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Face Work and Flaming in Social Media

1. Introduction

Social Media¹ play an increasingly important part in face work or relational management² of individuals as well as of groups.³ Based on a case study from YouTube, this paper deals with the linguistic analysis of flaming within the framework of pragmatics. Flaming is regarded as a particular means of face work practised in Social Media. Until now flaming has merely been described from a sociological or psychological perspective,⁴ according to which this phenomenon owes its rise to the Social Media.⁵ The term *flaming* is supposed to have first been created by the community itself in the

¹ According to Kietzmann et al. 2011, who concentrate on the economic impact for business firms, Social Media may serve seven different functions, i.e. identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. Similarly, Richter/Koch 2008 define the following functions: identity management, search (for experts), context awareness and management, network awareness, exchange/communication.

² Cf. the theory of relational management based on Goffman 1955 and applied for linguistic purposes by Spencer-Oatey 2000 and 2007, Locher/Watts 2005, Fant 2007. For a more detailed account see Locher 2012, Held 2011, Thaler 2011, amongst others.

³ The concept of *groups* includes cognitively defined virtual social groups as in computer-mediated communication (CMC).

⁴ E.g. Lea et al. 1992, Kitchens 1998, O'Sullivan/Flanagin 2003, Alonzo/Aiken 2004, Moor et al. 2010, Nitin et al. 2011.

⁵ Before, the "hostile expression of strong emotions and feelings" was "relatively uncommon in CMC, but [...] frequently remarked upon", as Lea et al. 1992: 89 point out in one of the earliest articles on flaming.

1980s and to have undergone a change of meaning since then.⁶ Currently flaming denotes an improper, impertinent, provocative or aggressive contribution to any kind of internet forum, chat or other electronic communication platform. Alonzo/Aiken indicate that “the term generally requires hostile intentions characterised by words of profanity, obscenity, and insults that inflict harm to a person or an organisation resulting from uninhibited behavior” (2004: 205). In their study about users’ attitudes towards flaming with special regard to YouTube, Moor et al. define the overall function of flaming as “displaying hostility by insulting, swearing or using otherwise offensive language” (2010: 1536).

Among Social Media, YouTube is usually seen as a Web 2.0 content community platform offering media, livecasting and video sharing for the purpose of entertainment.⁷ Less well-known perhaps is its function as an interactive medium of communication: users who have seen a video or listened to an audio clip uploaded by others are invited to leave their comments, which may call forth other comments in reaction, so that a kind of virtual conversation may develop. These comments, which nowadays occupy quite a prominent position within the platform, range from appraisal to bewilderment or even offence. Although in its Community Guide-

⁶ Moor et al. 2010: 1536 date back the first occurrence of the term to Steele’s et al. *The Hacker’s Dictionary* of 1983, where the original definition was ‘to speak rabidly and/or incessantly on an uninteresting topic or with a patently ridiculous attitude.’ – As noted at the same time in the 1983 edition of the *Oxford Concise Dictionary* (s.v.), the term *flaming*, derived from the English verb *to flame* in the figurative sense of ‘to burst out into anger’, may refer to a variety of meanings, amongst which the archaic sense of ‘exaggerated, over-laudatory’ alludes to the irony involved and the colloquial sense of ‘passionate’ refers to the overall mode of expression.

⁷ Cf. YouTube’s self-description (YouTube n.d.b): “Founded in February 2005, YouTube allows billions of people to discover, watch and share originally created videos. YouTube provides a forum for people to connect, inform and inspire others across the globe and acts as a distribution platform for original-content creators and advertisers, large and small.”

lines the platform makes some general restrictions⁸ providing sanctions against inappropriate comments, which may be removed or reported as spam, or its users may be blocked, nevertheless the extent of provocative, scoffing or even offensive comments with respect to contents offered by others that are allowed to pass without sanctions is quite astonishing. It is therefore legitimate to question the above-cited prevalent function of flaming as “displaying hostility” and to propose another framework capable of differentiating between the various underlying intentions and effects of flaming.

