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Shared Face and Face-Enhancing Behaviour in Social Media: Commenting on the Spanish Goalkeeper's Tears on YouTube

1. Introduction

On the video platform YouTube, we can observe a high frequency of positive face-related speech acts like the following, drawn from the discussion (YouTube 2010b) to a clip (YouTube 2010a) of Spanish national goalkeeper Iker Casillas who unexpectedly started crying in the final match of the World Cup 2010, when his teammate Andrés Iniesta scored the decisive goal:

casiilllssssssss eresss unico! lo vales demaciiadoo!un besito!
(*brendaensumundo*)

What is striking about this comment is that it is directly addressed at Casillas: we find his name, a verb in the second person and an affective greeting formula – in short, a direct address. Still, the comment seems to be addressed into nowhere. Social Media users are very likely aware of the fact that Casillas is not participating in this discussion. Hardly any of the users will expect a reaction from the goalkeeper. What sense does it make then to enhance the face of somebody who does not even take notice of it?

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Research on politeness has, in the past few years, focused on impolite speech acts and aspects such as prosody and sequentiality. Positive politeness and face-enhancing acts have been theorised but not tested empirically. At the same time, research on computer-mediated communication (in the following, CMC) has often dealt with the assumed rudeness of CMC – “friendly” online communication is rarely the object of research. Yet Social Media provide an infinite corpus of more or less sequential conversations which can serve to revise the models based on face-to-face settings and help to understand the dynamics of online language use.

This contribution attempts to start filling this gap, focusing on face-enhancing acts in a Social Media setting, taking the user comments to the Casillas clip as a starting point. I will try to show that online comments towards celebrities are not gratuitous, but serve specific social face wants.

2. Paying Compliments – Offline and Online

In informal talks (and also in academic discussions) about online conversations, we often find the position that people tend to react very impolitely (cf. Kayany 1998: 1136). Online communication is said to be extremely rude. Suler enumerates six factors in CMC – dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and minimisation of authority (cf. Suler 2004: 322ff.) – which are responsible for the fact that participants feel less inhibition to verbal face threats or damages. He names the phenomenon the *online disinhibition effect* (Suler 2004: 321) and states that:

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We witness rude¹ language, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred, even threats. (Suler 2004: 321)

Even though it may be true that some conversations in Social Media applications abound in impolite speech acts, we can find many examples for the opposite case. Face-enhancing acts (in the following, FEA) seem to be a common strategy in discussions. People pay compliments to each other for funny status updates, beautiful vacation photos, pictures of cooked meals or helpful advice; they congratulate on birthdays, exams, weddings and childbirth; they console each other in case of illness, accidents or death. And they do not only act in this way toward their friends (who may as well be “virtual friends”, cf. Pietrini 2012: 165), but also toward celebrities or complete strangers. As Suler notes, the disinhibition may also affect the friendly sides of life:

Sometimes people share very personal things about themselves. They reveal secret emotions, fears, wishes. They show unusual acts of kindness and generosity, sometimes going out of their way to help others. We may call this *benign disinhibition*. (Suler 2004: 321)

This may be one reason why Social Media participants enhance other people’s face, despite the physical absence, even if they have never met and are not even online friends.

Holmes ranges compliments among the positive politeness devices described by Brown and Levinson (cf. Brown/Levinson 1987²), with a “positively affective function [...] reducing social distance

¹ Bousfield elaborates on the terms of rudeness and impoliteness, differentiating them in that impoliteness implies the speaker’s intent to damage the other’s face, while rudeness is an unintended face damage which is only perceived as such by the hearer (Bousfield 2010: 122ff.). Since the aim of this contribution is not to analyse impolite speech acts, I will not go further in detail.

