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Virtuality and Communication: Examining Reddit texts in terms of the transformation of digital communication norms and linguistic behaviour patterns

Abstract

This study explores the transformation of digital communication norms and linguistic behaviour patterns through the lens of Reddit. This platform enables anonymous and semi-anonymous interactions within a multitude of subcultures. The research highlights how digital platforms shape politeness strategies, debate structures, and linguistic registers, particularly within the r/AskReddit community. By analysing the dynamics of disagreement, irony, personal attacks, and humour, the paper demonstrates how online discourse diverges from traditional face-to-face communication and reflects new norms of interaction. The study relies on theoretical frameworks in pragmatics and sociolinguistics, integrating recent empirical findings and qualitative discourse analysis. It concludes that Reddit's structure, anonymity, and feedback mechanisms contribute to both the erosion and creation of norms, resulting in a hybrid culture of democratic expression, performative identity, and community regulation. The findings are relevant for understanding digital pragmatics, teaching online communication, and framing future linguistic research in virtual spaces.

Keywords: Reddit; digital communication; online disinhibition; politeness strategies; discussion norms; anonymity; linguistic behaviour; sarcasm; virtual identity; community moderation

Introduction

The development of digital technology and the networking of everyday communication have fundamentally reshaped patterns of linguistic behaviour. Social media platforms, especially those allowing anonymous or semi-anonymous interactions like Reddit, have led to new communication norms. These norms can differ significantly from the rules typical of face-to-face interactions and present challenges and opportunities for linguistics, especially pragmatics and sociolinguistics (Chandrasekharan et al. 2018; Suler 2004).

Reddit is an exciting research area because it offers a unique opportunity to observe different communication norms as a platform. Reddit contains thematically organised forums, so-called subreddits, which have different

communication styles, politeness strategies, and language patterns. The uniqueness of this platform is that it provides opportunities for public interactions. Still, simultaneously, due to the possibility of anonymity, the so-called online disinhibition effect may be more pronounced, according to which users communicate more efficiently and openly than during face-to-face interactions (Suler 2004).

This study explores how norms and linguistic interpersonal communication patterns are changing among Reddit users. This research contributes to developing digital linguistics and pragmatics by helping us understand how virtual space reshapes human communication and what new language strategies emerge in the digital environment. The study's results may also be relevant for teaching digital communication and understanding future directions of social communication. This cross-context relevance is further reflected in the authors' recent studies. Rajcsányi-Molnár, Balázs, and András (2024) demonstrated that practical online leadership training in higher education demands adaptation to these evolving digital norms. Such insights bridge digital discourse with educational communication frameworks, showing that lessons from virtual interactions can inform pedagogical strategies in academia.

Digital communication norms and the Reddit platform

This chapter reviews the theoretical framework of general digital communication norms and then focuses on specific communication norms observed on the Reddit platform. In doing so, we discuss the characteristics of digital communication, the norm systems of different platforms, the transformation of politeness strategies, and the role of Reddit subcultures.

Digital, online communication has several unique characteristics that distinguish it from traditional, face-to-face interactions. First, non-verbal cues such as body language and tone of voice are often absent online, making it easier to misunderstand text-based messages alone. Communication is often asynchronous: the sender and receiver of a message are not present simultaneously, which allows for reflection on messages but also delays feedback. Furthermore, the Internet can provide a high degree of anonymity and distance: users often communicate anonymously, without revealing their real names, and speak to physically distant, even unknown, audiences. This psychological distance and anonymity greatly influence the norms of communication (Aratό–Balázs 2023; Vaughan–Szűts–Novák 2024).

One of the essential psychological phenomena of digital communication is the so-called online disinhibition effect, or the release of inhibitions. Suler

(2004) calls the online disinhibition effect the phenomenon when Internet users express themselves more openly and do or say things in cyberspace that they would not do in physical reality, face to face. People "release" themselves online, feel less inhibited, and communicate more freely and honestly.