Within the framework of (im-)politeness and relational management theories, flaming could be considered as a face-threatening act (FTA) *par excellence* to be avoided at all costs for the sake of successful everyday communication.⁹ Whether or not the flamed person or target is absent from interaction, there are contexts and communities of practice¹⁰ that not only allow but even encourage flaming.¹¹ But the awareness and perception of flaming as FTA

⁸ Community Guidelines’ formulations are identical worldwide: “We encourage free speech and defend everyone’s right to express unpopular points of view. But we do not permit hate speech (speech which attacks or demeans a group based on race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, age, veteran status and sexual orientation/gender identity). There is zero tolerance of predatory behaviour, stalking, threats, harassment, invading privacy or the revealing of other members’ personal information. Anyone caught doing these things may be permanently banned from YouTube.” (YouTube n.d.c).

⁹ In terms of Brown/Levinson 1987: 1, communication is destined “to minimise the imposition on the addressee arising from a verbal act and the consequent possibility of committing a face-threatening act.” For a critique of the compensatory effect of politeness in interaction see Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004 and 2011 and recent research on impoliteness, e.g. Culpeper 1996, 2005 and 2011, Bousfield 2008 and 2010, Bousfield/Locher 2008, Locher 2010 and 2012, amongst others.

¹⁰ Cf. Wenger 1998.

¹¹ Besides advertising (e.g. Alcaide Lara 2010; Fuentes Rodríguez/Alcaide Lara 2008), television shows (e.g. Culpeper 2005; Fuentes Rodríguez 2013) and political debates (e.g. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2011; Helfrich 2011), CMC seems to provide a particularly fruitful context for provocative FTAs of this type.

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may vary according to context features like the degree of directness of communication, the degree of publicity and mediatisation. An overtly impolite,¹² apparently face-threatening act such as flaming may therefore not even always serve its prototypic function, that of attacking a person's integrity. I will argue for a linguistic analysis of face work and flaming that takes into account the interplay of context-specific¹³ structural, semantic, semiotic, pragmatic, ethnological, multiconodal and multimodal phenomena and norms of communication on the various interactional levels of Social Media.¹⁴

2. Data and Analysis

The following analysis is based on comments made on a 6'10" audio clip from a popular Chilean phone-in radio show called *El chacotero sentimental*, in which members of the audience talk to the presenter about their romantic and sexual experiences. This programme, presented daily by Roberto Artigoitía from 1996 until 2000, and re-started in 2006,¹⁵ has attained cult status in Chile. The real protagonist of the show is its popular presenter, known also by his nickname El Rumpy, whose intention is to make fun of

¹² Following Culpeper's definition, impoliteness is necessarily bound to intentionality: "Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)" (2005: 38).

¹³ Cf. Terkourafi 2005; Locher/Watts 2005; Locher 2011.

¹⁴ For similar approaches of CMC in general see Androutsopoulos 2010 and Herring 2013.

¹⁵ Until 2000 on Rock&Pop-Channel, daily from 2.30 pm, and since 2006 on Radio Corazón FM, Monday to Saturday from 2pm to 4 pm. In view of its popularity various films were produced celebrating the programme and its presenter: *El Chacotero Sentimental* (Chile 1999, director: Cristián Galaz), *Radio Corazón* (Chile 2007, director: Roberto Artigoitía), *Grado 3* (Chile 2009, director: Cristián Galaz). There are numerous clips starring El Rumpy or the radio show on YouTube.

incoming callers in line with the programme's title ('the sentimental teaser'). In this clip, the caller is a young woman aged 22 (María), mother of a 3-year-old girl, who is still attending school as a result of having had to repeat several classes. The conversation between the two is about María's amorous relationship to one of her teachers despite living in a steady relationship with someone else. For obvious reasons she is introduced by El Rumpy under the pseudonym *María*. Although María repeatedly tries to draw his attention to her romantic story, El Rumpy from the beginning takes every opportunity to mock her for failures of school and to score points off her brutally, e.g. by subjecting her to 'examination questions' that she cannot answer and where she makes a complete fool of herself. The clip culminates in the apparently simple but – for the confused María – unanswerable question, *¿Quién descubrió América?*¹⁶

This clip, which was uploaded on YouTube by user ChIsPa2804 on 5th January, 2009,¹⁷ had been accessed 76.912 times by 15th April 2013. It received 111 comments and 9 channel comments.¹⁸ Its contents aim to provoke reactions of malicious glee, and the clip still seems to attract users even after having been online for more than four years. Analysis will focus on the different strategies and targets of flaming in this sample and ask for the functions of flaming as face work within this type of social medium.