² The high relevance of compliments for politeness research is discussed, amongst others, in Probst 2004.

and reinforcing solidarity between speaker and hearer” (Holmes 1988: 448):

A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer. (Holmes 1988: 446)

While compliments are usually intended to meet the positive face wants of the hearer, interaction shows that they may as well be interpreted as a threat to the negative face: the speaker irrupts into the hearer’s private territory and constrains them to react in some adequate way (cf. Thaler 2012: 100). This is a ritual communicative frame applying to face-to-face conversation and many other forms of interaction. It prescribes that people should compliment one another more or less regularly to keep their relationship intact, and that a face-enhancing act should be followed by an act of acknowledgement (cf. Holmes 1988: 447; Herbert 1989: 5). Social Media does not make an exception: Most Social Media devices provide the possibility to comment on any kind of media content in order to show appreciation or support. Some users write long text messages, some place applauding or other positive emoticons, some click the “Like” or “thumbs-up” button. The act of acknowledgment can occur in the same way: Positive comments can also be rated with the “thumbs-up” button, or users write a thank-you note in reply. At least on YouTube, more elaborated reactions to compliments are rare and usually limited to cases where users share private content (like craft tutorials) and receive compliments for their effort. In the case of face enhancement towards celebrities, there is usually no acknowledgment, since the addressees cannot follow all online conversations concerning them, even if they

wanted to do so.³ Most fans or followers are aware of this and do not expect a reaction from celebrities when complimenting them.

It is by now a commonplace that CMC modes “impose conversational constraints on language users due principally to the lack of contextual cues” (Park 2008: 2051). Yet, research on CMC has shown since the late 90’s that linguistic online behaviour is “not primarily a characteristic of the medium, rather [...] social context dependent” (Kayany 1998: 1140). With regard to this, Park notes that “online discourse participants adapt to the CMC setting and employ a variety of creative communication devices to express sociointerpersonal content” (Park 2008: 2058). He also states that FTAs can occur in the same way in CMC as they do in face-to-face situations – and so do FEAs (Park 2008: 2055). In spite of the differences in concrete linguistic means that we can hardly overlook, CMC is not detached from our offline communication, and it is as well influenced by social and interactional context factors (Kayany 1998: 1141).

Two conditions are important for the communication of an FEA: the flattering must be non-ambiguous, and the addressee must understand that the FEA is directed to them. In Social Media, we can find many examples in which people make an effort to disambiguate the function and addressee of their FEA:

- mention the name (or pseudonym) of the addressee
- avoid means like irony
- repeat their compliments
- fill the compliments with positive attributes
- add smileys.

³ Some celebrities do interact with their fans or followers via Facebook pages, Twitter accounts or other applications. But many of them do it irregularly or have their account maintained by a Social Media manager, which is of course not the same as frequent personal contact. In the case discussed here, the video was uploaded by an anonymous YouTube user, so it is even more unlikely that the featured person will take notice of it.

Turning back to the initial posting addressed to Iker Casillas, I will now observe the special case of enhancing the face of someone who does not participate in the conversation. I suggest this has to do with a concept I will call 'shared face', which is itself related to the social identity of an individual. This concept has first been touched on by Goffman:

[...] in many relationships, the members come to share a face, so that in the presence of third parties an improper act on the part of one member becomes a source of acute embarrassment to the other members. (Goffman 1967: 42)

As Spencer-Oatey puts it,

[...] people have a fundamental belief that they are entitled to an association with others that is in keeping with the type of relationship that they have with them. This principle [...] seems to have three components: involvement (the principle that people should have appropriate amounts and types of "activity" involvement with others), empathy (the belief that people should share appropriate concerns, feelings and interests with others), and respect (the belief that people should show appropriate amounts of respectfulness for others). (Spencer-Oatey 2005: 100)

Tajfel defines "social identity" as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1974: 69; cf. also Tajfel/Turner 1979: 40). In the moment when an individual becomes aware of a specific element of their social identity, this element becomes part of the individual's face that they will want to save from threats. The interesting point here is that the individual does not only care for their own face, but for the face they share with all individuals belonging to the specific group.

When an element of the social identity is being derided, insulted, denigrated or in another way devaluated, the individual feels a face damage. In case the target to the damage is a person, people

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feel the face damage with the target person – they cringe, feel hurt, derided, or ashamed for the other. They share elements of their social identity with others and thus also share a face with regard to these elements. A face-related speech act towards a social identity element affects the face of all group members.

The effects of face work on shared face are not only evident in case of devaluation, but also in case of upvaluation. People feel proud, happy, euphoric, etc. when their social identity is positively touched indirectly through the *shared face*. Holmes provides an example from face-to-face communication which is a similar case of shared face enhancement:

[...] even when a compliment apparently refers to a third person it may well be indirectly complimenting the addressee, as (1) illustrates.

