users, commentators tend to apply what I call *verbal shorthand*, expressed in terms of unconventional punctuation, graphics, emoticons (less common in online political comments), and first of all, verbally strong language, from the words of support and appreciation (significantly less frequent in the data examined here) to abusive language, hate speech, towards their online or real world opponents (enemies). Online users prefer shorter rather than lengthy posts and messages, so in order to attract sufficient attention and make oneself the locus of the others' attention, a shorter, but rather more salient expression of one's stand and position is required.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials for the analysis are selected from Polish and English comments to online newspaper articles referring to the Greek crisis in the year 2015, and having relevance to Poland's and United Kingdom's European Union membership. Units of analysis (sampling from 3,476 posts for Polish and from 4,112 posts in English) are identified as two distinct language files and searched with the use of concordancing tools.

The methodology involves both quantitative measures as well as a qualitative analysis in terms of the Cognitive Linguistic apparatus, covering types of utterance, metaphoricity, as well as forms of referring expressions. The tools of (media) discourse analysis are used to analyse gambits and adjacency pairs and types and frequencies of conversational and interactional turns among particular discussants. Special attention is paid to the commentators' evaluation of the events and participants referred to and the way it is expressed, which is indicative of the interactants' beliefs, opinions and political preferences.

Linguistic methods used in the study also include other Cognitive Linguistic tools such as event building strategies by means of cognitive *construal* mechanisms (Langacker 1987, 1991). Relevant here are also discourse strategies such as the reactions and response patterns.

Highly relevant *corpus linguistic* tools such as those generating frequencies of occurrence of particular language forms and discourse patterns, length of posts, a number of positive and negative post-author posts, types and frequencies of conversational and interactional turns among particular discussants, are also taken into consideration in the identification of opposing conflict parties and their leaders. The corpus linguistic tools involve, inter alia, Gephi graph-generator, WordSmith Tools, Slopeq and PELCRA ([pelcra.uni.lodz.pl](http://pelcra.uni.lodz.pl)) concordancers and collocators, developed by Piotr Pęzik (2014) for the National Corpus of Polish and for the British National Corpus.

As an auxiliary instrument, the present analysis of emotions prevailing in the comments applies results of English and Polish studies of basic emotions clusters by Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Wilson (2013). The studies use the data from corpus materials, from the GRID questionnaire (Fontaine et al. 2013), and from a battery of online categorization and sorting tasks of Polish and English emotion terms, designed and applied by Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Wilson.

## QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

A contrastive study on emotions used in the present analysis is based on the outcomes of three different methods. Firstly, the GRID project coordinated by The Geneva Emotion Research Group at the University of Geneva, The Swiss Centre

for Affective Sciences and the Geneva Emotion Research Group, the HUMAINE Association and Ghent University (Fontaine et al. 2012). GRID covers over 30 languages from Europe and beyond, from Afrikaans, Arabic, Basque and Chinese, through Czech, Polish and English, to Japanese, Filipino, Hebrew and Hindi, etc. It involves both basic emotions such as *disgust* – *wstręt*, *anger* – *złość*, *gniew*, *hate* – *nienawiść*, *fear* – *strach*, *happiness* – *szczęście* or *love* – *miłość*, etc., as well as so-called social and moral emotions *pride* – *duma*, *compassion* – *współczucie*, *guilt* – *poczucie winy* or *shame* – *wstyd*. A number of native speakers of particular languages (average 130 in each language) answered a complex questionnaire (144 questions on each emotion) with reference to the experienced behavioural, mental, psycho-physiological and verbal manifestations, accompanying each of the emotions researched.

*Online sorting and ranking tasks* which engaged Polish and English subjects were also carried out by Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Wilson to investigate degrees of similarity (closeness) and difference (distance) between various emotions. The tasks generate a few large *emotion clusters* and *megaclusters*, which uncover a distinct composition and colouring of some of the basic and moral emotions in English and Polish, e.g., Polish *strach* ‘fear’ is more strongly linked with higher inactiveness and feeling of hopelessness than English *fear*, which is a more invigorating, energizing sensation. On the other hand there is less *control* over *strach* in Polish than over *fear* in English<sup>2</sup>. In other cases e.g. those involving Polish *pycha*, a member of the *duma* – *pride* cluster, *pycha* is singled out in Polish (lexicalized in Polish but not in English), which makes English *pride* less positive than Polish *duma*, with Polish *pycha*, accumulating a fully negative evaluation. A sense of higher hopelessness in the case of *strach*, less control over this emotion in Polish than in English, coupled with the salient Polish *pycha* sensations, generates clusters of a different composition across these languages in many interactional contexts.