¹⁶ For a linguistic analysis of this clip see Helfrich 2013.

¹⁷ Cf. YouTube 2009 and YouTube n.d.a. In the Spanish-speaking countries Chile and Spain in question, YouTube is 3rd in popularity after Facebook and Twitter (33,1%, Chile) and 2nd after Facebook (64%, Spain), respectively.

¹⁸ Total including blocked comments.

2.1. Flaming the target

Most comments refer specifically to the actors on the audio clip, i.e. the presenter Rumpy and his conversation partner María, hence constructing their respective faces. Comments aimed at María as target predominate¹⁹ and, typically of FTAs, flame her stupidity, whereas comments that express pity for María or try to defend her are very rare.²⁰ Commentators' behaviour in the apparently non-hierarchical world of the Social Media can indeed be compared to the so-called *schooling* or *flocking behaviour* of animals:²¹ In this example the tenor of flaming is introduced by ChIsPa2804, the user who uploaded this contents on YouTube under the suggestive title *El Rumpy (weona tonta)* and who also

¹⁹ Comments on target María amount to 70 out of 111, whilst only 14 comments refer to El Rumpy alone, 11 on both, 10 on others, and 5 comments have unspecified reference. Note that there is only comment on uploader ChIsPa2804 (9 comments addressed to ChIsPa2804 are published in the separate section of channel comments, see below p. 307f.). As a rule, commentators intervene only once, at least under the same alias (92 comments). If a commentator leaves more than one comment, this appears either as answer to other comments and may open out in interaction between commentators (cf. below p. 310f.), or else is posted like a sort of addendum immediately after the first comment, as if the latter had not yet been completed, e.g. comments (110) *jjajajajaaj pobre y triste...* and (109), *puta la weona pava*, both by Valentina Gorgonita, comments (103) *weona tonta won...no pudiste ponerle mejor titulo!!!* and (102), *puntaje poblacional psu..pensará esta wea o no??*, both by Emerson Galvez, and comments (40) *puta la weona tonta* and (39) *jajajajajaaja el rumpy la mando a la xuxa ajajajajaja por ser tan weona*, both by gu4r1. There is only one case of multiple participation in regular yearly intervals (with a slightly changed alias):

(74) sociobalto0 hace 2 años
una perdida de tiempo esta weona tonta
(48) sociobalto0 hace 3 años
pero si esta genio se esta perdiendo
(6) sociobalto hace 4 años
ni un aporte la ttttttttoooooonnnnnntttttt-ttttttttaaaaaaaaaaaaa

²⁰ 3 out of 111, e.g. in ex. (27) below.

²¹ Particularly observed in birds and fish. According to sociological studies, groups of people may show a very similar flock-like behaviour.



Fig. 1: Setting the frame

opens the discussion with his comment *puta la wna pava :s*²² (cf. fig. 1). Both appear directly under the clip at the very top of the site. Thus ChIsPa2804 fixes the interactional norms and clearly influences the direction in which the discussion is supposed to develop. Secondly and adding to the same effect, his choice of category label *comedy* (*Comedia*),²³ under which the clip figures, sets both the frame and the criteria of choice of *Best comments* (*Mejores comentarios*).²⁴ After being shown the way by these introductory remarks and categorisations, all the other posted comments displayed on the screen unsurprisingly follow the same tenor,

²² All comments are reproduced in their original orthography.

²³ See *Mostrar más*.

²⁴ The selection presented in this section seems to be generated automatically and updated regularly by YouTube, not by the uploader, but contributes to the same effect, as does the reception indicated by the number of “likes” awarded by users (see below pp. 308 and 310).

with the first two comments literally repeating the uploader's title (cf. fig. 2):



Fig. 2: The first two comments on the audioclip *El Rumpy (la weona tonta)*

Comments on María have in common a definitely flaming illocutionary force, but differ with respect to form. One of the most frequent stylistic devices is to give offence by abusive name-calling in imitation and hyperbolic exaggeration of the uploader's input. Significantly, María is never referred to by this alias,²⁵ but always by unambiguously pejorative designations, e.g. *weona*²⁶ (*tonta*) and *puta*, the labels proposed initially by ChIsPa2804. *Weona* is by far the most frequently attributed name to the target, including orthographic variants²⁷ like *wena*, *wna*, *wea*, *wueona*, *hueona*, *awuona*,²⁸ and collocations with derogatory adjectives, or other colloquialisms referring to María's stupidity such as *pastel*, *volaita*, *weona floja*, *mina*²⁹ *weona*, *weona tonta* or *tonta weona*, *pava(aaa)*, *seca*, *pesaaa*,

