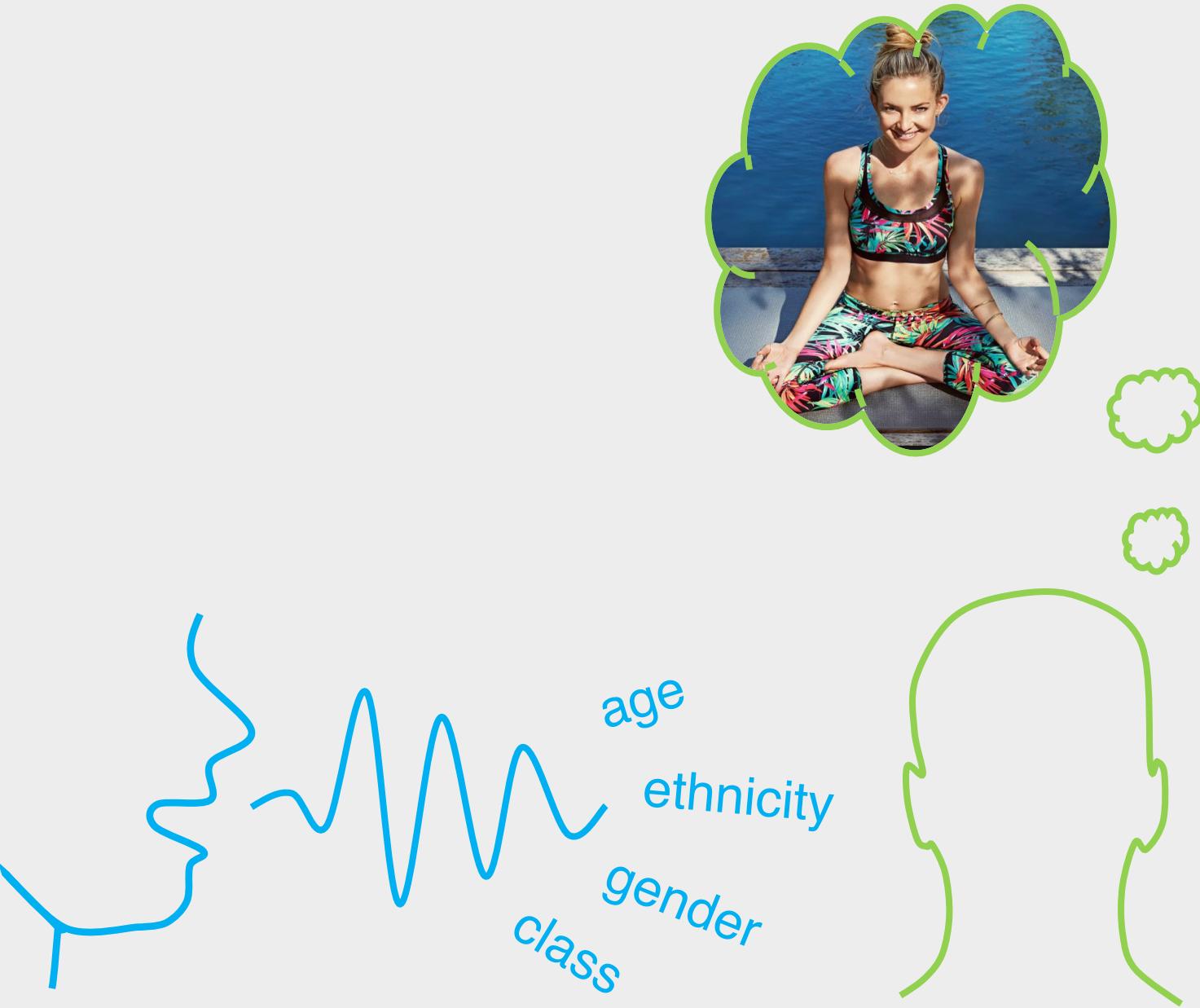


Expecting a Performance: Listener expectations of social meaning in social media

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Two related observations

- Social meanings aren't fixed
 - "a constellation of ideologically related meanings" (Eckert 2008)
 - Social meanings are listener-dependent
 - linguistic performance ≠ 'transmitting an encoded message' (Campbell-Kibler 2008, Burnett 2017)
- Social meanings: 'listener-situated'
- meanings depend on listeners' situated uptake



Social media posts:

- a spot-lit 'front-stage' (Goffman 1959; Bullingam & Vasconcelos 2013)
- 'high performance' (Coupland 2007)

How do expectations of speaker performance mediate listeners' interpretations of speakers – in the absence of rich, socioindexical cues?