Extensive studies conducted by Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Wilson (2013) and Wilson et al. (2013) show a number of English-Polish culture- and language-specific contrasts in the behavioural, etc., and linguistic expression and manifestation of a number of emotions. Some of them, particularly those referring to *fear*, *anger* and *pride* can be hypothesized to have direct relevance to cross-linguistic expression, and possibly experience, of conflict events.

Discourse quantitative measures include corpus linguistic tools, viz., frequencies of occurrence of particular language forms and discourse patterns, length of posts, number of positive and negative post-author posts (sentiment) and types and frequencies of conversational and interactional turns among particular discussants

<sup>2</sup> See Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2012a) and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Wilson (2013) for a fuller account of the relationship between the *fear* and *strach* clusters, which involves other nominal and verbal cluster members such as *lęk*, *niepokój*, *obawa* / *bać się*, etc., in Polish, and *anxiety*, *panic* / *(to be) afraid*, etc. on the one hand and the culture-specific perspective on the three *fear* scenarios FRIGHT, FIGHT and FLIGHT on the other.

(Interconnectivity Index or Value), corresponding to the samples of Excel tables presented in (1) and (15) below. The measure subsumed under the *Interconnectivity Value*, or *Index* (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2012) presents the activity of particular users and points to the number of times a user connects and exchanges turns with all relevant interactants during the whole conversational event considered a separate analytic unit (see 2). The numbers of the particular user – addressee contacts and the interconnection network are available on the basis of the generated data. The Interconnectivity Indices are generated in the present study from the comments on the Greek economic situation as well as questions of the European Union membership of UK and Poland. Some of the commentators are more active than others in quantitative terms (the number of posts and the number of interactants), which is one of the parameters of online visibility and conflict models.

In what follows, samples of English and Polish online exchanges will be analysed to show a graded nature of conflict exchanges and to identify linguistic strategies and tools used and emotional patterns that underlie them.

## CMC COMMENTING DISCOURSE

Online communication in what I call an *online commenting interaction* is patterned according to a typical schema familiar from natural face-to-face conversational discourses. Questions are typically followed by answers, comments await responses, while topic initiation moves invites verbal replies, all following turn-taking patterns. And yet, while a typical face-to-face interaction involves primarily one person speaking at a turn, internet exchanges are most often *many-to-many exchanges*, *one-to-one/one-to-many* and *many-to-one (local) interactions*, typically relative to a given communication type.

## ENGLISH ONLINE COMMENTING INTERACTION

The English data presented in (1) exemplifies online comments accessible in the online editions of *Daily Mail* on 29 July 2015 at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/search>. The nicks of the discussants are followed by the time their opinions were posted and the texts they authored. The topic of the discussion refers to the Greek crisis and involves the UK commentators, as can be judged from the content and form of the posts<sup>3</sup>.

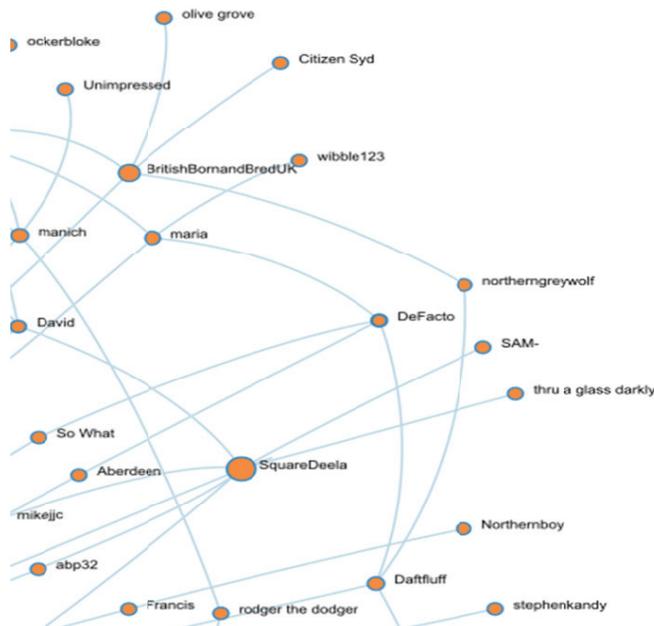
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<sup>3</sup> The users' nicknames cannot be anonymised in the data presented due to practical constraints on table and graph generation from the authentic materials. The quantitative IVs in the present study are generated with the assistance of Łukasz Drózdź, MA., of the University of Łódź, whose help I fully acknowledge.

