HASHTAGS AS A SPECIAL TYPE OF THE INTERNET DISCOURSE

Nataliia Shkvorchenko*

Juliia Koltsova**

Abstract

Internet discourse is a relatively new phenomenon that enables linguistic studies in a variety of areas, such as blogs, information sites, cinema, literature, wikis projects, shops and auctions, advertising, payment and search engines, e-mail, chats, forums, messengers, social networks, radio, television, information portals, etc. One of the most popular forms to characterize the event, describe a photo or express feelings online has become a hashtag. A hashtag can be defined as a label for content. It helps others who are interested in a certain topic, quickly find content on that same topic.

People use hashtags in their Instagram and Twitter posts but there is not enough knowledge about their real meaning and what they are used for. According to its structure, a hashtag can be a single word, an abbreviation, an invented combination of letters and numbers, or a phrase. If it is a phrase, there can be no spaces between words. It is not possible to have punctuation or symbols in your hashtag (other than the # symbol at the beginning). Numbers are allowed, but it is necessary to have at least one letter with numbers — hashtags cannot consist entirely of numbers.

According to its meaning, a hashtag can be related to a great variety of topics: private life, personal characteristics, nature, holidays, events, activities, emotions, travelling and many others.

A hashtag as a linguistic phenomenon has not been studied enough, so, it requires researching.

KEYWORDS*:* Internet Discourse, Internet Content, Hashtag, Hashtag Structure*.*

1. Introduction

The object of the research is a hashtag as a specific type of the Internet discourse. Discourse is a complex term in a number of humanities, the subject of which directly or indirectly involves the study of the language functions: linguistics, literature, semiotics, sociology, philosophy, ethnology and anthropology. There is no clear and universally accepted definition of ″discourse″ that covers all cases of use, and it is possible that this explains the considerable interest in this problem by both foreign and domestic linguists. *The subject* of the research is hashtag features and structure.

Internet discourse is a new variety of language that leads to significant variations in written structure of language. This discourse type lacks a number of grammar and spelling rules that is inappropriate for written communication in other areas. Internet discourse lies in between speaking and writing and it has its own features and graphology. *The purpose* of the research is the structural analysis and classification of hashtags. This study attempts to present characteristic features and provide a variant of the classification of hashtags as a new variety of language. In addition, it aims to conduct linguistic analysis of the features found in the electronic discourse.

---

 * Nataliia M. Shkvorchenko, International Humanitarian University, Room 316, 33 Fontanskaya Doroga, Odessa, 65009, Ukraine; tel.: +38 067 489 18 33, e-mail: nikolette@ukr.net
ORCID: 0000-0002-7146-7244

** Juliia Ye. Koltsova, International Humanitarian University, 33 Fontanskaya Doroga, Odessa, 65009, Ukraine; tel.: +38-063-735-15-14, e-mail: koltsova.julia@icloud.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-9490-6545

2. Methodology

There have been chosen 1000 English hashtags used in Instagram and Twitter for the period from November, 2018 to April, 2019. The most popular ones (used more than 20 times within the mentioned time period) have been sorted out and classified in accordance with their linguistic and semantic structure.

The combination of the following linguistic methods was used: acquisition, computer analysis, quantitative method (to choose the most popular hashtags), induction and deduction (to classify the results).

3. Results and Discussion

Discourse is the subject of interdisciplinary study. Of course, the study of discourse involves, first and foremost, linguistics, but along with this, interest in it is also traced in psychology, philosophy, logic, sociology, literary criticism, historiography, jurisprudence, pedagogy, the theory and practice of translation, political science, and etc. Each of these disciplines has its own approach to discourse study (I.V. Arnold[1], J. Brown[2], R. Vodak[3], V. I. Karasik[4], O. O. Selivanova[5]).

The term ″discourse″, as it is understood in modern linguistics, is close in content to the notion of ″text″, but emphasizes the dynamic nature of speech communication. In contrast, text is conceived mainly as a static object, the result of linguistic activity. Sometimes discourse is understood as the simultaneous interaction of two components: the dynamic process of speech activity, written in its social context, and its outcome.

Scholars of different directions of linguistics at different times defended their vision of discourse. As R. Bart[6] points out, the term discourse refers to a set of sentences. In his interpretation, discourse is one big sentence, the components of which are not necessarily the sentences themselves, and the sentence is, accordingly, a small discourse[7].

