#GenderChallenge keynotes

Keynote 2, Jul 20th 15:30 – 16:30 CET

**Gender, Sexuality, and the Digital Commodification of Linguistic Style**

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Research has increasingly sought to document the ways in which linguistic and other semiotic signs become indexically linked – or ‘enregistered’ (Agha, 2003) – with person-types. This includes work which has examined those parodied or ‘stylised’ (Coupland 2001: 345) forms of interaction, such as the ‘Mock White Girl’ documented by Slobe (2018).

In this paper, I focus on the intersection of gender and sexuality in stylisation in digital communication. I do this by exploring the emergence of a stereotypically feminine style and persona that is prevalent in British social media. Specifically, I examine the prevalence of non-standard spellings (e.g., <dallyn> darling, <gawjus> gorgeous, <partehh> party), particular discourse features (e.g., hun, babe, u ok hun?), and characterological tropes (e.g., the life motto ‘live, love, laugh’, the budget alcohol ‘Lambrini’, taking a package holiday to ‘Zante’) as indexical representations of a particular type of classed, gendered, and ethnic identity in a corpus of 1000 Instagram memes. Through this analysis, I demonstrate that these features have become enregistered as a ‘characterological figure’ (Agha, 2003) of a White British working-class woman – the Hun. For users, this persona is particularly valued as a ‘commodity register’ (Agha, 2011) where it appears to have acquired certain social and linguistic capital within internet subcultures.

Concluding, I reflect on the social significance of the Hun and the challenges of examining (gender) identity online. Finally, I discuss the implications of stylisation and personae for future research on digital communication.


Christian Ilbury is a Lecturer in Linguistics at the University of Suffolk. His research examines the intersection of digital culture and language variation, with a particular focus on examining the social meaning of variable patterns of language use across face-to-face and digital contexts.