It is important to emphasise that online disinhibition can manifest in two ways, even opposite (Suler 2004). On the one hand, there is "benign" disinhibition, when users open up positively: sharing personal secrets, fears, desires, or showing unusual kindness and helpfulness towards others. On the other hand, we can talk about "toxic" disinhibition, during which harsh language, sharp criticism, anger or hatred appear, and even aggressive or deviant behaviours that the individual would not indulge in in real life. Anonymity, invisibility (hiding behind a monitor), asynchronous communication (no immediate consequences), the separation of personality from real identity, and the minimal presence of power authority are all factors that contribute to this effect (Suler 2004). Research has shown that, for example, people are more likely to use criticism or a more aggressive tone of voice in an online forum or email than they would in person (Kiesler et al. 1984). This phenomenon has been referred to as flaming since the 1980s: in the computer "subculture," flaming referred initially to someone expressing their opinions more forcefully online, without any restraint, than they would in other communication situations. Early Internet communities reported that rudeness and personalisation were more likely to emerge in unmoderated online messaging, partly due to the lack of shared etiquette and partly to the anonymity and impersonal nature of the medium. All of this suggests that the digital environment can loosen social inhibitions, which, on the one hand, creates new opportunities for self-expression and poses challenges to maintaining norm-compliant, polite interactions.

Online communication norms are not uniform across the Internet; they can vary from platform to platform. As Virginia Shea said early on, "netiquette varies from platform to platform," and what is acceptable in one online environment may be inappropriate in another (Shea 1994). Each digital platform and community develops its own set of norms, depending on the technical framework of the interface and the user culture. For example, a more formal tone and self-control are required on a business-oriented social network (e.g., LinkedIn). At the same time, a more direct or crude style is expected in an anonymous forum or gaming community. The given platform's affordances also influence communication: in the world of 280-character Twitter messages, brevity and a sharp tone have become the norm, while in a professional Facebook group, polite, considerate speech is typical.

An example of differences between platforms is the change in politeness strategies in the online space. In many linguistic cultures, including Hungarian, it can be observed that traditional politeness norms are loosening in online communication. For example, on Hungarian-language online platforms, using a polite tone towards all strangers has become common, which in real life was previously only accepted in confidential relationships. While previously politeness was expected between strangers or official partners, today, politeness dominates with almost mandatory force in the public sphere of social media. This shows that communication in the digital environment has become more informal (Balázs 2018). Of course, this also depends on culture. According to some, the loosening of online linguistic etiquette reflects the democratisation of relationships, while others are concerned about the decline of traditional norms of respect (Balázs 2018). These changes do not necessarily mean the disappearance of politeness, but rather its transformation. Politeness strategies can also be observed in online communication – for example, positive feedback, emphasis with emoticons or smileys to indicate a friendly tone, and conflict-avoidant wording. However, it is common for users to express criticism or disagreement more openly than in person, which requires a new balance between politeness and honesty. Overall, the norms of online communication are evolving dynamically. The standards of politeness are adapting to the new medium: while some formalities are relaxed, new conventions emerge to maintain respectful and effective online communication (for example, previewing content in advance to avoid repeating previous questions, or understanding the flexibility of response times in a forum.

Reddit's communication norms and subcultures

Reddit is an excellent case study in the diversity of digital communication, as it creates countless distinct communities within a single platform. Reddit is structured into thematic forums called subreddits, each constituting a particular subculture. Accordingly, communication norms consist of general rules that are standard to Reddit as a whole and community-specific customs and expectations. Reddit also has a standard code of conduct, the so-called " Reddiquette ", an informal statement of values and behavioural guidelines written by Redditors for platform users. Reddit's core principles – such as "Remember that others are human too" or "Adhere to the same standards of behaviour online as you would in real life" – are applicable

across the platform, similar to other netiquette rules.[1] In addition, Reddit's official Content Policy prohibits certain behaviours, such as hate speech or harassment, and violations of which can result in a ban from the entire platform. These macro-level norms provide the core values of the community and the framework for safe communication.

The absolute uniqueness of Reddit lies in the fact that each subreddit has its own culture of norms. Each community formulates its own rules (usually published in the subreddit description or its targeted posts), and an implicit system of behavioural norms is also developed that members follow. According to research, three norms prevail on Reddit: macro-level norms are present almost everywhere (these are values and rules that apply to the entire Reddit), meso-level norms are standard among certain subreddit groups. In contrast, micro-level norms are characteristic only of a single community. For example, Chandrasekharan et al. (2018) showed in an empirical study covering 100 large subreddits that, in addition to the standard value system of Reddit users, many different, community-specific rules and expectations have developed: certain norms only exist in a given thematic circle (for example, in some humorous or professional subreddits), while other norms are shared in many communities, but are not necessarily universal. In other words, common courtesy or expected behaviour in one subreddit may be unusual or undesirable in another. Similarly, different digital environments cultivate communication standards and etiquette outside of Reddit. For instance, in a business communication course augmented by AI tools, instructors must establish explicit norms for human–AI interaction and professional discourse (Balázs et al. 2023). This reinforces that norms must be tailored to each community's context and purpose, whether engaging on a social platform or within an online educational setting.