(1) *Context*: R's old schoolfriend is visiting and comments on one of the children's manners.

C(omplimenter) What a polite child!

R(ecipient) Thank you. We do our best.

The utterance can be interpreted as a compliment since it indirectly attributes credit to the addressee for good parenting. (Holmes 1988: 447)

The peer group identification may grow stronger as members compliment their shared face and thus reaffirm the group's solidarity. This might be one reason why people post positive comments regarding their social identity in Social Media: They feel as a part of a peer group, even if it is only a virtual one, and as such, they have the responsibility to contribute to the group's community feeling.⁴ Again, Kayany emphasises the strong connection between offline and online communicative behaviour:

⁴ An FEA towards a shared social identity element may also be interpreted as self-face enhancing, since it also means upvaluing an element of one's own face. Writing nice

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[...] the participants bring with them their social behavioural norms, cultural affinities, patriotic loyalties, and religious and national conflicts. (Kayany 1998: 1137)

The main difference between social behaviour offline and online might be that online groupings are far more disperse, which makes it harder to discern individual members.

3. Corpus Data

For the present contribution, I looked into the comments posted by August 2012 to the YouTube clip “Casillas llora despues del gol de Iniesta en la final - España vs Holanda 1-0” (YouTube 2010), the oldest dating from July 2010 (shortly after the final match of the World Cup), the newest from August 2012.⁵

17 comments had been hidden due to negative comments or spam suspicion.⁶ 10 comments had been eliminated because the authors had been deleted from YouTube (it is not clear whether they had deleted their accounts themselves or had been excluded by YouTube because of inappropriate behaviour). Finally, I deleted some of the remaining 734 comments since they were pure duplicates.

Since multiple pragmatic means are used in online communication, there is no reliable automated analysis tool for these matters by now. In order to classify the comments as FEA and to find pat-

things in Social Media does not only mean an altruistic act of enhancing the face of others, but also a face enhance for oneself.

⁵ YouTube does not provide precise dates neither for clips nor for comments.

⁶ These hidden comments being FTAs, they were not relevant for the corpus of this contribution on positive politeness and face enhancement. If someone decided to explore impolite communication on YouTube, it would of course be of great interest to analyse these comments with a high number of “thumbs-down” or “spam suspicion” clicks from other users, which means that the community has rated them especially impolite.

terns for different linguistic strategies, they must be read one by one and in context. In the following section, I will analyse the comments I classified as an FEA – in total 283.

4. Data Analysis

Glasford et al. name two important strategies to establish in-group harmony and identification: “[...] out-group derogation and activism to change the behaviour of the in-group” (Glasford et al. 2009: 420). These strategies are also present in the analysed YouTube comments. For the activism part, users turn out to be very creative, so I subdivided this strategy into five sub-strategies, which are, by order of frequency: *Indirect Compliment – Patriotism – Empathy – Compliment from Opponent – Direct Address*. The opponent-centred FEA strategy – named here *Deriding the Opponent* – is the least frequent, as shown in chart 1.

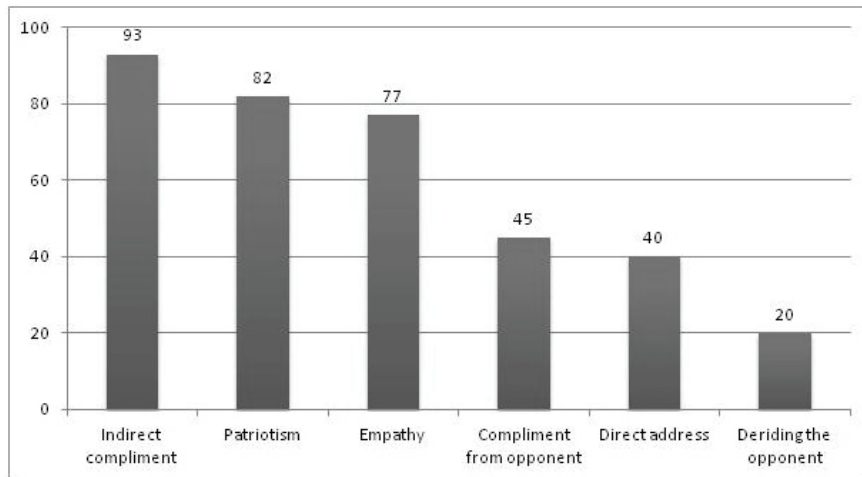


Chart 1: Distribution of FEA strategies in YouTube corpus

Users often combine these strategies. It is interesting to see that the three most important strategies are also those being the most frequently combined with each other (see chart 2).