²⁵ Two commentators mention what seems to be her real name Karen and another pseudonym, Carla, used by El Rumpy when during their conversation by a slip of her tongue she accidentally reveals her real name: *ke chistosa la KAREN XD pero mas wna ke ella sola wn wjajajajaja* (Carolina Araya hace 3 años); *Puta que es weona la carla...* (Medinak87 hace 3 años).

²⁶ The term *weona* is a Chilean colloquialism for 'person' in general, but is also used with a pejorative connotation.

²⁷ This term alone occurs in 53 of 111 comments.

²⁸ Most examples display various typical features of informal net orthography, such as abbreviations or otherwise shortened forms (e.g. consonantic skeletons), phonetic script, omission of accents, etc.

²⁹ 'mujer'.

weona inmadura, (*awuona*) *culia*³⁰ (and variants *culiá*, *kulia*, *qlia*, *floja reculia*³¹), *estúpida* (*elevada al 200*), *imbécil* (*inbesil*, *invesil*), *enferma de tonta*, *weona bruta*.³² Other frequent labels attached to María are vulgar sexismes like (*qlia penka* ('pene') and *puta* (including its variants *uta*,³³ *puta maraca*,³⁴ and *hija de puta*), *pela* ('puta'), *cabra culia weona* ('puta'), as well as scatological terms like (*perra de mierda*).³⁵

Other indirectly discrediting devices are irony, e.g. by dysphemism (*genio*, *pobresita*), and iconic paralinguistic devices which serve to mitigate or to intensify an FTA, e.g. emoticons in graphic imitation of overt sneering laughter:

- (1) sociobalto0 hace 3 años
pero si esta genio se esta perdiendo
- (2) alterwho hace 2 años
quiere ser alguien, pobresita XD!
- (3) Carolina Araya hace 3 años
la hija va a salir antes ke ella del colegio po wn! wajajajajaj xdddd
- (4) apology160 hace 3 años
la qlia penka, quiere ser alguien hahhjaa
- (5) DoggiFine hace 3 años
weona tonta no sabe quien descubrio america weona tonta
xDD
DD

³⁰ Short form of *culeada* ('gillipollas'), which seems to have lost its sexual connotation.

³¹ The prefix *re-* is an intensifier.

³² Examples are listed according to their increasing degree of vulgarity.

³³ Omission of the first letter is a common device in informal Spanish net orthography.

³⁴ Intensification, since both mean 'puta'.

³⁵ There is one comment, *ta weando esa weona..no sabe qn descubrio america WTF!* (Andrés Carvajal hace 2 años), concluding with a vulgar English abbreviation ('what the fuck'), but altogether code mixing in this corpus is limited to two comments (cf. also ex. (23) below).

Like in (5), many comments echo³⁶ El Rumpy's flaming on María by means of literally taking up his phrases from the clip and intensifying their illocutionary force by typical typographic features of informal net discourse such as the use of capital letters, the provocative grapheme <k> which replaces Spanish <qu> or <c>, punctuation marks or by exaggerated laughter symbolised by grapheme repetition, and emoticons:

- (6) Carlos Herrera hace 2 años
despues volviste y repetiste?? si puta que soy pilla³⁷
jkajkajkajakjakjaakj
- (7) iwannabeyourdog1969 hace 2 años
"cacharon.. cacharon lo que le pregunté, o no..?"³⁸
- (8) Die9U hace 4 años
KIEN DESKUBRIÓ AMERIKA??
- (9) TheMobec hace 3 años
wuaaaaaaaaaaaaaajajaajajaj no no no si no sabe quien descubrio
america la cortamos kjsajksjksajksajksajksajksaksajksajksjakaj
- (10) Fraaanckox3 hace 3 meses
nonono, si no sabe quien descubrio america la cortamos..RUMPY
QLAO XDDDDDDDD

These examples show that strategies in themselves are neither polite nor impolite, but functionally polyvalent and may refer to both targets at the same time, María and El Rumpy, with a contrary effect. The same techniques that are used to threaten María's face (quotes, name-calling, irony, typography) simultaneously operate as assertive statements about the presenter of the show and have

³⁶ On the other side, there is only one comment that takes up a direct quotation from María: *si estudiaba, lo que pasa es que repetia ahahgahahaha* (baltiloco delpuerto hace 2 años).