Reddit's subcultures, therefore, play a vital role in shaping communication. Each community has its own "tone" and internal culture: for example, a scientific knowledge subreddit (e.g. r/ askscience) requires moderated, objective, and polite conversation, severely punishing condescending or off-topic comments, while a subreddit steeped in satirical humor (e.g. r/ memes) allows for crude language and teasing. The community feedback system, primarily the upvote/ downvote mechanism, also reinforces adherence to norms: community members reward norm-compliant, valuable comments with positive votes, while norm-violating or inappropriate content is downvoted, making it less visible (Chandrasekharan et al. 2018). Reddit's decentralised moderation model – in which volunteer moderators oversee the order of each subreddit –

[1] support.reddithelp.comsupport.reddithelp.com.

allows different communities to develop their norms autonomously, but also challenges users to navigate the platform's diverse norms.

To participate effectively on Reddit (and other online communities), it is common practice for newcomers to first observe the community's operations – called "lurking" – before actively contributing. Reddit recommends that new members read the rules of a given subreddit and study previous conversations to familiarise themselves with the community's style before posting or commenting. This can help them avoid unintentional norm violations and learn the implicit communication norms of the subculture. Reddit users also often refer to the platform's unwritten rules, such as " Remember the human," which warn about the importance of a polite, humane tone. All this shows that platform and subcultural norms shape communication on Reddit: global digital norms acquire local interpretations in individual communities.

Communication norms and social expectations

/r/AskReddit serves as a general question-and-answer forum, where the norms of communication are relatively open. Still, unwritten rules typical of Reddit and the subreddit's moderation principles also apply. The platform's pseudo-anonymity (using usernames instead of real names) creates a unique atmosphere: participants share their opinions more freely. However, anonymity sometimes allows for more crude expressions through the so-called online disinhibition effect (Suler 2004). Nevertheless, a civil, polite tone is generally expected in the r/r/AskReddit community – according to the moderators' rules, "users should behave civilly; personal attacks, insults will be removed, and in serious cases, a ban will follow" (Reddit n.d.). This official norm provides a framework for discussions, although enforcement may vary depending on the discourse dynamics.

Another critical community norm is that AskReddit focuses on answering questions and sharing personal stories and opinions. Commenters often draw on their own experiences and perspectives, as evidenced by the high use of first-person pronouns in AskReddit's longer comments (Messerli et al. 2025). In other words, communication often has a personal tone, which also influences the style of discussions: discourse is not just an abstract exchange of ideas, but frequently a clash of individual experiences. The norm in this environment is that users tolerate different life experiences. Still, if someone questions the authenticity of other people's accounts or generalises from their own experience, it can quickly generate a debate.

The rating system (upvote/downvote karma) is also part of the communication norms. The collective votes of the community indicate

which comments are considered valuable or incorrect. This can result in a "herd effect": an opinion upvoted early on gains greater visibility, thus attracting further agreeing reactions (Muchnik et al. 2013). However, early downvoting does not necessarily lead to a "total fire" – research suggests that an unjustified downvote can have the opposite effect, and others may upvote the content to balance it out (Muchnik et al. 2013). This means that the AskReddit audience self-regulates discussions to a certain extent: comments with a style or content that the majority finds unacceptable receive negative feedback. In contrast, constructive or entertaining comments are rewarded with positive feedback. This mechanism incentivises users to conform to community expectations – for example, to avoid harsh attacks or to think through their comments first if they do not want to be scolded by the "famous" Reddit hivemind.

The AskReddit norm system encourages open, informal conversation, but implicitly expects a sober tone and respect for the experiences of others. In the following, we examine how participants handle disagreements in practice in this environment and what discussion styles can be observed.