According to P. Serio[8], the main method of discursive analysis is to bring to the positional unity of many statements, where the main thing is the attitude to the place of statement of expression, which allows you to identify what is called ″discursive formations″.

In numerous discursive studies of scholars there is also a certain diversity of thoughts and positions on this issue. According to the most common definition given in the ″Linguistic Encyclopedic Dictionary″ N. Arutyunova, the concept of ″discourse″ is reduced to three main interpretations, where discourse is understood as: a) a coherent text in combination with extra-linguistic-pragmatic, sociocultural, psychological and other factors ; b) the text taken in the event aspect; c) the language considered as a purposeful social action. Discourse is a speech immersed in life[9].

However, attempts to create a universal classification of types of discourse do not stop. Today, the leading criteria for the selection of types of discourse are those that are related to the categories of discourse and can be distinguished in terms of formal, functional, and meaningful

---

[1] Arnold 1991
[2] Brown 1993
[3] Vodak 1997
[4] Karasik 2002
[5] Selivanova 2011
[6] Bart 1975
[7] Arnold 1991
[8] Serio 1985
[9] Selivanova 2011

criteria. Consequently, the whole scope of discourse can be logically divided according to this or that criterion[10].

Thus, taking into account the addressing criterion, linguist V.I. Karasik highlights a personality-oriented and status-oriented (institutional) discourse. In the first case communication involves communicants who know each other well, and in the second one – representatives of one or another social group. Personal discourse is represented by two main types: domestic and existential. The specificity of domestic discourse is in an effort to compress the transmitted information as much as possible, to create such a communication code when people understand each other in a half-word. Essential discourse aims at the artistic and philosophical understanding of the world.

Status-oriented discourse is the speech interaction of representatives of social groups or institutions with each other, with people who realize their status-role opportunities within the framework of established social institutions[11]. Taking into account the modern society, such subtypes as political, administrative, legal, military, pedagogical, religious, mystical, medical, advertising, scientific, media can be distinguished within the institutional discourse. It should be noted that institutional discourse is historically variable – when a public institution disappears as a special cultural system it dissolves in adjacent types of discourse.

The notion of ″Internet″ is used to define both separate networks and World Wide Web, connected by means of IP and similar protocols[12]. The emergence of the Internet is due not only to technological development but also to human philosophical thought, since its prototypes began to appear already in ancient philosophy, where there was an urgent need for an efficient repository of information and ″knowledge base″. In the Middle Ages, leading philosophers are aware of the ideas of Virtus and ″virtual reality,″ and the main problem of this time is the unification of heterogeneous knowledge. So the idea of ″Network″ matured, which in future goes into the Internet with a network organization. In modern Western philosophy and science, the theoretical foundations of the Internet concept, the concept of the ″virtual world″ and ″artificial intelligence″ [13] are finalized. The Internet is a synthesis of ideas of virtuality, hypertext, multimedia, universal information network, network society and nonlinear thinking. The fundamental theoretical ideas of the Internet fit it into the broad context of world history and culture, whose paradigms and dominant ones were formed in critical epochs, which are interpreted as revolutions and associated with radical changes in intellectual technologies, that is, means of production, storage, transmission and consumption of information.

In foreign linguistics, the study of the features of virtual communication began in the eighties of the last century, and is associated with the names of Thimbleby[14] and Crystal[15].

The contemporary discourse theories are still only beginning to turn their attention to social media in general and social networks in particular. But as yet there has been little that has dealt specifically with issues of multicultural discourse – how language, identity, cross-cultural social relations and power play out in the rapidly evolving landscape of social media. Yet these new forms of communication are fused into wider patterns of changing cultural values about forms of social structure, knowledge itself and the kinds of issues that tend to form our individually civic spheres.

---

[10] Crystal 2001
[11] Karpa 2010
[12] Goroshko 2009
[13] Vodak 1997
[14] Thimbleby 1996
[15] Crystal 2001

A hashtag ("#" symbol) has become an integral part of social media. People use hashtags in their Instagram and Twitter posts but there is not enough knowledge about their real meaning and what they are used for.

A hashtag is a label for content. It helps others who are interested in a certain topic, quickly find content on that same topic. To create one, a person starts with a hashtag symbol # and follows it directly with letters and sometimes numbers. It is important to know that depending on geography, the symbol # is called differently. For example, in the United States and Canada, it is called a number sign or sometimes a pound sign. But in the United Kingdom and Ireland, that # symbol is called a hash sign. That is exactly this name that has become internationally known and sounds alike in different languages – "hashtags". In essence, a hashtag is a label that consists of a word or phrase *tag* with a *hash* symbol in front of it[16].

