

Netlinguistics. An Analytical Framework to Study Language, Discourse and Ideology in Internet

Santiago Posteguillo (2003)

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Santiago Posteguillo, senior lecturer at the University of Castellón with a long research curriculum in spite of being relatively young, has published a book, which in a way is the result of a consistent evolution since it summarizes and gives coherence to the whole body of research he has carried out in recent years. After having written a thesis on the language of Computer Science, he has written many articles on the subject of digital language, some of them with a high impact index, such as "The Schematic Structure of Computer Science Research Articles", published in *English for Specific Purposes* or "The Emergence of a New Genre: Advertising on the Internet", published with two other colleagues in *Hermes*.

From the beginning the book grasps the attention of the reader and the title itself, *Netlinguistics*, anticipates that the author intends to something more than simply add a few comments or general reflections on the subject. What Dr. Posteguillo intends to do and indeed does is to set up a framework, and to develop a whole theory to explain the different layers and factors involved in the language we use in the Internet.

After a book such as David Crystal's (2001) *The Language of Internet*, which is an introduction to the subject based on a preliminary description of how the different 'channels' (e-mail, chats, MUD, Web) of the Internet use language, it was a difficult task to write a book which would depart from reproducing the structure or the ideas. Santiago Posteguillo's book succeeds because he has organised the book following a purely linguistic and theoretical approach, which means that applied linguists are lucky because someone has made the effort to bring their traditional concepts and linguistic tools into play and because he has put some order in the conundrum and labyrinth represented by the digital world and more specifically by the Internet.

This obviously means that the book fills a gap because it adopts a completely new approach in an area of research, Internet language which, although in recent years it has seen an ever increasing body of study, still remains a land to explore. In fact, we could say that a book like the one reviewed here was badly needed since there are still very few books on the subject on the international scene in general and in Spain in particular.

Among other qualities, the book includes an extensive and very up to date bibliography, which has the peculiarity of combining both foreign and Spanish sources, departing from the accustomed proclivity to everything that comes from abroad and recognizing the work being done in this country. It also contains an author and a subject index together with a list of acronyms at the beginning, thus making life easier for the reader.

Similarly, the effort the author makes to incorporate high quality and consistent use of graphs and tables is worthy of praise, since they help the reader to visualize and, consequently, to understand better the concepts and the structure of the text, thus reinforcing the pedagogical character of the book. Finally, all the concepts are exemplified and are usually taken from the real world, which makes the text all the more interesting.

Netlinguistics has a neat chapter structure, which is explained in the introductory chapter, 'Netlinguistics: The Analytical Framework', and then developed in the rest of the book, as a progression from the most basic level, the technological level, to the most complex and intricate layer, the ideological one. This progressive structure makes it recommendable to read the book from beginning to end, since it is in this way that the reader will make the most of it. Let me just put forward an example: the ideological analysis carried out on page 145, entitled 'Internet fabric', where the ideological bearings of the 7-bit binary numbers technology initially adopted for the Internet, cannot be fully understood if one has not read the very interesting and illuminating second chapter, where we are given an introduction to the description of the communication codes used in the Internet.

The second chapter deals, as I have said, with the technological level and it is, from my point of view, one of the surprises we come across in the book. It is an attempt, and a very successful one indeed, to go as far back as possible in the exploration of

all aspects involved in the digital world. As if using a magnifying glass, we can see what lies behind the sentences and the discourse we find on the screen and we are introduced to the primary semiotic nature of computers and Internet. Step by step, with both clarity and conciseness, the author explains the different codes and semiotic systems which make up and constitute the first layer of the digital language.

Chapters 3 and 4 represent the core of the book as they contain the linguistic analysis on which the whole theory presented is grounded. Again there is a carefully organised progression from the smaller units, lexical units, to greater linguistic units such as text and genres. In both cases, the theoretical drive giving shape to the whole book is also present.

Thus, in the chapter devoted to terminology, we find not only a description of the vocabulary used but also an analysis of the lexico-genetic processes involved both at the morphological level and at the semantic level, where metaphor is given special treatment, very much in line with the advances of cognitive linguistics.

Particularly interesting, and I must admit here my common interests with those of the author, is the section on borrowings and code-switching. It is argued that Computer Language is especially prone to the use of this amalgamating language, where native words are mixed with borrowings and with words or expressions from other languages. Naturally, as in the rest of the book, this conclusion is not reached based on general or personal impressions, but through a carefully organised methodology and quantitative study.

In the chapter on digital discourse, the author, after making an introduction on the stylistic features of digital English at the sentence level, opts for applying a functional approach, and more specifically a Hallidayan framework, where Computer Mediated Communication is characterised as *mixed mode*, i.e. one where "spoken mode features (are used) in a written mode channel due to the technological constraints of space ... and cost" (p. 124). Thus, the traditional division into two *modes* of discourse, speech and writing, dependent on the channel of communication, becomes obsolete and it is necessary, to better represent reality, to introduce a continuum representation rather than a dichotomy.

Finally, the chapter entitled "Internet and Ideology" presents an outline of the most important social and ideological consequences of the use of English in the digital medium. Here subjects of the utmost relevance, such as the consideration of English as a new *lingua franca* or the analysis of Internet communities, are touched on together with the relevance cultural barriers and their importance in business carried out through the Internet.

In short, our editorial market sees a new book on language, but in contrast with others, more preoccupied with the comprehension of *things past*, this one represents a very serious and academic attempt to understand one of the key developments of the society of the XXI century. It thus becomes a powerful and very useful tool for all philologists and linguists who are interested in the present and in how it is shaped by the way we use language.

Reviewed by Rafael Alejo González

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