In sizeable public forum discussions, disagreements are inevitable. What's unique about r/r/AskReddit is that the questions that start the conversation aren't necessarily meant to be discussion-provoking—they're often more about sharing personal experiences or gathering opinions. However, when a response or opinion sparks controversy, the discourse unfolds in a characteristic pattern:

Disjointed threads: Because Reddit's structure allows for tree-like comment threads, each disagreement often occurs in a separate thread, separate from the discussion of the other replies. For example, if a user makes a bold claim responding to a question, dozens of replies may erupt into heated debates below it. At the same time, other top-level comments remain peacefully engaged in light storytelling. The discourse is thus fragmented: parallel mini-discussions occur about different aspects of the main topic. This discourse structure allows users who are not interested in the conflict to ignore the threads of contention, while those interested can delve deeper into them.

Expressing a dissenting opinion: When someone disagrees with a statement, there are typically two approaches. One is a polite, constructive rebuttal, where the responder acknowledges the other person's point of view before stating their own. It's common for such a comment to start with something like, "I understand what you're saying, however, I think…" or "It's true that X, but Y…" This strategy helps soften the disagreement's edge and maintain a civil tone. The other approach is direct, unvarnished rebuttal, where the

commenter states their disagreement straight away: e.g., "You're completely wrong, that's stupid." These two approaches initiate different discourse dynamics: the former often results in rational dialogue, while the latter can quickly escalate into personal attacks or insults.

Reactions and escalation or resolution: If the parties continue the discussion, it is possible to observe how they handle the further development of the disagreement. In many cases, the discussion escalates: the parties defend their position more and more strongly, provide additional arguments and evidence (links, sources). On Reddit, it is common for someone to refer to or link to an external source (e.g. an article, Wikipedia) to support their truth, especially in factual disputes. However, it is common for the discussion to be resolved with humour or a punchline: a third party may insert a witty remark that everyone laughs at, thus closing the fruitless debate. Sometimes, the disputing party himself will back down from the confrontational tone with a joking or self-ironic remark, indicating that he does not want the conflict to turn into personal hostility. Other times, however, the discussion stops without consensus: one party does not respond further. Due to the asynchronous nature of Reddit, discourse often becomes stale – parties do not return to the thread days later, leaving the discussion unresolved but archived as a lesson for the community.

Community intervention: It is noteworthy that outside observers often intervene during disagreements. For example, when the tone between two users becomes heated, a third person usually calls on them to calm down or get back on topic: "Guys, keep it civil", or "Let's not get personal, let's stay on topic." Such intervenors act as guardians of community norms, reminding debaters of Reddiquette (Reddit's unwritten code of conduct) and the rules of the subreddit. This kind of norm control helps to prevent conflicts from escalating. If the discussion does take an offensive turn, moderators can also intervene: warnings and comment removals signal to the parties that the boundary has been crossed. For example, a moderator message (" Removed: Personal attack ") may appear in place of a deleted post, which is a clear indication that the discourse has crossed the line of permissible style.

Overall, the handling of r/r/AskReddit discussions suggests that although the community is not a thematically narrow discussion forum (like ar/ar/ChangeMyView, where they specifically focus on debate and persuasion), a culture of discussion has nevertheless developed, where conflicts are mostly contained. In the following subsection, we will examine the linguistic strategies used in discussions, focusing on politeness, irony, personal attacks and humour, and illustrate their operation in AskReddit discourse with specific examples.

/r/AskReddit, various linguistic strategies are observed, with which participants assert their positions or manage their relationship with the other party. These strategies often influence the tone and outcome of the discussion. Below, we discuss the most typical ones – politeness, irony/sarcasm, personal attacks, and humour – each presented with a brief example and analysis.

While the online anonymous environment can often be a hotbed of impoliteness, AskReddit is surprisingly rich in examples of polite debate. By politeness, we mean primarily when commenters pay attention to the other person's "face" and avoid attacking the other person's position crudely or offensively. Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) classic politeness theory, this can manifest as negative politeness (when the debater avoids offending the other party, e.g., by using careful phrasing, apologising) or positive politeness (when they seek common ground, emphasising points of agreement).

Research shows that in specific debate-centric communities on Reddit (e.g. r/ ChangeMyView), disagreements are predominantly expressed through negative politeness strategies – meaning users use indirect, mitigating phrases like "I see your point, but ..." or " With stand due respect, I have lake disagree ...", thus minimising the threat to the other party (Lukonas 2024). Similar examples can be found on r/r/AskReddit. Here is an anonymised quote from the corpus that demonstrates a polite disagreement:

User A: "I think parents should always financially support their kids through college."

User B: "I understand where you're coming from, and I agree it's great when they can. However, I respectfully disagree that they always should – some can't afford it, and it might teach independence."