The first known social media usage of hashtags was in October 2007 when Nate Ridder of San Diego, California, tagged his social messages with #sandiegoonfire – informing people about the wildfires his local area was suffering at the time.

Twitter was the first platform to officially adopt the hashtag in 2009, meaning that any tag starting with # became automatically hyperlinked.

It was not long before most of the other networks added support for hashtags on their platforms. This includes Instagram, which has probably seen the most significant uptake of hashtag usage. Unlike Twitter, where not more than two or three hashtags are recommended for use in a single tweet, Instagram encourages large-scale hashtag usage. It is common for people to include up to 20 hashtags in a single post, and many use the maximum they are permitted – 30 hashtags.

The reason people and businesses use hashtags is to help to group content. These can either be general hashtags that everybody uses – in which case posts and images are grouped with others who upload similar content. Alternatively, many businesses create niche hashtags to develop interest, and to consolidate posts relating to a particular product or campaign together.

A hashtag can be distinguished as a specific type of the Internet discourse, not just its element as it has characteristics not those of separate words, but of phrases, sentences and texts. Hashtags are used socially to convey broad meanings. It is possible to investigate the relationships between their form and function.

Most Instagram users love to boost their following. But there is little point in being followed by somebody with entirely different interests to you. By using appropriate hashtags with their content, they are making their posts available to people who have an interest in the same subjects. And if they like the other person's posts, they are likely to follow this person in the hope of seeing more content on the same topic.

Even if people do not follow the person, they may like the content of his\hers that they come across when searching for a particular hashtag.

Instagram has grown phenomenally over the last few years. This means that there is no way that businesses are likely to deliver the right content to the right people accidentally. When they use hashtags, they are effectively helping Instagram sort and organize their posts – helping them reach people who will value them.

A hashtag is obviously a new linguistic phenomenon that does not refer to any lexical or grammatical group that exists. A hashtag can be classified from the following points of view:

16

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjjnvbowZj iAhXLpIsKHWR8BrAQFjAAegQIBRAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.oxforddictionaries.com%2F&usg=AOvVaw3vIv qciQaZ8zIJCSAgkbcG

a) its structure;
b) its meaning;
c) its frequency.

According to its structure, a hashtag can be a single word, an abbreviation, an invented combination of letters and numbers, or a phrase. If it is a phrase, there can be no spaces between words. All letters and numbers must run together without spaces in a hashtag. It is not possible to have punctuation or symbols in your hashtag (other than the # symbol at the beginning). Numbers are allowed, but it is necessary to have at least one letter with the numbers — hashtags cannot consist entirely of numbers.

According to its meaning, a hashtag can be related to a great variety of topics: private life, personal characteristics, nature, holidays, events, activities, emotions, travelling and many others. It is used to describe a picture, to give basic information and/or to share emotions. Hashtags are widely used to avoid writing long texts, but to give all necessary information to the viewer / reader. They can be as informative as sentences (e.g. #shiny#weather#good#mood#family#Sunday#zoo#). It is easy to decode the idea based on key words, but it is time-saving.

According to its frequency, this classification is a variable one as priorities are steadily changing. Currently, the 25 most popular Instagram hashtags are as follows:

1. #love
2. #instagood
3. #photooftheday
4. #fashion
5. #beautiful
6. #happy
7. #cute
8. #tbt
9. #like4like
10. #followme
11. #picoftheday
12. #follow
13. #me
14. #selfie
15. #summer
16. #art
17. #instadaily
18. #friends
19. #repost
20. #nature
21. #girl
22. #fun
23. #style
24. #smile
25. #food

These hashtags were analyzed from the points of their length (one or more words); parts of speech used; their syntactical structure (a single word, a set expression, a phrase, a sentence, abbreviation).

The analysis of the most frequently used hashtags, proved that the most popular hashtags consist of one word (18 out of 25), 10 of which are nouns, 4 of them are verbs, 3 are represented by adjectives, 1 is a personal pronoun. The next popular structure is a phrase (used 5 times out of 25) which is written as one word, without any spaces or punctuation marks between them. Only two abbreviations (one with numbers) are used within twenty-five most widely-used hashtags.