Experiment 1

um / *uh*

- “Women use *um*; men use *uh*”
Acton (2011), Tottie (2011)
- Overall preference for *um*: a female-led
change in progress
Fruehwald (2016)

‘Women use *um*’



Hazel Hayes @TheHazelHayes · 23h

I just, **um**, I really, just,
runs fingers through hair

I sort of, **um**
sighs

Like, just, **um**
weird grin

Y'know, I
eye roll

I'm. Like. Batgirl?

Or whatever.



SuperBroMovies @SuperBroMovies

WB Reportedly Eyeing “Kristen Stewart Prototype” For
‘BATGIRL’ bit.ly/2A51leG

34

161

2.0K



'Men use *uh*'



Tina Belcher @GirlsNoteBook · 1h

guys are over here like "yeah **uh** in my opinion the perfect female body is like a victoria's secret model but with 3x bigger boobs" and girls are over here like "mmm dad bods are literally just fine just please respect us" and guys are over here like "no"

1

43

180

✉

▼



Sorority Probs 🎉 @SORORITYPROBS · 2h

I've never seen a more fragile male than a frat boy getting called out for his mistakes

"**uh** believe what you want but you are crazy Jessica"

1

54

575

✉

▼

um



User18934085
@handle18934085

Walking around the mall and um just saw two kids shoplift

um

Left arrow, Retweet, Star, Profile, More

uh



User18934085
@handle18934085

Walking around the mall and uh just saw two kids shoplift

uh

Left arrow, Retweet, Star, Profile, More

How _____ is the user?

educated/uneducated

formal/casual

smart/stupid

pretentious/unpretentious

friendly/unfriendly

masculine/not masculine

feminine/not feminine

funny/unfunny

young/old

(7-point Likert scale)

Design

condition 1: um



condition 2: uh



Mixed-effects ordinal regression models for each social dimension

Predictions

- *um*: more feminine/less masculine, younger
- *uh*: less feminine/more masculine, older

um



'Cher' (*Clueless*)

uh



'The Dude' (*The Big Lebowski*)

Results



um

uh

'listeners' use contextual expectations and
existing ideologies to reason about a
'speaker'

all results $p < 0.05$

Experiment 2

ing

User18934085
@handle18934085

I'm driving my car across Texas... send me suggestions for BBQ places

Follow

in'

'marked IN'

User18934085
@handle18934085

I'm drivin' my car across Texas... send me suggestions for BBQ places

Follow

in

'bare IN'

User18934085
@handle18934085

I'm drivin' my car across Texas... send me suggestions for BBQ places

Follow

How _____ is the user?

educated/uneducated

formal/casual

smart/stupid

pretentious/unpretentious

friendly/unfriendly

masculine/not masculine

feminine/not feminine

funny/unfunny

young/old

(7-point Likert scale)

Design

8 unique tweets
(driving, cooking, looking, walking...)

condition 1: ing



condition 2: in



condition 3: in'



Mixed-effects ordinal regression models for each social dimension

Predictions

- Similar results for IN vs ING and IN' vs. ING
 - e.g., less educated, more casual...
- IN' = IN?
 - Or is IN' a 'performative move'...?

Results

compared to ING

IN

less educated
more casual
stupider

IN'

less educated
more casual
stupider
more masculine
funnier

Qualitatively, same results for IN' vs. IN

all results $p < 0.05$

Why IN' ≠ IN?

- ‘Listeners’ sensitive to IN’ and IN - but only IN’ associated with additional socioindexical meanings (**mASCULINE, funny**)
 - IN’ – a performative move
 - ‘Listeners’ reason that IN’-users are *performing* ‘funny, down-to-earth guy’
 - thus ascribe distinct meanings to IN’
 - Meanings of IN’ emerge from listeners’ reasoning about speakers’ language use, given the performative context

IN' and high performance

In high performance...

“The poetic and metalinguistic functions of language comes to the fore and considerations of ‘style’ (...) become particularly salient”

(form focusing)

“There is an intensity, a density and a depth of utterances or actions, or at least this is assumed to be the case by audiences”

(meaning focusing)

To summarize

In the absence of rich socioindexical cues...

um/uh results show:

- ‘listeners’ use contextual expectations and existing linguistic ideologies to reason about a ‘speaker’

ing/in’/in results show:

- the emergence of a particular set of social meanings may be partly contingent on contextual expectations

Listeners expect a performance?

→ Listeners interpret a performance!

Conclusions / implications

Theoretical

- Listeners' expectations of an *interaction* may shape the meanings that emerge therein – not just listeners' expectations about *speakers*

Methodological

- Contextual expectations, and expectations of 'performance' may shape listener interpretations more generally
 - E.g., in lab experiments

Thanks!

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Models

um/uh

clmm(attribute ~ variant + (1|phrase_pos))

ING

clmm(attribute ~ variant + (1|word))