In this short excerpt, User B first indicates his understanding ("I understand where you're coming from "), also expresses a little agreement ("I agree it's great when ..." – this is a sign of positive politeness, looking for a common denominator), and then after " however " he politely expresses his disagreement. He explicitly uses "I respectfully disagree ", a clear example of conventional politeness. This strategy allows the disagreement not to become offensive: B does not say "you are wrong", but emphasises his perspective ("I […] disagree that they always should – some simply can't ..."), supported by arguments. Such linguistic solutions contribute to keeping the discussion constructive.

Polite phrasing also has practical benefits in online debates: research has shown that politely phrased disagreements can be more effective in persuasion

and debate outcomes. Chiu et al. (2022) found that in an experimental online debate environment, "polite dissenters" more often won over their audience and partners than rude debaters. In other words, politeness is not just a moral or normative issue, but also has pragmatic benefits: the audience remains more open, and the debate is less likely to run into dead ends.

Of course, on AskReddit, it also happens that someone does not use these politeness tools. Such bald-on-record (Brown–Levinson 1987) expressions – e.g. "No, you're wrong. That's a terrible idea." – tend to receive less positive feedback, often receiving downvotes or criticism from other users. Overall, however, the community values respectful discussion, and many users consciously strive for this when engaging in disagreement.

In online discourses, including Reddit, irony and sarcasm are widespread strategies. These linguistic devices can serve humorous purposes and critical expressions in the discussion. Through irony, the user expresses his opinion indirectly and implicitly, often saying the opposite of his thoughts, drawing attention to the perceived absurdity or flaw of the other party's position.

We regularly encounter sarcastic replies in AskReddit posts, especially when a user has made a highly controversial or provocative claim. Here's an example of a typical sarcastic response:

User C: "Everyone" who struggles financially is fair lazy, they should work harder."

User D: "Oh, absolutely, because no hard-working person ever faces money problems. 🙄 /s"

Here, User D intentionally feigns exaggerated agreement ("Oh absolutely, because no hard work person ever faces money problems "), then emphasises that it is sarcasm with an eye-rolling emoji and the "/s" symbol. "/s" is a standard meta tag on Reddit and many online platforms, which explicitly indicates to readers that the previous statement is meant to be taken ironically (Hew et al 2024). This is often necessary because irony can be easily misunderstood in purely written communication due to the lack of emphasis and facial expressions. Hew et al. (2024) found in their study of AskReddit comments that users consciously use the "/s" notation mainly in sensitive, socio-moral topics – for example, it is seen more often in political, racial or other divisive issues, since in these contexts it is imperative to avoid misunderstanding and social condemnation. The above example also deals with a socially sensitive topic (causes of poverty), so D will surely get the sarcastic emphasis across.

Sarcasm has a dual function: on the one hand, it acts as a striking retort – D thereby ridicules C's simplistic opinion in one fell swoop, without engaging

in a lengthy argument; on the other hand, it also acts as a stress-relieving humor for outside readers, as a good sarcastic comment can generate many upvotes and cheers. However, it is essential to note that sarcasm can also be considered a negative irony, because it often carries a kind of hidden aggression: D is mocking C's view. The argument can become even more heated if C does not take it well. So sarcasm is a risky strategy: it can have high rewards (entertaining the audience, strikingly destroying the opponent's argument), but it comes at the cost of humiliating the target, which can incite further conflict.

In any case, sarcasm is such an established element on AskReddit that the community treats its recognition as an expectation. Those who do not understand obvious irony are sometimes jokingly called "Reddit-intolerant". It also happens that sarcasm is not even marked with "/ s", trusting that the context is clear. Irony and sarcasm are integral to AskReddit's discussion culture, which maintains the community experience (humour, entertainment) and serves discussion strategy goals (indirect criticism, position defence).

All good intentions and moderation, personal attacks and rude, even aggressive, expressions sometimes occur in online discussions, including on AskReddit. These messages, classified as flaming, attempt to discredit or anger the other party by insulting, belittling, or denigrating them. They often appear when the discussion becomes highly polarised or one party's frustration reaches its limit.

A typical example of a personal remark is when the debater does not criticise the argument but attacks the other person. For instance, in an angry reaction, someone might write: "Only an idiot would say something like that." (Only an idiot would say that.) Such ad hominem attacks immediately turn the tone sour. The attacked party can ignore it, retaliate, or try to correct the attack calmly. However, it is common for the offended party to get personal, creating a real " flame" war, in which the original topic is pushed into the background and the parties focus on insulting each other.