It should be mentioned that seven of ten one-word hashtags represented by nouns express positive attitude directly (love, fun, smile) or indirectly (summer, nature, friends, food). All three adjectives denote positive emotions (beautiful, happy cute). Verbs are mainly used in the imperative form to encourage the other users to follow or support the account (follow, like, repost).

So, the most popular hashtags are not long, refer to pleasant moments and explicitly invite people to share and support the ideas.

4. Conclusions

To conclude, a hashtag can be called a separate type of Internet discourse as it refers to a unit of language, transfers information and is used in a social context. Hashtags can be classified according to their grammatical, semantic and syntactic structure.

While the exact list of most popular Instagram hashtags is continually changing, there are clear popularity trends.

There are a few distinct niches which always perform well on Instagram. The above list indicates how many popular posts feature fashion, beauty, and food. Although not currently in the Top 25 at the time of writing, #travel often performs very well, too.

The success of the #nature tag suggests that people still love to see beautiful scenes of nature and the environment.

This makes sense. Instagram is highly visual. People are going to want to share eye-catching imagery – which they are far more likely to be able to do with an image of the latest fashion or a delectable dessert than they are with a picture of yet another phone or computer.

Some hashtags are seasonal by nature. #summer may be top ranking from June to August, but it will fall out of favour when it's time to share the snowboarding and skiing pictures in winter. #valentinesday jumps up the rankings each February and #christmas in December. At the end of each year, #sale skyrockets in popularity.

Not every hashtag falls neatly into one category or the other: index and commentary hashtags are more like two ends of a hashtag continuum. Somewhere in between is the #marketing hashtag, where #brands #hashtag #random #words that are #topical but which no one is probably searching for. And Shapp points out that hashtags sometimes start as one-off commentary hashtags but get picked up by a larger group of people and become indexes, making them difficult to classify. One common example of hashtags on this boundary are meme hashtags, such as the ″problems″ set—#FirstWorldProblems and #90sProblems are indexes, but people also coin one-off ″X problems″ hashtags as commentary on any problem characteristic of a particular group.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Арнольд И. В. Основы научных исследований в лингвистике / И. В. Арнольд. – Москва : Высшая школа, 1991. – 140 с.

Водак Р. Язык. Дискурс / пер. с англ. и нем. / Р. Водак. – Волгоград: Перемена, 1997. – 139 с.

Галичкина Е. Н. Специфика компьютерного дискурса на английском и русском языках (на материале жанра компьютерных конференций) : дисс. … канд. филол. наук / Е. Н. Галичкина – Астрахань, 2011. – 212 с.

Горошко Е. И. К уточнению понятия ″Компьютерно-опосредованная коммуникация″: проблемы

терминоведения / Е. И. Горошко // Образовательные технологии и общество. – 2009. – Т. 12. – № 2. – С. 445–454.

Дудолатова О.В. Інтернет дискурс як особливий вид дискурсу / О. В. Дудолатова // Вісник Харківського національного університету імені В. Н. Каразіна. – 2008. – № 837. – С. 74–78.

Карасик В. И. Язык социального статуса / В. И. Карасик – Москва : ИТДГК ″Гнозис″, 2002. – 333 с.

Карпа І. В. Функціональні та прагматичні характеристики інтерактивної віртуальної комунікації (на матеріалі інформаційно-довідкового сервісу Yahoo! Answers) : дисс. … канд. філол. наук / І. В. Карпа. – Херсон, 2010. – 212 с.

Кондрашов П. Е. Компьютерный дискурс: социолингвистический аспект : дисс. … канд. филол. наук / П. Е. Кондрашов. – Київ, 2004. – 189 с.

Селіванова О. О. Основи теорії мовної комунікації : підручник / Рекомендовано МОНМС України. – Черкаси : Чабаненко Ю. А., 2011. – 350 с.

Barthes R. An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative / R. Bart // New Literary History. – 1975. – Vol. 6. – № 2. – P. 237–272.

Brown G. Discourse Analysis / G Yule, G. Brown. – Cambridge University Press, 1993. – 288 p.

Crystal D. Language and the Internet / D. Crystal. – Cambridge University Press, 2001. – 275 p.

Sériot P. Analyse du discours politique soviétique / P. Serio. – Paris: IMSECO, 1985. – 364 p.

Thimbleby H. Internet, discourse and interaction potential / H. Thimbleby // First Asia Pacific Conference on Human Computer Interaction. – 1996. – P. 3–18.

