

Title: “The straights are not ok”: A linguistic analysis of queer discourses resisting and subverting heteronormativity on social media

Abstract:

Although criticism of heteronormativity and heterosexuality in online queer spaces is not a new phenomenon (Cavalcante, 2019), 2019 marks the emergence of online discursive practices dedicated to this subject, perhaps as a product of post-MeToo culture and the development of feminist and queer counter-discourses online. Being at the intersection between discourse analysis, gender studies and digital humanities, this work aims to examine how some of these discourses that are critical of heterosexuality and heteronormativity on Twitter and Instagram challenge the ideology conveyed by heteronormativity in terms of gender and sexuality and subvert its normative character, thereby questioning a power relationship. This work is based on the study of a multilingual corpus in English, French and German comprising two sub-corpora from Twitter and Instagram collected between 2020 and 2021. The Twitter subcorpus was collected using the noun phrases “the straights”, “straight people” and “les hétéros”. The Instagram subcorpus originates from two heterocringe humor accounts, a form of humor that consists in sharing content found on the internet that is perceived as excessively heteronormative in order to elicit a feeling of “cringe” in readers. The dimensions of resistance and discursive subversion at the heart of this work are addressed in a qualitative analysis through the lens of several micro and macro discursive categories, such as markers of subjectivity, the denomination and address of social actors, elements of visual representations, as well as the counter-discursive positioning of the discourses analyzed, the role of humor and implicit discourses. The analysis reveals that the subversion of heteronormativity operates, on the one hand, through statements that highlight and denounce the mechanisms involved in the reproduction and domination of heteronormativity. On the other hand, it is achieved through the discursive and often performative decentering and othering of straight people as a social category. We also observe how the practices analyzed are the product of a resistance that is sometimes made an explicit goal shared by part of the LGBTQIA+ community on Twitter and Instagram, which in turn generates a backlash from heterosexual users. By studying the criticism of heteronormativity and heterosexuality from queer users, this research not only seeks to contribute to the analysis of the discursive realization of certain processes of subversion by a dominated group in a digital context but also proposes that we consider it a practice of resistance in its own right that constitutes an alternative form of online LGBTQIA+ activism.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, heteronormativity, LGBT, counterdiscourse, digital humanities, social network, resistance, humor