It is worth noting that the AskReddit community and its moderators do not tolerate personal attacks well. As mentioned earlier, the rules prohibit this, and according to community norms, anyone who does so is considered a "bad debater." Accordingly, users often quickly downvote personal comments, which moderators can remove. We found examples of this in our corpus. In a more extended discussion thread, where one party finally lost patience and resorted to insults, their comment was replaced within minutes with a moderation flag ("[comment removed: rule violation]"). In discourse, this typically results in a break – the discussion stalls, or more cultured debaters try to get the conversation back on track.

However, there are interesting borderline cases: sometimes the community perceives an offensive comment as humorous or justified indignation, and even rates it as such. For example, if someone makes a highly insensitive statement, an irritated response like "You have no idea what you're talking about, this is extremely ignorant" (You have no idea what you're talking about, that's an incredibly ignorant statement), although harsh, may be justified according to some in the community. Cases like this show that context matters a lot: the audience weighs in on who "deserved" the harsh response. However, persistently aggressive or baseless personal attacks are a turn-off for most AskReddit members.

From a communication theory perspective, personal attacks highlight the downside of anonymity: some users are much less inhibited by the lack of consequences (Suler 2004) and may even describe things they would not do face to face. At the same time, Reddit's structural and community control mechanisms – the rating system, moderation, and peer feedback – generally ensure that flame doesn't dominate the forum. This way, AskReddit maintains its friendly, if occasionally outspoken, discussion culture, and genuinely destructive communication remains the exception rather than the norm.

AskReddit discourse cannot be overemphasised. This subreddit is famous because even serious questions are always accompanied by funny, witty, meme-like answers, and the community values entertaining content. Humour is not only a goal (entertaining others, collecting upvotes), but also a tool in communication, including discussions.

Humour often functions as a de-escalation mechanism in arguments. When the heat rises between two or more users, one may respond with a joke instead of further fueling the conflict. For example, in an argument where A and B are already taking very different positions in heated tones, User A suddenly says, "Alright, I think we've both made our points. Let's agree that pineapple on pizza is a topic we'll never settle 😂." This instantly elevates the conversation to a new level, using a famous internet debate (pineapple on pizza) metaphor to make a joke out of the disagreement. If User B is receptive to humour, they may laugh or respond with a joke, ending the angry exchange. Humour thus allows for avoiding "loss of face": the parties can close the argument without openly apologising or declaring a winner – laughter essentially nullifies the conflict.

In other cases, humour remains an integral part of the discussion: it does not resolve the disagreement but makes the tone more friendly. Common strategies: self-irony (when someone mocks their previous position or vehemence afterwards), overgeneration (hyperbole – e.g. "If you're serious

about that, I bet you're Thanos incognito and you'd wipe out half the universe, right? 😜" to an overly harsh opinion), or the inclusion of light-hearted memes (e.g. turning a well-known movie quote upside down on the subject of the discussion). These solutions also provide enjoyment to the audience – according to Baym (1995), humour is critical in creating social meaning in online communities, i.e. it is a strong community-building force. A humorous post can receive many positive reactions, indicating that the community values humorous treatment even on serious topics.

Of course, humour can also be a distraction: not everyone agrees on what is funny. Some people think that a humorous response trivialises the problem, for example, under posts labelled [Serious] (where the questioner indicates explicitly a serious, personal topic and asks that people not joke), humorous off-topic comments are strictly prohibited and are quickly removed. This is also part of the discussion culture: recognising when humour is appropriate and when it is not. The AskReddit audience guides in this by what they respond positively to. In general, humour works well when the discussion is about to turn into a dead end or too sombre - in such cases, a shared laugh brings the conversation back to a more human, friendly level. However, if humour arrives prematurely, instead of an honest exchange of ideas (e.g. someone only responds to an essential point with jokes instead of serious arguments), many people may find it frustrating.

Humour is a lubricant in AskReddit discussions: it reduces friction and helps maintain community cohesion even amid disagreements. If you use it skillfully – for example, by using self-irony to indicate that you are aware of the absurdity of the discussion – you can quickly become the "winner of the debate" in the eyes of the audience without defeating the other side on the level of arguments.