(1)		
Arschloch	2015-06-29T12:56	Greece you deserve every thing you get and you have been given multiple chances BYE
Daftfluff	2015-06-29T13:10	There will be a deal, Germany cannot afford to right off all their losses.
DocDaneeka	2015-06-29T13:20	If Greece votes to leave then I bet that within weeks there will be a very convenient Colour Revolution with protests and a few innocent Greeks killed before miraculously a pro-Europe (Merkel/ Junker stooge) comes to the rescue forcing the Elected Prime Minister to flee the country in fear of his life.
Sam	2015-06-29T13:20	This is the tire bare fact of the powerful EU, they can bring down a country without sending troops and decimate a country's fiance.
saying how it is	2015-06-29T13:21	Greece won't crash out of the Euro that now means it becomes our problem
Sterlingsilver	2015-06-29T13:24	Bet all the Russian money left weeks ago after lessons learned in Cyprus
Henry	2015-06-29T13:30	On the phone to Merk and her French poodle lap dog and USA has got military with an iron fist everywhere.

The Interconnectivity Index underlying a selected part of the discussion is presented in (2) below.

(2) Graph representing Interconnectivity Index of English Commenting Interaction (selected part).



The communication type used in this discourse has the elements of all three categories identified in Section 2 above. Elements of the *ping-pong* communication are less visible though, the tone is not aggressive or hostile but rather patronising and referential as in examples (3), exploiting popular stereotypes (commentator B in particular) with respect to Greek (and Turkish) cultures, which shifts the communication in the posts towards the *loose balloon* category with strong elements of reminiscences of the commentators' personal or acquired experiences and a condescending attitude towards the Greek and Turkish way<sup>4</sup>.

(3)

A: Its a Greek tragedy!

The entire Greece debacle just shows that you can't ever have a true European Union. Every country at some stage will look after their own interests at the expense of another!!

B: I hope lazy Greeks get booted out  
[...]

A: Problem is, is that Turkey wants to be in the EU, silly people!! Stay a million miles away from this institution Turkey.

B: caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

A: It was always going to end in tears. The EU project is toast, this is the beginning of the end and about time too.

A: They will be better off in the end leaving the EU.

- They will likely become a very bad example of peoples historically which is not a nice thing to be for a nation who were originally such enlightened, progressive and brilliant peoples.
- Sick of people harpin on about it...how does it affect holidaymakers....nothing at all..returned from a week in greece busy as ever..if anything slightly cheaper and i had enough money to last me..who uses cashpoints on holiday as everyone knows your bank charges you and the exchange rate is poor
- Beginning of the end of the European dream thank god

B: Any one for Ouzo.

There is figurative language used there, although mostly of a conventional type. Metonymic phrases such as *Russian money left* in (4) and in the same example the metaphor *after lessons learned in Cyprus*, are outnumbered by combinations of metaphors and metonymy referred to as *metaphonymy* (examples in 5 and 6) by L. Gossens (1990).

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<sup>4</sup> All examples from the online corpora discussed in the present paper are provided in the original spelling.

## (4) Metonymy/Metaphors

Bet all the *Russian money left weeks ago after lessons learned in Cyprus*

## (5) Metaphors/Metaphonymy

- (i) On the phone to *Merk and her French poodle lap dog* and USA has got military *with an iron fist everywhere. The international cops.*
- (ii) If Greece are allowed to refuse to pay so should we, however with *podium knee knocking* Cameroon at the helm *take out your wallets* and say “help yourselves” you watch Cameroon will do nothing to refuse.
- (iii) After *the dust settles*
- (iv) [of Greece] *caught between the devil and the deep blue sea*

## (6) Metaphonymy

- (i) why would you *silver tongued charmers* want a Greek lady with your way with words and no doubt good looks and style *you should be fighting the ladies off*
- (ii) Greece *won't crash out of the Euro* that now means it becomes our problem
- (iii) No need to panic as the Central bankers are skilled at *pulling money out of thin air and they can always throw more money* at Greece to stop the EU failure *toppling like a Bunch of Dominos.*

Another discourse strategy to emphasize the negative evaluation and emotionality observed in the materials is the play on words such as the clipped (familiarising) form *Merk* in (5i) or puns on the names such as *Custard Shameron* (7i) or *Cameroon* (5ii) with respect to UK Prime Minister. Uses of new compounds (7iii) or colloquial language forms are also marked as in (7ii) *zilch* in the sense of *nothing, zero*.