Writing in CMC often does not follow the same orthography rules as written standard language. In the case of Spanish, the omission or displacement of diacritics is very typical, as well as a creative use of punctuation marks like the non-placement or dislocation of the double question and exclamation marks or the repetition of a punctuation mark. We also find repetitions of single letters or letter sequences.

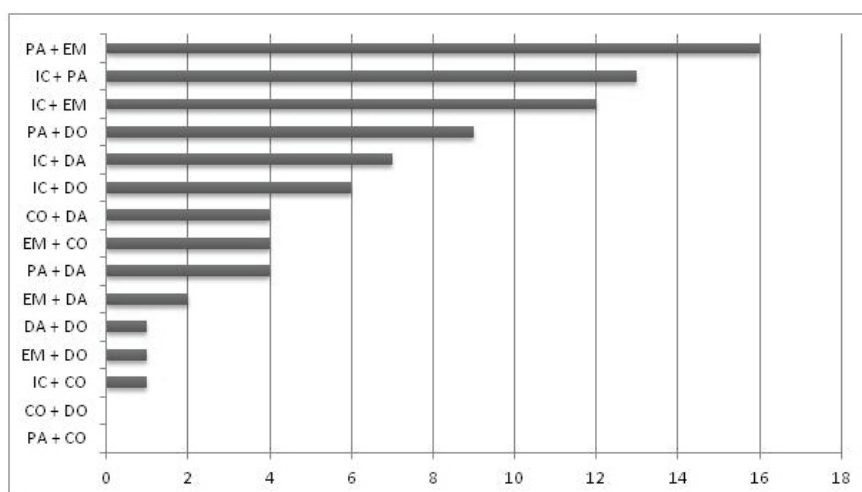


Chart 2: Combinations of FEA strategies in YouTube corpus (IC=Indirect Compliment, PA=Patriotism, EM=Empathy, CO=Compliment from Opponent, DA=Direct Address, DO=Deriding the Opponent)

Yet these online-specific linguistic means are not unmarked; they are mostly used to create emphasis and thereby show involvement. They are frequent in the YouTube corpus data, which is not surprising since speech acts related to social identity (FTAs as well as FEAs) affect the shared face of the users and imply emotional

involvement. In the following, I will focus on the linguistic means to create emphasis, in order to carve out how Spanish speakers do positive face work in Social Media.

5. Face-Enhancing Strategies on YouTube

5.1. Indirect Compliment

The most frequent strategy is to say positive things about Casillas or the Spanish team, mostly in the 3rd person.

- (1) IKER CASILLAS SERÁ EL MEJOR POR SIEMPRE.
(*bichioeurovisivo8*)
- (2) el mejor portero del mundo!!! (*moonyHale*)
- (3) Casillas es hermosisisisisisisisimooooo-ooooo,bueno como todos los españoles !!! Abundan los chicos guapos en mi pais Viva España
(*BellaSevillana*)
- (4) es que es lo menos que podía hacer, llorar. viva la madre que parió a san iker casillas (*enrique12972*)
- (5) IKER ES DIOS! (*jesusc7505*)

The first two examples look quite similar, both using the superlative of the positive adjective *bueno*, and both using terms with maximal extension (*por siempre, del mundo*) to express their estimation of the goalkeeper. To emphasise their comment, they use different strategies available to online users: The first writes all in upper case letters, which is a common online writing practice to simulate a loud voice and thus high emotional involvement. The second writes in lower case letters, but adds three exclamation marks, which have about the same effect.

We find the exclamation marks again in comment 3. Furthermore, *BellaSevillana* emphasises the superlative *hermosísimo* by repeating

several times the stressed penultimate syllable (once adding another *i*, but this might be a typing error) and reduplicating many times the final vowel *o*. Both means do probably not represent simulation of prosodic stress: the last vowel is not stressed or lengthened when pronounced; the penultimate syllable might be stressed but would not be repeated. We may consider this as a typical feature of written language in online contexts, especially in Social Media.