Consequences for language use and social interactions

The communicative norms and strategies observed on Reddit show how digitalisation shapes language use and social interaction. Regarding language use, Reddit discourse has a unique written and spoken language mix. The language of the comments is generally informal and colloquial – often resembling orality – but is also written, thus preserving the permanence and plannability of the written text. This mix has led to a new linguistic register, full of Internet slang, emojis, GIFs and formatting tricks (e.g. to indicate irony, italics for emphasis, etc.). Language has become more flexible: users creatively shape linguistic norms, and new forms spread quickly in

the community. This kind of virtual linguistic evolution has created a new arena of social interactions, where traditional grammar and stylistics are partly rewritten based on norms consensually accepted by the community. At the same time, Reddit discourse also has a norm-forming power: since many, especially young, users interact on this platform daily, the modes of expression developed on Reddit can filter into other communication spaces and even into everyday speech. For example, it is not uncommon for a popular Reddit joke or meme to become part of the Internet vernacular as a phrase.

Social interactions and community: In the case of Reddit, communication does not occur solely between two individuals, but is part of a broader community interaction. Users communicate with the crowd and the individual simultaneously: their answer to an AskReddit question can be a personal story for the community. At the same time, someone can respond to them specifically in a thread. This multi-layered interaction results in a specific discussion culture. On the one hand, a public discussion can encourage participants to express themselves more coherently and clearly (since many "ears" are listening), and to try to prove their claims, for example, with links and sources, if it is a serious topic. On the other hand, the mass presence can also make it challenging to have a meaningful dialogue: popular comments often have hundreds of sub-discussions, making it difficult to keep track of who is responding to what. The discussion culture is thus fragmented: instead of being a single discussion thread, comments appear in a file-like branching structure. As a result, instead of a collaborative search for truth, discussions on Reddit often appear as parallel monologues. Everyone throws their own opinion or joke, without reaching a common conclusion. At the same time, it is essential to highlight that Reddit's community mechanisms (rating, moderation) still force the discourse to self-correct to a certain extent: answers containing misleading information are often corrected or downvoted by others, and the community values relevant additions. We saw countless examples of "teaching each other" and informal knowledge dissemination on AskReddit, which suggests a collective normative expectation in the community for meaningful dialogue, even if this is often implemented in a humorous or informal style.

Identity and social relationships: Changes in language use and interaction patterns also affect social relationships. On Reddit, the role of personal identity is minimised, paradoxically increasing honesty and reducing responsibility. The previous chapters have drawn attention to the fact that Reddit is a testing ground for identity for many users: they can show different faces on different forums without affecting their offline personality. This provides opportunities

for positive self-expression – for example, sharing desires and opinions they would suppress in their everyday environment – and hostile behaviour, since actions rarely have personal consequences. Therefore, in Reddit's discussion culture, community approval (in the form of upvotes) has become one of the main regulating factors instead of individual responsibility. However, this dynamic also awakens a sense of responsibility at the community level: users learn that they are responsible for the quality of the community, since they shape the direction of the discourse with their votes and reactions. Thus, Reddit is a space for individualistic and collectivist communication. It is individualistic because every voice has an equal chance of being anonymous, but collectivist in the sense that the community decides which voices to elevate and which to suppress.

Conclusion

The example of Reddit clearly shows that online platforms are rewriting the rulebook of social interaction. The transformation of communication norms – the duality of freedom and irresponsibility due to anonymity, the new dynamics of debate arising from asynchrony, humour and sarcasm as a mediating language, and community feedback as a value regulator – all contribute to the emergence of a new linguistic culture. This culture is once more democratic (since anyone can contribute and the best ideas or jokes emerge), but also more fragmented and unpredictable than the world of traditional dialogue. Our social interactions are increasingly supplemented by this virtual layer, where language is not just a means of communicating information. Still, also a source of social play, identity laboratory, and collective experience. This notion of a virtual "identity laboratory" resonates beyond social media. For instance, in higher education environments, the authors' AVATAR project (Balázs et al. 2024) similarly leverages a digital persona to monitor student engagement and success, reducing dropout rates through proactive feedback. Such parallels suggest that managing identity in virtual spaces, be it on Reddit or in an online classroom, can significantly influence community outcomes and norms. Reddit's culture of debate suggests that new norms are needed in digital communication, norms that retain the benefits of open discourse and creative self-expression while addressing the challenges of misunderstanding, anonymity, and mass interaction. The challenge lies in that community members collaboratively developed and maintained these norms, continually reflecting on how language and social interaction are changing in the virtual world.

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