## (7)

- (i) *Custard Shameron* should *keep his nose out of* their affairs, and get *weaving on out own referendum!*
- (ii) Having read this I and my *zilch portfolio* will not suffer...
- (iii) Send in Gordon Brown. It's time for some serious *Gordonomics*

An interesting strategy is the use of phonetic mimicry, expressed in writing as in (8) below to ridicule the pronunciation of English aristocracy and higher social classes:

- (8) plus be subject to a Campaign by Cameron that he will use to try to convince us all that leaving the EU will be *oooooh vewy vewy bad*

The use of humour involving more frequent lighter jocular remarks as well as more abusive sarcasm and irony contribute to the more explicit signaling of negative evaluation and (frequently patronising) sentiments in the discussion (examples 9 and 10):

- (9) (sarcasm) Clearly the schools have been let out! Does your Mummy know you're on her computer troll?

(10) mild irony, jocular

A: Every time *I* say that, you rubbish the point. Good to see you have come around.

B: Actually, it's me that usually rubbishes your point – but I am starting to come round now! I still don't agree with the way that you say it, but the basic fact is that squabbling between the players will, I agree, negate the work that they are doing.

(11) jocular sarcastic remarks

Let them leave. I want to buy a villa on Rhodes. Price now 350,000, price in 6 to 9 months, 75,000. Come on, let them leave or kick them out!

A palette of language with negative valence starts from using an explicit negatively-loaded words (12) to (presented in 3 above) more nuanced, indirect expressions of the commentators' sense of superiority and a condescending attitude towards Greece.

(12)

(i) @Lord....You are naive

(ii) The whole economic concept of a single currency was a nonsense from the start.

(iii) No tiny country (sorry, Greece is tiny) should be allowed to impact the finances of larger nations.

The same-opinion supporters complement one another's posts:

(13)

A: No answers have been given to the question what benefits has the EU brought to the UK that the UK could not have achieved without being a member of the EU. If I am wrong, PLEASE post the answers and I will make a grovelling apology, but at present any claim to have answered is a lie, so I am not being ungentlemanly, simply stating the bald truth.

Over to you.

B: I don't need a leader, i dont need to be led.

I dont need a face, a focus,a talking head.

It's a democracy thing, i'm voting out,

It's OUR government that has no clout.

Will it cost to leave? I'll happily pay,

It's coming soon.....our INDEPENDENCE DAY!

In the *ping-pong* exchanges the disagreements are usually constrained in order to observe politeness principles, although some controversies focus on essential political principles. Interlocutor-addressed metalinguistic comments and other-repairs also assume a rather polite, although mildly condescending tone in the frame of a *ping-pong* interaction, with a humorous or relaxing remark in conclusion:

(14)

A: Although I am for remaining in the EU – and would want to see it greatly modified – it is clear that with such insane statements, assuming they are reported accurately, Juncker and Co. are doing more damage than good.

B: Yes, don't forget from whom they take their orders. The Council of Europe.

A: I thought Juncker and Co. were the Council of Europe.

B: No, they are not.

A: OK, I have just looked this up in Wikipedia. So according to you, Juncker and Co. receive their orders from this august body? „The Council of Europe (CoE; French: Conseil de l'Europe), founded in 1949, is a regional intergovernmental organisation whose stated goal is to promote human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in its 47 member states, covering 820 million citizens.”

B: Sorry, I should have said the European Council.

A: President of the European Commission.

I am now thoroughly confused and apparently I need a crash course on the workings of the EU. We have a Council of Europe; a European Commission, and a European Parliament. Go figure, as they say in NYC and points west.

B: No need for a crash course. The European Commission enacts the decisions of the Council of Ministers of the European Union.

A: See above please.

Going for a piece of cake and cup of tea now.

Cheerio.