³⁷ Ironically for 'inteligente'.

³⁸ Use of quotation marks is exceptional in comments, the only incidences being (7) and (28).

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to be regarded as dysphemistic face-flattering acts³⁹ (FFAs) with respect to him.⁴⁰ El Rumpy – unlike María – is praised for being *culiao* (*qliao, klao, qlao, qlo*), *chistoso*, *care palo*,⁴¹ *pesa(a)o*, *cochhesumadre*,⁴² *manso*,⁴³ *weon seco*, etc.:

- (11) xoro0018 hace 1 año
jajaja rumpy qlo wn ! jajaja chistoso wn ! care palo xd
- (12) 00nightwolf00 hace 2 años
el qlo pesao jakajakjakaja wena vola el rumpi
- (13) Denny Muñoz hace 3 años
el cochhesumadre pesaao xd
- (14) roguet17 hace 3 años
jajaja el manso filo del rumpi el weon seco la cago

As in the case of María, most comments convey subjectivity without being personal,⁴⁴ i.e. overt admiration and approval of El Rumpy's is expressed nearly exclusively by talking about him in the 3rd person. Yet for each target there is also one single case of direct address, (17) towards El Rumpy: *cortaste*, and (18) to María: *matate*, as if the targets were present on the YouTube platform:

- (15) blaismi09 hace 3 años
ji,ji,ji, pero que majete (bacan)⁴⁵ es el rumpi, super bien por cortarla a la mina por no saber quien descubrió América.Un beso desde España.

³⁹ Cf. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005 and 2011.

⁴⁰ Sceptical remarks about his action like the following, where uneasiness is expressed through the final emoticon, are very rare: *queee maaaaal wn...=/* (Aneurismo hace 3 años). If ever El Rumpy receives the blame for his action, he is excused in the same comment by María's stupidity, e.g.: *lidesaaaaagraaaaaadaaaaaableeeeeeee wnnnnn jajajajajajaja mina tonta*.

⁴¹ 'sinvergüenza'.

⁴² Misspelling for *conchesumadre* / *conchetumadre* 'maricón, hijo de puta'.

⁴³ 'grande, tremendo'.

⁴⁴ None of the comments is written in explicit 1st person.

⁴⁵ Both *majete* (European Spanish) and *bacan* (American Spanish) are colloquial expressions meaning 'simpático'.

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- (16) gu4r1 hace 3 años
jajajajjaaja el rumpy la mando a la xuxa⁴⁶ ajajajajja por ser tan weona
- (17) eavluz hace 1 año
Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!!! no sabe quien descubrio America? Bien que la cortaste Rumpy, que onda la chica uff!! preocupante...
- (18) ztrong666 hace 2 años
CABRA CULIA WEONA , HIJA DE PUTA ESTUPIDA , VERGUENZA PARA EL HERMOSO SEXO FEMENINO , MATATE WEONA XDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDD!!!!!!!

2.2. Flaming the uploader of the clip

As seen so far, commentators seem to agree with El Rumpy's scornful treatment of María. What on the surface would resemble a flaming FTA turns out to work as an FFA on the construction of the face of the presenter as well as – indirectly – that of ChIsPa2804, the user responsible for uploading this contents.

Besides direct comments which may relate either to the contents or to other comments,⁴⁷ the medium itself provides two other means of commenting: the “like” (👍 *Me gusta*) or “dislike button” (👎 *No me gusta*) and the so-called channel comments. The affirmative “like button” is generally used more often than the “dislike button”: the clip itself received 85 “likes” and only 9 “dislikes”.⁴⁸ These statements add to the spot's continuing perception as well as to group identity, since they represent approving FFAs to the faces of other

⁴⁶ ‘chucha’. The grapheme <x> is often used in net orthography to replace <ch>. *Mandar a alguien a la chucha* is a vulgar expression for ‘ponerlo en su lugar, retarlo, llamarle la atención severamente.’