REFERENCES

Arnold, I.V. (1991). *Osnovyi nauchnyih issledovaniy v lingvistike* [Основы научных исследований в лингвистике]. Moscow: Vysshaya shkola.

Barthes, R. (1975) 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', *New Literary History*, 6(2), pp. 237–272.

Brown, G.,Yule G. (1993). *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge University Press.

Crystal, D. (2001). *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge University Press.

Dudoladova, O. V. (2008). *Internet-dyskurs jak osoblyvyj typ dyskursu,* Visnyk Kharkivs'kogo nacional'nogo universytetu im.V. N. Karazina. [*Internet Discourse as a Specific Type of Discourse, The Journal of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University*]. Kharkov, pp. 74–78.

 Galichkina, E. N. (2011). *Specifika komp'juternogo diskursa na anglijskom i russkom jazykakh (na materiale zhanra komp'juternykh konferencij): diss. ... kand. filol. nauk.* [Specifics of the Computer Discourse in English and Russian (Case Study of Computer Conference Genre), PhD Thesis]*, Astrakhan'.

Goroshko, Ye.I. (2009). *K utochneniyu ponyatiya ″Kompyuterno-oposredovannaya kommunikatsiya″: problemyi terminovedeniya* [Образовательные технологии и общество]. Kazan', Vol. 12. № 2, pp. 445 –454.

Karasik, V.I. (2002). Yazyk social*'nogo statusa* [Язык социального статуса]. Moscow: Gnozis.

Karpa, I. B. (2010). *Funkcional'ni ta pragmatychni kharakterystyky interaktyvnoi' virtual'noi' komunikacii' (na materiali informacijno-dovidkovogo servisu Yahoo! Answers): avtoref. dys. ... kand. filol. nauk* [Functional and Pragmatic Characteristics of Interactive Virtual Communication. (Case Study of Reference Service Yahoo! Answers)*, Author's thesis]. Kherson.

Kondrashov, P. E. (2004). Kompyuternyiy diskurs: sotsiolingvisticheskiy aspekt: disc. … k. filol. n. [Компьютерный дискурс: социолингвистический аспект: дисс. … к. филол. н.]. Kyiv.

Selivanova, O. O. (2011). Foundations of Language Communication Theory, Cherkasy: Chabenko Press.

Sériot, Patrick (1985). Analyse du discours politique soviétique. Paris: IMSECO.

Thimbleby, H (1996), Internet, Discourse and Interaction Potential. APCHI'96, pp3-18, Singapore.

Vodak, R. (1997). *Yazyik. Diskurs. Politika* [Язык. Дискурс. Политика]. Volgograd: Peremena.

Анотація.
Інтернет-комунікація та Інтернет-дискурс є предметом вивчення багатьох дисциплін: соціології, психології, менеджменту, риторики, журналістики та деяких інших. Інтернет-дискурс уможливлює миттєву передачу інформації незалежно від відстані та географічного розташування. Величезна віртуальна область Інтернету пропонує користувачеві широкий спектр платформ: медіа, блоги, інформаційні сайти, кіно, література, вікі-проекти, магазини і аукціони, рекламні, платіжні та пошукові системи, електронна пошта, чати, форуми, месенджери, соціальні мережі, радіо, телебачення, інформаційні портали тощо. Інтернет-комунікація характеризується такими

особливостями: 1) поліфонія; 2) гіпертекстові та інтерактивні можливості мережі; 3) анонімність і віддаленість. Інтернет-дискурс, як і будь-який інший тип дискурсу, характеризується рядом структурних і лексико-граматичних особливостей. Хештег - це мітка для змісту. Це допомагає іншим користувачам, які цікавляться певною темою, швидко знайти вміст по тій самій темі. Люди використовують хештеги в своїх повідомленнях у Instagram та Twitter, але наразі ще недостатньо знань про їх реальний зміст і для чого вони використовуються. Згідно з його структурою, хэштегом може бути одне слово, абревіатура, винайдена комбінація букв і цифр, або фраза. Якщо це фраза, між словами не може бути пробілів. Всі букви та цифри повинні працювати разом без пробілів у хештезі. Неможливо мати знаки пунктуації або символи у хештезі (окрім символу # на початку). Числа дозволені, але необхідно мати хоча б одну букву з цифрами - хештеги не можуть складатися виключно з чисел. За своїм значенням хештег може бути пов'язаний з великою кількістю різноманітних тем: приватне життя, особистісні особливості, природа, свята, події, діяльність, емоції, подорожі та багато інших.