#### POLISH ONLINE COMMENTING INTERACTION

The Polish commenting interactional data are drawn from discussions available at the *onet* platform and were accessed in July 2015, when the problems connected with the Greek crisis were most acute and discussed. In each interactional exchange the materials manifest high emotionality of the negative type (*Anglia ma takich samych głupków jak my w PISie* ‘England has the same type of fools as we do in the party Law and Justice’; *nawiedzony bałwan* ‘obsessed – lit. haunted – blockhead’) with strongly abusive language used in the encounters as presented in the Excel sample below (15):

(15)			
~Polak	Onet Biznes	7 lip 10:44	Comment precz UE, precz euro, bez dyktatury niemiec i francji!!!!!!
			Pomyślelibyście, ze to możliwe. Anglia kraj ludzi mądrych i myślących, a tu taki zakalec....
ojciec Jacek	Onet Biznes	7 lip 10:44	Comment Wynika z tego, ze Anglia ma takich samych głupków jak my w Pis-ie.
			UE przyjęła do Euro Grecje która nie spełniała wymogów !!! Więc UE samo sobie zrobiła ten
~UE	Onet Biznes	7 lip 10:44	Comment cyrk !!!

~imas	Onet Biznes	7 lip 10:44	Comment	e tam tak naprawdę to Niemcy chcą tego kryzysu ale zwałą wszystko na Grecję
~jp	Onet Biznes	7 lip 10:44	Comment	nawiedzony bałwan!
~Pazerna	Onet Biznes	7 lip 10:45	Comment	Jewrejska UE celowo przyjęła do Euro Grecje która nie spełniała warunków ekonomicznych bycia w walicy Euro
myslacy.inaczej	Onet Biznes	7 lip 10:45	Comment	W niedzielnym referendum 61,31 proc. Greków zagłosowało przeciwko przyjęciu warunków zagranicznej pomocy od „trojki” kredytodawców (UE, MFW, EBC). Kurcze! Tusk powinien im wysłać tylko jednego kredytodawcy. PROVIDENT.

Although the Polish comments are considerably less negative towards Greece than the English ones, and occasionally praise Greece for opposing the EU, the posters's voices attacking the EU and Poland's membership are much stronger and their posts more interactionally visible than those of their defenders:

(16)

- (i) Likwidacja o połowę instytucji unijnych i redukcja urzędników o 85% to program ratunkowy dla UE na wczoraj! 'reduction of the Union institutions and clerks in 85% is a rescue programme for the EU for yesterday!'
- (ii) POTRZEBA W EUROPIE NOWEJ UNII UNII KATOLICKIEJ 'a need for a New Union, a Catholic Union in Europe' [capitalization]
- (iii) jednym słowem IM GORZEJ TYM LEPIEJ.wiemy komu lepiej i kto woli ruble od funtów i euro. 'in one word THE WORSE THE BETTER, we know who is doing better and who prefers roubles to pounds and euros'
- (iv) chciałbym by Paweł Kukiz, Janusz Korwin i Marian Kowalski zmienili mój kraj chciałbym by zmienili moje zapyziałe upadające przez puchnących urzędasów miasto Poznań 'I'd like PK, JK and MK to change my country and to change my small, dirty town Poznan, falling because of the officials getting bigger and bigger'.
- (v) Lubię tego Angielskiego polityka, ponieważ mówi jak jest nie ściemnia tylko wali prawdę prosto z mostu, czego nie można powiedzieć o innych euro osł... ach 'I like this English politician, as he's telling how it is, doesn't lie and throws the truth straight, which you can't say of the other UE-asses [play on words]'
- (vi) Ha,ha,ha bo ta komuna nie ma prawa przeżyć.Takich idiotów narody wybrały a te łachmyty zastanawją się czy ogórek ma być prosty,czy wygięty jak banan. 'Ha, ha, ha, this communa [communist system] cannot survive. These idiots were elected by the nations and these rag-pickers are thinking whether the cucumber should be straight or bended as a banana'.