⁴⁷ See below p. 311f.

⁴⁸ The current balance is displayed in the top section of the page and has an additional effect on the perception of the spot.

commentators and to that of the uploader respectively.⁴⁹ As a rule, disapproval towards the uploader of the clip is expressed neither in the comments⁵⁰ nor through “dislikes”, but can be found in a different section of the YouTube platform reserved for personal feedback to ChIsPa2804, in the 9 channel comments, where, interestingly and in contrast to the other comments, opinions are split between agreement and disagreement. As for the target María, FTAs in this section of the platform are again written in the same vulgar scatological language (*hijo de puta, hijo de mierda, tu padre mierda, lavate la concha, clasista* etc.) and include directly addressed overt threats (e.g. (20) *muerete*). A particular new strategy, limited to this section, are discriminating remarks about the uploader’s nationality (which is, indeed, the only information on his identity that he provides in his profile), e.g.:

(19) Carlo1654 ha publicado un comentario. hace 4 años

lavate la concha Chileno HIjo de puta y puto

(20) CotoThrashMetal ha publicado un comentario. hace 3 años

weonao ql....que es la U de chile ctm⁵¹ ...tu padre mierda.... teni al rumpy en tu futo...y vo sabi de que equipo es el de la T_T ... muerete ctm

In this way, support or admiration for ChIsPa2804 for offering this contents are once more accompanied by emoticons, so that comments such as (23), which at first glance seem to scoff or doubt the authenticity of the clip (*cheat*) and to question the face of

⁴⁹ Whilst the average score is between two and 4 “likes”, there are two comments which received noticeably more “likes”: *JUA JUA JUA!!! Si esa mina termina el 4to medio es por que la educacion es realmente una mierda!!!! JAJAJAJA!!!!* 28 ♠ (vassili1984 hace 3 años); *LAWEONA TONTA* 15 ♠ (Salvador Tenisi hace 4 años). It does not seem, however, that pressing the “like button” is a temporary convention that appears only in earlier comments.

⁵⁰ Amongst comments there appears only one – in face-flattering approval – addressed to the uploader of the clip: *weona tonta won...no pudiste ponerle mejor titulo!!!* (Emerson Galvez hace 4 meses).

⁵¹ Acronym for *conchetumadre* (cf. FN 42).

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ChIsPa2804, are mitigated and turned into an FFA by terminating with an ironical smile and adding *pasalo*:

- (21) marlonloquendero12 ha publicado un comentario. hace 1 año
KAPO ke decis me suscribo y tu te suscribes a mi aplas XDDD.....qe dices
- (22) Sailence X ha publicado un comentario. hace 4 años
ola men,, Viva Chile Wn!. yy wenos vid de conter,, lamentablemente los No Steam Cagaron, pork borraron toos los servers. en fin,. PutaSteam. Adioz.yy me suscribi we,.
- (23) Fkoman ha publicado un comentario. hace 4 años
cual es ese cheat??? pasalo :P

2.3. Flaming as interaction between commentators

As seen above, the use of the various options of direct and indirect commenting provided by this social medium vary with respect to different functions (approval, disapproval) and levels of communication, that is the contents (targets María and El Rumpy), the uploader and the commentators themselves. As regards the latter, assertive actions such as echoing or topping each others' comments and the "like button" are the preferred indirect means of commenting on other users' flames (121 "likes" vs. 0 "dislikes").⁵² *Answer (Responder)* is another, less frequently employed option, which enables commentators to react and to interact directly with one another, e.g. in (24), where a provocative sexist comment evokes protest as well as consent:

⁵² "Likes" are distributed on only 21 comments out of 111. The entire lack of "dislikes" may be due to sanctioning, as two comments that received too many negative scores are displayed on the screen only on demand without showing the amount of "dislikes", and another comment has been removed completely for the same reasons.