Comments 4 and 5 feature emphasis by religious allusions: Casillas is called a saint (*san Iker*) and even God (*Dios*).

5.2. Patriotism

Patriotism means here that the person expands the context of the event to national relevance. Again, the person reveals the event as relevant to their social identity, but also as part of shared face, since they assume the whole nation to feel the same.

- (6) Eran las lagrimas de toda España.....nos lo merecíamos todos..pero por encima de todo..el
El mejor jugador del mundial tenia k ser el...k grande Casillas
(*akasha737*)
- (7) Felicidades Españoles. you deserved it. Fue mi favorito desde el principio. Gano el mejor futbol duelale a quien le duela. QUE VIVA ESPAÑA carajo!!!! (*anadisi02*)
- (8) Al verlo llorar rompi en llanto muy copiosamente, entretanto veíamos el trigunfo de nuestro lado entiendo la razon de sus lagrimas y el sendero para llegar a ese momento, detras de toda la historia entre las luces esparcidas al atardecer en el alma de esta final que ahora cayo ante nuestra patria, la promesa y el anhelo eran una lucha entre la realidad y los sueños una puesta en escena donde España se hizo grande! al fin somos campeones del mundo! Dios bendiga a España! (*Andy77mx*)

(9) ViVa España KopoNN que Grandes SomoSS (*elvaqui*)

In many of these examples we find a focus on the in-group. This is expressed by the frequent use of pronouns and verb forms of the 1st person plural (*nos lo merecíamos, veíamos, nuestro lado, nuestra patria, somos campeones*).

It is typical of football fans to speak of their group as a whole even when they are talking about very individual feelings and to project the team's success on themselves. In the case of the national teams, the in-group is supposed not only to be some football fans, but the whole nation. This is obvious in the shown comments using ritual and religious formulae to enhance the self-esteem of the nation (*que viva España, Dios bendiga a España*). Again, writing in upper case letters simulates loudness and signifies a high level of emotional involvement. *Elvaqui* plays with this device interchanging loosely upper and lower case letters, which gives the written words an inconvenient appearance and emphasises them.

The ritual formulae make these comments ambivalent. They are not only FEAs toward the in-group, strengthening the group feeling of Spanish football fans, but they are also indirect face threats against fans of other national teams. The explosive force of these formulae and of the use of exclusive "we" often leads to fierce debates among patriotic football fans, mostly leading away from the subject of the clip – Iker Casillas crying.

5.3. Empathy

Showing empathy means enhancing the face of all those who share a specific face element. Unlike the Patriotism strategy expanding the narrow individual perspective to a supposed large group, the Empathy strategy focuses on the individual's self. Many commenters personalise the event and talk about their own feelings regarding this shared social identity element.

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(10) q hermosoo!!!! me hizo llorar a mi (*eria89*)

(11) el empezo a llorar anoche y yo tambien con el. fue magico ese momento, cuando casi todos empesaron a llorar. <333333 (*tegritoamor18*)

(12) me conmueven esos 8 segundos (*altDIY*)

The frequent use of the 1st person singular in many of these comments shifts the focus on the feelings of the commenter. Again, we find a combination of common means and typical pragmatic elements from online communication to show empathy: use of positive adjectives (*hermoso, mágico*), emotion verbs (*llorar, conmovier*), graphic emphasis (multiple exclamation marks, vowel reduplication as in *hermosoo*), graphic ASCII-art (<3 as a pictogram for a heart, combined with graphic emphasis when the 3 is multiplied).

5.4. Compliment from Opponent

A subtype of the compliment worth mentioning in a paragraph *à part* is the compliment from the out-group. It is the users themselves who draw the line between in-group and out-group according to their own perception. In this specific case analysed here, the in-group consists in the first instance of Spanish football fans, who often expand their in-group on all Spanish people. The out-group is constructed from non-football fans and fans of other countries' national teams:

(13) ya hace un año. Bien merecida la copa para españa. con esa seleccion que tiene era logico que serian campeones!! Saludos desde mexico. (*sonnyIDI*)

(14) iker casillas el mejor de todos... Saludos hermanos españoles paso por aqui un Argentino (*siempreuniluso21*)

(15) yo soy uruguayo y admito es el mejor golero del mundo!! (*adrianixman*)

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This type of comments abounds in hyperbolic praise of Casillas. Many users close their comment with a greeting formula, which is not very common in YouTube comments and thereby a special act of positive politeness towards the Spanish fans.