The decidedly anti-EU tone prevails in the discussions. A number of highly abusive forms are used either in the form of blends *euro-osły* 'it. 'euro-donkeys/ asses' or direct derogatory terms *idiotów*, *łachmytów* 'idiots, lit. 'rag-pickers/in rags', or else forms which are abusive because of their negative historical references such

as in *Dość targowicy, my Polacy to pojęcie znamy* ‘Enough of targowica, we Poles know this concept well’ with the form *targowica* hist. ‘protesting against the Polish Constitution of 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1791’; fig. ‘traitors’ or else indirectly conveyed meanings *wiemy komu lepiej i kto woli ruble od funtów i euro* ‘we know who lives better and who prefers the roubles (Russian currency) to pounds or euros.

Nationalist remarks of a high degree of abusiveness are present in the anti-Union comments such as *żydowski syf rozpada się* lit. ‘Jewish syph (abbreviation of *syphilis*) [dirt/chaos] is falling apart’, *dworkiem parysko berlińskim* ‘Paris-Berlin court’, *UPAina* ‘UPAine’, a blended form of the *Ukraine* and the *UPA* ‘Ukrainian Nationalist Party’, considered anti-Polish in local context.

On the other hand, metadiscursive questions are occasionally asked: *nie wiedziałeś tego, czy to była ironia?? :)* ‘didn’t you (really) know that, or was it irony?’ and interesting creative metaphoric uses are also noted as for example *[nie chcemy]... Unii zapasionej, sapiącej, rozkapryszonej w papilotach i rozdeptanych sandałach baby* ‘[We don’t want]...the Union fattened, puffing, whimsical, a hag in curl-papers and worn-out sandals’, *moje zapyziate upadające przez puchnących urzędasów miasto* ‘my small/ugly/provincial town, falling because of the – getting bigger and bigger, red-tapery – clerks’. Frequent reference to the Catholic religion (*Chcemy Unii Katolickiej* ‘We want a Catholic Union i.e., the Union to be Catholic’) is present, parallel to ridiculing the Union by making reference to the notorious examples of their dictating the required shapes of cucumbers and bananas. Simultaneously, some posts dismiss Angela Merkel and praise UK Prime Minister David Cameron (*lubie tego angielskiego polityka bo mówi jak jest...* ‘I like this English politician, as he says how it really is...’).

## ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN CONFLICT EVENTS

Analyses of CMC discourses as presented in this study (supported by previous research in Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2016), show an asymmetry between the English and Polish communication profiles in online comments. This study confirms the results of the previous research, although at the same time introduces a description of more subtle conditioning observed in the conflict scenarios, related to the role of emotional involvement, emotion valence and appraisal in the conflict events.

Communication involves the activation of conceptual and emotional cluster hierarchies in interaction. We live within particular intellectual and emotional clusters which are triggered by a variety of stimulus-related conditions. In some contexts, the stimuli induce positive emotions such as the clusters of pleasure, joy, and approval, sympathy, compassion, and pity or clusters of negative emotions such as fear, anger, hate and disgust. All of these emotions can be *exbodied*, i.e., expressed in language by means of particular linguistic patterns, vocabulary, play with meanings or, in

the case of CMC, additionally play on spelling and other iconic markers in the form of emoticons. Indirectly conveyed emotional meanings wrapped in figurative uses, in humour or banter, assume in the case of negative emotions the form of irony and sarcasm and in some cases involve insults of varying gravity/severity.

I want to propose that the strongest triggers to instigate a conflict (both in real and virtual lives) are *threat* and *fear* on the one hand and *anger* on the other. Although tensions between *emotional display rules* and *emotional display norms* are stronger in face-to-face interaction, in the CMC contexts, the norms are weakened and flouted. Additionally, it is anger rather than fear that can lead to both positive as well as negative consequences in actual reality. In the context of *snow-ball* communication anger can result in outcomes desired by the vast majority of commentators (see Lindebaum et al. 2016 for the military contexts, Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2015 for examples). Both anger and fear on the other hand can give rise to or be clustered with hate, contempt and hostility. In Lewandowska and Wilson's (2013) analyses of fear, Polish *strach* can also be more strongly combined with *sadness*, however, as it turns out, in the context of (internet) anonymity and (conventionally assumed) absence of negative consequences (punishment), the emotions of hate and hostility, not infrequently paired with those of *hubris*, i.e., negative pride, mostly equivalent to Polish *pycha*, and *conceit*, tend to take over.