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(24) Intelchile hace 1 año
se supone ke las mujeres estan para procrear y satisfacer a los
hombres asike es normal esta mina

Carolina Araya hace 1 año
ke wea? uta el (weon tonto) xDDDD

keGko hace 1 año
y si luego se molestan si se los recuerda

On various occasions a metadiscussion⁵³ between commentators emerges that deviates from the original target itself and switches on to the question in which María failed, i.e. who was the first to discover America. In general, it is a rather mock-ironic tone that dominates this kind of interaction between commentators, e.g. (25), but this may turn into flaming shouting (by use of capital letters, e.g. (26) *ENCONTRÓ, DESCUBRIÓ*) when some commentators get involved in this topic more seriously than others, e.g.:

(25) Norman Loayza hace 2 meses
fueron los sajones jejejejejej
juvenor threat hace 2 meses
me dejò con la duda de quien descubriò america :c⁵⁴

(26) metalero vina hace 3 años
la mina mas weona q las palomas y mas caliente q aceite de papas
fritas el que descubrio america fue cristobal colon el 12 de octubre
de 1492

blaismi09 hace 3 años
muchas gracias por la información, compadre,te pasaste! qué
enciclopedia consultaste! juaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaajaja!

Bastían silva espinoza hace 3 meses
Colón ENCONTRÓ América. Hernán Cortés lo DESCUBRIÓ.

⁵³ As the chronology of comments in (26) and (27) shows, discussions do not necessarily take place simultaneously with the timeline but develop over time, and hence polylogical discussions are constituted only in retrospect.

⁵⁴ Comments in (25) have to be read bottom-up.

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Later on, another polylogical metadiscussion breaks out on the same question, when one commentator (ScreggaeaficionBw, in reaction to Jerónimo Herrera Godoy) seeks to defend María twice and is in response blamed by other commentators (TheKinglalo, SuperZapaZ) for being such a “smart ass”:⁵⁵

(27) ScreggaeaficionBw hace 2 años

quien descubrio america? no fue colon, ahora es un hecho que colon fue uno más, y no el primero, ni siquiera los historiadores saben quien fue el primero en llegar a America, entonces que esta mina no sepa, no es algo extraño.

Robert Peña hace 1 año

solo tienes que fijarte en lo que le enseñan a cada uno desde pequeño ps... pa que te vay en la profunda.. jajaja.. xD

SuperZapaZ hace 2 años

buscandole la quinta pata al gato

ScreggaeaficionBw hace 2 años

es enserio, no es por buscarle la pata al gato, es injusto que la tachen de tonta por no saber quien descubrio america cuando ni siquiera tu sabes y ni siquiera los historiadores.

TheKinglalo hace 1 año

aweonao!!!!!!!!

SuperZapaZ hace 2 años

VAMOS POR LA SEXTA PATA

Jerónimo Herrera Godoy hace 2 años

En realidad Colón no descubrió América. Sólo encontró algo que millones conocían antes que él. PERO ESTA WNA LA CAGA WN !!!⁵⁶

Seen generally however, flaming is clearly an accepted part of net standards, and interactional norms are not subject to negotiation

⁵⁵ Other aspects of commentators’ faces, e.g. avatars, nicknames, are neither positively nor negatively evaluated by users.

⁵⁶ Comments in (27) have to be read bottom-up.

between users and posters: the highly derogatory and vulgar lexical and stylistic registers in which many comments are composed pass without discussion. The same applies to orthography, which is full of variants and hardly ever criticised; there are, in fact, only two cases of metacommunicative flaming, i.e. in (28) when Sir WyldeBLS blames Nicolás Arancibia and is subsequently given the blame by Carlos Javier Miles Cuevas:

(28) Nicolás Arancibia hace 3 años

“Si no sabe kien descubrió América la cortamos” weona invetil jajaja

Carlos Javier Miles Cuevas hace 2 años

te preocupas de las tildes, pero te caes en el “Kien” xD

Sir WyldeBLS hace 2 años

y vo con esa ortografia no estay muy lejos compadre! IMBECIL!