The in-group can be subdivided into fans of Iker Casillas more specifically as a player of the Spanish football club Real Madrid and fans of the National team, but not of Madrid. Here are some examples for this case:

- (16) amo al barcelona!.....pero el primer arquero q marco mi juventus y q me dio esa remota idea de se arquero siempre fue....Iker Casillas!....el mejor arquero de España de todos los tiempo!!.....hala Casillas (*renxo17*)
- (17) Soy un fan de barcelona Casillas is the best es el mejor del mundo no soy un fan de madrid pero si de Casillas. (*Zpaceboy77*)
- (18) Iker eres el mejor!!! te lo dice un aficionado del barcelona! (*nicolasrod*)

Many users declare themselves members of the out-group and add their compliment, either toward the Spanish team or toward Casillas. Receiving a compliment from the out-group must be perceived as an even more enhancing act to the shared face of the in-group, since such a speech act comprises a self-devaluation of the out-group and a confirmation for the in-group that their self-esteem is justified.

Beyond the strategy of double hyperbolic speech, declaring Casillas as best keeper of all times, there is an enhancement strategy that we have not mentioned yet: the use of English elements in 17. The user switches between Spanish and English, probably feeling that this language-mixing will highlight the comment, since they simply repeat the same content in Spanish.

5.5. Direct Address

An interesting type of shared face FEA is the direct address of the person in question. The improbability that this person will even read this comment is a sign that the FEA is not really directed at them, but rather at others sharing this element of social identity. In the following examples, either the name (Iker Casillas) is mentioned or the goalkeeper is addressed through the personal pronoun of the 2nd person sg.

(19) lagrimas de felicidad,iker eres un grande maestro,hala madrid..SAN IKER. (*ztereozizou*)

(20)QE GRANDEEEEE ERESS CASILLASSS TODOSSS LLORAMOSSS CONTIGOOO (*molisnow*)

(21)iker el mejor portero del mundo ! si señor ! eres el mejor casillas el MEJOR ! (*Eveliinaa1995*)

(22)TE QUIERO IKER (*BuyoIker*)

(23)casillas eres el puto amo gracias (*cicovic2*)

The enhancement here is made obvious by usual means: positive adjectives (*grande, mejor*) or nouns (*maestro, amo, felicidad*), exaggeration (*te quiero, mejor del mundo, todos*). We find again sanctification (*San Iker*) and intensification by use of a word with negative connotation in a positive sense (*puto*), both expressive strategies to increase the effect of the comment.

In addition, we see typical means of online communication, known from e-mail, chat, and message boards: writing in upper case to imitate shouting, multiplication of letters to emphasise the words they belong to. We can assume that in the case of vowel multiplication, it also means imitation of an extended pronunciation, but in the case of consonants, this is less probable. In *molisnow's* example, *grandeeee* and *contigooo* might be the written representation of an extended pronunciation (even if we would expect it rather on the stressed penultimate syllable), whereas *Casillasss*,

todos and *lloramos* are probably only emphases using the same graphic means, but without an oral model.

5.6. Deriding the Opponent

An ambivalent strategy is open derision of the in-group's opponent. To the in-group, drawing the line of membership may serve as a strengthening act. To the out-group, this is an affront, an FTA.

(24) Lora por que le faltaban 30 sg para llegar a los penaltis, como no va a llorar.

Casillas es un superhombre, 3 minutos antes acaba de realizar la mejor parada del mundial ante el calvorota holandes ese que no me acuerdo como se llama. (*cineaccion3*)

(25) sii hubiera ganado holanda hubiera sigoo injuustoo !!
porqueee nuestroo juuegooo fuuee limpiooo no komo el de ellooss!!
que lo unico que hacian era dar patadaaas!!
VIIVAAAAA EESPAÑAAAAA!!!!!!!!!!!!!! viivaaaaaaa
CASIILLAAAAA!!!!!!!!!!!!!! quee sus lagrimas representan
las de todos los españoleeees!! (*BeeittaaySuusii*)

In these examples, the opponent is the Dutch national football team, and due to the concept of shared face, also all of its supporters. In 24, we find an allusion to Dutch footballer Arjen Robben, clearly an insult: *calvorota*, which reduces the player to his head's appearance and depersonalises him, since he is not called by his name. The Dutch team is denigrated in 25, saying that their game was not *limpio*, i.e. not appropriate; and again, much emotion is transported in the repeated letters. From the forth line on, there are only vowels repeated, which makes a concrete phonetic lengthening possible. The wording (praising the own team, naming a player) is typical of football chants. This commenter takes the derision of the opponent to the extreme by simulating the humiliating stadium situation.