The conditioning that should also be mentioned with regard to Polish and English differences is a distinction between Geert Hofstede's *cultural dimensions* (1980), particularly with reference to the individualism – collectivism dimension, which situates England as one of the most individualistic culture, and Poland – as a culture with a strong collectivism component, although closer to the middle values of the collectivism-individualism range. It is interesting to note in this context that although individualism is characterised by less constrained emotion expression (more power) than collectivism, the emotional *display norms* in Polish culture are generally less restricted than those in the English culture. Furthermore, the English society as reported in various research studies, is more norm- and law-abiding than the Polish one, and also less extrovert on the whole, which weakens the *expression* of the (higher) power dimension e.g., in the case of anger. This outcome conforms with Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Wilson's data on other relevant dimensions with regard to English *anger* and the Polish corresponding cluster of *gniew* and *złość*, which are more negatively evaluated in Polish than *anger* in English culture<sup>5</sup>.

*Fear* is also one of the basic emotions, and *threat* is its stimulus and a direct cause. Fear is considered a response that enhances one's survival chances when faced with a physical threat, as pointed out by numerous emotion scholars (Beck et al. 2005).

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<sup>5</sup> In a comprehensive study on Polish and English emotions, under preparation, Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Wilson identify four GRID features that are relevant to the negative view on the expression of anger in collectivistic cultures (*inconsistent with expectations, incongruent with own standards and ideals, violated laws or socially accepted norms* and *to what extent is it socially accepted*), which can collectively be termed *incongruence with standards and norms*.

The main attributes of emotions, researched in Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Wilson (2013) are the dimensions of *Evaluation-Pleasantness*, *Activation-Arousal*, *Potency-Control* and *Surprise-Expectedness*, proposed in the GRID project. A comparison between English *fear* and Polish *strach* on the dimension of Potency – Control presented in Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Wilson (2013) shows that *strach* is a more overwhelming emotion in Polish than *fear* in English and more acutely experienced in Polish than *fear* in English, so the Polish experience of *strach* is deeper. Emotions are observed as clusters. Clustering of negative emotions in the examined materials involves predominantly hate, hostility and aggression in Polish and predominantly anger, condescension and dissatisfaction in English. We can further hypothesize that the emotions of *hate*, *aggression*, and *hostility* arise primarily from *the threat-fear scenario*.

In the CMC context, in which fear is related rather to a *distant* rather than *immediate* threat and, additionally, voicing one's judgments and opinions does not bring risk due to the commentators' (assumed) anonymity, Polish comments carry with them more transparent and visible signals of aggression, hostility and abuse, which is consonant with the *Compensation Hypothesis* referred to in the present paper. Discourse management functions in CMC are encoded more explicitly than in other types of communication, particularly in face-to-face encounters in order *to compensate for the absence of other interactional signals, available in face-to-face communication*.

Another striking difference refers to the selection of appropriate discourse strategies which support the achievement of high discourse efficiency. While English commentators use a variety of less salient strategies and less frequent direct abuse of the strong type, the Polish users, by their choice of structure, vocabulary, phraseology and style, fight to achieve higher efficiency, manifesting at the same time less control over their fears, anxieties and anger. By using the abusive emotional signals they signal their identity marking and make an attempt to achieve leading CMC visibility. The Interconnectivity Index as one of the essential predictors of the conflict-winning strategy, indicating the number of times a user connects and exchanges turns with all relevant interactants during the whole conversational event, is a factor expressing the winning commentators' discourse visibility.

The English comments in our data are typically addressed to an external opponent, beyond the immediate CMC context. Instances of direct agreement (e.g., *Good post, and the comparison with the tea party is a good one*) are rare, although more frequent than in Polish, while disagreement, in which confrontation and assertiveness are present, are more numerous in the material but their gravity is significantly lower than that in Polish. It can be proposed then, that the essential *discourse regulatory function* in the context of CMC comments are assertiveness and imperatives, while the positive markers like humour or banter, which contribute to the development of social bonds (Graham/ Wright 2014), although more frequent in English, are not too often used in the posts examined.

The discourse regulatory functions in the Polish posts are taken over by emotional (most frequently abusive) language. The abuse scale and severity types, classified according to the scales developed by Balci & Salah (2014), identify insult of varying gravity, sarcasm, irony, etc., with the ranking scale of their severity. Strongly negative emotionality patterns are much more frequent in Polish CMC in the dyadic *ping-pong* exchange type (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2016), and less frequent in English, although this relation appears partly topic-sensitive<sup>6</sup>. Language-specific emotionality patterns are correlated with the type and frequency of emotionally charged utterances, phrases and lexis. In general comments interactants perceive the hierarchical dominance of interpersonal roles, although in Polish CMC the interpersonal roles seem to play a less important part.