Jajajajaja

3. Conclusion

At first glance, the extent of flaming in comments with respect to contents offered on YouTube may seem fairly startling. The anonymity of cyberspace definitely favours this type of comment, since flammers have to fear “little life retribution for their actions on such platforms” (Nitin et al. 2011: 427). Nevertheless, this still does not explain completely why behaviour, which according to common standards of politeness would have to be regarded as highly impolite and therefore unacceptable, has apparently established itself as a completely acceptable part of face work within the culture of the net. On closer examination, what from outside looks like face-damaging behaviour “can be ‘normal’ in a given community of practice” (Bousfield 2010: 105). Social Media apparently create their own standards and identities, which may differ from

those of everyday offline interaction and allow people “to write things online that they would seldom consider saying face-to-face” (Alonzo/Aiken 2004: 205). One motive why users follow these standards and practise this type of face work is in order to show themselves to be a legitimate part of a particular net community by displaying the appropriate behaviour.⁵⁷

Furthermore the example analysed in this paper shows that flaming in a strongly – in this case doubly – mediated, multicode and multilevel communicative context may not always be regarded as face-damaging behaviour, at least not with respect to all “participants”. The target afflicted by this kind of face work is not necessarily the person who is responsible for having uploaded the contents; on the contrary, flaming is directed at the target of the contents him- or herself. In this case, the target under attack is a “third party” completely unknown to the uploader or to the commentators. Hardly anybody defends this widely exhibited “third party”; in fact, most of the flaming comments at the expense of the target María unanimously agree in causing additional damage to her face, whereas the same flaming strategies regarding her counterpart, the target El Rumpy, serve a different function, namely to strengthen his face. Comments are on the whole affirmative and assertive and thus, at the next level, similarly strengthen the uploader’s face too, since they confirm his predefined point of view and communication standards regarding the targets. In this sample the collective discursive construction of face(s) through flaming at different levels clearly aims at consensus rather than confrontation, conversation rather than discussion,⁵⁸ with the effect that an intrinsically conflictive, face-attacking strategy such as flaming is used here as an approving, face-enhancing strategy.

⁵⁷ *Politic behaviour* in terms of Watts 1992 and 2003.

⁵⁸ See before. Controversial remarks blaming ChIsPa2804 for having uploaded this clip are “hidden” in the separate section of channel comments.

In addition, both the uploader by offering to share a content of this sort with others and exposing another person publicly under the label of *comedy*, as well as commentators who join in his construction of faces, succeed in getting themselves in the public eye and topping one another as entertaining characters, who do not only believe in the same values but laugh at the same entertainment. Flaming thus acquires another dimension in this communicative context, i.e. *entertaining impoliteness*.⁵⁹ Unlike Moor et al., who from their poll amongst users conclude that flaming on YouTube “is more often intended to express disagreement or as a response to a perceived offence by others” (2010: 1536), this example proves that its entertaining function should not be underestimated as a prior underlying motivation for flaming in this type of Social Media.⁶⁰

Social Media such as YouTube provide their own microcosm for entertainment⁶¹ based on calumnies. This particular type of face work can be classified as *collective flaming for entertaining purpose*. The question remains as to whether this kind of flaming is part of global net identity or culturally dependent as earlier studies on the use of obscene language and swearing in Spanish-speaking communities would suggest.⁶²

⁵⁹ In terms of Culpeper 2011, who specifies three functional types of “impoliteness events”: affective impoliteness, coercive impoliteness and entertaining impoliteness. According to Culpeper 2011: 233f. it is decisive for cases of entertaining impoliteness, “that others, aside from the target, can understand the probable impoliteness effects for the target. Without this it would not be entertaining impoliteness.” Besides voyeuristic pleasure and the pleasure of feeling superior, it is the pleasure of feeling safe that is involved in this type of entertainment.

⁶⁰ Whether or not only “individuals who have a high level of disinhibition seeking and assertiveness” tend to flame for pass time and for entertainment, as Alonzo/Aiken 2004: 211 claim from their survey, cannot be decided from this analysis.

⁶¹ For Androutsopoulos 2010: 430, the emergence of the entertaining “spectacle” genre is the most innovative aspect of Web 2.0.

⁶² YouTube provides the following information about users who clicked this clip: They live mainly in Chile, Sweden or Spain and are mostly males, aged 25 to 34, 18 to 24, or 35 to 44 (cf. YouTube 2009). If these user profiles established by YouTube trustworthily reflect

4. References

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reality and the identity of those who left a comment, the results of this study seem to correspond with observations by Gómez Molina 2002, Alonzo/Aiken 2004, Zimmermann 2005, Martínez Lara 2009, and others, according to which (young) males tend to flame more than females. Chilean and Spanish informants consulted with regard to my corpus would also confirm this. – On the widely discussed question of universality of politeness phenomena see Bravo 2004, Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004, amongst others.

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