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It is no wonder that many comments of this order receive replies from annoyed users who feel a damage of their shared face. Not all of the answers are direct replies to the initial comment, but users often refer to previous posters or to the overall bad atmosphere in the previous comments. In fact, the totality of comments shows a majority of FTAs, mostly reactions to face damage even though the derogating strategy is not very frequent – but it obviously has the strongest effect on the shared face of the out-group. This is linguistic evidence for the above mentioned social psychological findings that derision of someone else’s social identity strengthens people’s identity feeling on both sides, often leading the attacked group to defend their shared face or to counterattack.

6. Concluding Remarks

This contribution is based on the assumption that the world of Social Media is not detached from communication in offline settings. People have a social identity and thereby seek to keep their *shared face* intact – offline as well as online.⁷ If their social identity is attacked by a negative online comment, it does not matter for people from the hurt group whether they know the offender or whether thousands of miles separate them from each other – they still feel offended. Just like in their offline life, people feel the need to enhance their own and other people’s face online. They send positive comments to users they have never met, on the basis that the others share a specific element of their social identity.

⁷ I assume that online activities are nowadays part of real life, and that the argument “It does not matter, it is only virtual” is no longer valid. This implies that the facets of identity which users create in online spaces are facets of a real identity related to a real person’s real experiences (see also Fröhlich in this volume).

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A fundamental difference between the offline and the online world is that people can exchange on their specific interests independent from distance and time. The groups that people belong to are potentially larger and may spread all over the world. So people may watch a football match on television and celebrate the players with a small group of friends, and they may as well rewatch the best scenes on YouTube and celebrate the players together with thousands of other internet users who share this social identity element. In both cases, the individuals demonstrate solidarity with others and strengthen their feeling of belonging to a group. This enhances the shared face of the group and the individuals' self face at the same time. Once more, this behaviour suggests that offline and online spaces are closely linked to one another – people tend to interpret unspecific face work actions as individually directed to them, even in vast groups whose structure is unclear, like online communities.

In my corpus of YouTube comments, users of the Spanish language make use of six main strategies to send out an FEA related to shared face. These strategies – five in-group related, one out-group related – have been presented above. The most important linguistic means to create emphasis in the comments are:

- graphic means:
 - playing with graphemes, mixing upper and lower case characters
 - economic spelling
 - iteration of single graphemes or punctuation marks
- lexical means:
 - syllable iteration
 - hyperbolic speech, positive and emotional semantics
 - sanctification

- pragmatic means:
 - personal focus on the individual
 - focus on the in-group
 - focus on the element of shared face (by mentioning the name)
 - focus on the relationship between in-group and out-group
 - ritual formulae

Since this analysis is based on a small corpus, these findings cannot be generalised. Further research on FEAs in Social Media with regard to different aspects is necessary. I suggest that some of the strategies presented here (notably patriotism) would play a less significant role in other contexts, leaving place to strategies that could not be observed here. It would be interesting to observe comment threads related to content which does not provoke many FTAs, like fashion and beauty clips. The fact that Social Media are often plurilingual and populated by individuals speaking different languages (cf. Locher/Bolander, this volume) may be of interest for contrastive politeness research.

The phenomenon of the troll (an individual deliberately disturbing a harmonious online conversation with inappropriate comments, cf. Kluge, this volume) would also be an interesting subject due to its relation to both Social Media and politeness matters. It could also be enlightening to observe whether and how individuals attempt to solve miscommunication online to prevent themselves and others from face damage. Analysing metacommunication about the “correct” behaviour in an online setting would provide further clues to the applicability of traditional politeness conventions and models to the CMC context.

7. References

7.1. Corpus

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