Emotionality patterns uncover the users' reactions and contribute to the identification of the most influential users and most influential posts. However, in English (usually mild or moderate) abuse is most frequently addressed to external extra-contextual opponents, while significantly more *sarcasm* and *irony* as well as fewer personal insults are observed. Direct metacomments addressed to interlocutors are significantly less frequent in English than in Polish. In the Polish comments a body or individual considered an external enemy (e.g., government, party (leader), etc.) is most often attacked by attacking direct interlocutors holding opposing views on the matters discussed. *Ping-pong* exchanges are equally frequent in both languages, however commentators who post positive opinions are typically ignored in post-author posts or their posts are ridiculed more often in Polish than in English. Nevertheless in both Polish and English there are significantly lower numbers of direct positive, supportive posts when contrasted with negative, rejecting moves (identified in the numbers of *(dis)likes* and *(non) support* markers).

Although in both languages direct personal confrontation is present to the same degree, high severity of abusive comments is significantly less frequent in English. A variable that cannot be fully controlled is the degree of moderation in the two sets of data. What must be reported though is a higher frequency of the information *This comment was deleted* in English, which may be indicative of the fact that the English discussion is more closely moderated than the Polish one, which may exert some influence on the overall comparability of the results.

One of the conclusions refers also to differences in the typographic conventions used in the two sets of data. The Polish materials contain significantly more emotionally salient, emphatic forms typographically expressed, particularly by means of capitalization, punctuation (interjection marks) and other idiosyncratic graphic symbols or spelling. This alone can also be considered indicative of a higher arousal and emotionality characteristic of the Polish commentators when contrasted with the

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<sup>6</sup> The results of the analysis of comments following press articles on 2015 Chopin piano competition do not significantly diverge from those presented here, although the number of abusive posts and mitigating responses is lower.

English ones. Another observation made in the questionnaire administered to a few English nationals, residing in Poland for 6-15 years, concerns the observed lower sense of law abiding and respect for legal regulations in Poland when compared with those in UK.

An additional factor in the analysis, which may be problematic, is that on the whole Polish users appear to be younger than English ones. Out of the entire population of Poland only 6% of all people over sixty years of age regularly use the internet (data available on public websites), so we may conclude that the Polish commentators are younger than the English ones, hence they are most likely more emotional and less emotionally balanced than the English ones. There is a significantly higher number of more content-related opinions as well as longer and better argued judgments in the English than in the Polish materials, which again can introduce a distorting factor to the data analysis.

Moreover, what can be of some relevance is that there are also differences observed in the *internet leadership profiles* in the two populations (see also Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2016 for more details). Interestingly enough in English, a more individualistic culture, we observe a preference for a more frequent positive *companionate leadership* model, while in Polish it is negative *war leadership* that is salient, characteristic of more collectivist cultures.

The encoding of internet discourse management functions is distinct too. In Polish – discourse management functions are marked more explicitly than in English and more information tends to be packed into either fewer or more visible (confrontational, vulgar) utterances to mark the commentator's dominance over their interlocutors. Thus, discourse winners are more visible in Polish discourse conflict management, while negative emotions (abusive language) can be considered to act in fact as the *conflict catalyst* (see also Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2013). There also exists a correlation between the number of conversationally winning commentators and the final conversational victory, essential for the group (parties, fractions, etc.) well-being, which cannot be overlooked in the discussion.

Culture-specific properties of conflict management, possibly historically and socially conditioned, involve stronger fears observed in Polish posts, more insecurity, and more aggressive compensatory strategies in terms of frequent *verbal shorthands*, and more frequent *face-threatening* moves, and yet they lead to the authors' clearer visibility in online conflict contexts. Less frequent employment of erudite comments, considered interactionally risky due to the absence of appropriate audiences' response, is being replaced by abuse of varying severity, which turns out to be less risky, and much more effective, partially due to the fact that a smaller segment of the society participates in online (political) compromise conflict management. The English comments are more tempered, more *face-saving*, though patronising at times, with a weaker emotional display. They contain more frequent witticisms and are more often self-directed in a humorous way. Conflicts in such cases, which can be misleading though in actual reality, look easier to attenuate and settle then.

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