English affiliative stance markers in Argentine online fan communities
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Introduction

Without discounting the obvious importance of Spanish to the formation of Argentine national

identity, English has also been a critical component of Argentina's linguistic history. After

declaring independence from Spain in 1816, Argentina's economy, politics, and culture were

profoundly shaped by the imperialist involvement of the British (Gallo 2001). Until the 1930s,

the British controlled most of the major industries in Argentina, and British officials were closely

involved in Argentine policy decisions. As a result of this, iconically British activities came to

also be seen as indexes of the Argentine upper crust. Rich folks in Argentina took high tea,

shopped at Harrod's, played polo and—importantly—taught their children English (Graham-

Yool 1981). English has thus been seen as a marker of the cultural elite in Argentina for some

time now. More recently, however, processes of globalization have brought discourses of

English as "a" or even "the" world language into the Argentine cultural consciousness

(Valentinsson 2019). The global circulation of media and pop cultural texts produced in

Anglophone countries has aided this process, linking the English language to a new set of

cultural meanings in Argentina: higher education, upward social mobility, and a democratized,

openly accessible form of cosmopolitanism (Sultana et al 2013). These new social meanings

exist alongside the historical social meanings, creating conditions of what I and my colleague

William Cotter have called "bivalent class indexicality" (Cotter and Valentinsson 2018): English

in Argentina can, simultaneously, point both "up" to elitist, snobbish social positions, as well as

"down" (or at least "horizontally") to cool, in-the-know, democratically cosmopolitan positions.

Based on data collected from 18 months of digital ethnography with Argentine fans of various Anglophone media and pop cultural products, this paper analyzes how Argentine fans of English-language media use linguistic resources from media fan communities. Building on work on stance and alignment in online and offline interaction (Bucholtz 2009; Kiesling 1998; Sierra 2016; Zappavigna 2014, 2018), I focus on a class of discourse markers that I term "affiliative stance markers", which are deployed to index alignment, agreement, or affiliation with some previous utterance, turn, or proposition, or with one's interlocutor. English affiliative stance markers such as "same", "mood", and "kin" allow Argentineans to construct stances of positive alignment with other members of their local online fan groups—thus avoiding English's indexical links with snobbery and privilege—while also demonstrating proficiency in the youthful internet vernacular of "always on" (Baron 2010, boyd 2012) global media fan communities, which are generally perceived to be English-dominant spaces (Thurlow et al 2004). Thus, these discourse markers can be seen as a strategy for managing the potential effects of English's bivalent class indexicality in Argentina, as well as a way of engaging Argentina's place within global media- and techno-scapes (Appadurai 1996).

"Same"

The bivalent class indexicality of English in Argentina puts Argentine fans of English-language media and pop culture in a social bind. On the one hand, participation in Anglophone fan communities offers venues to develop fluency in English, which is seen as a marker of good education and a globally marketable skill—important for Argentinean's who see socioeconomic mobility as rather strained, given the Argentine national economy and the country's position in

global economic markets. Yet these fans also worry that using too much English can lead others to perceive them as elitist, snobbish, and privileged.

Discourse markers offer, perhaps, a "safe" class of English words for these fans to appropriate. Sociolinguistic research on this vast and difficult-to-classify set of lexical items has shown strong links in Anglophone contexts between discourse marker use and young, female-coded social personae—thus, perhaps, also stances of frivolity and unseriousness. Given this group's robust engagement with English-language media, it is unsurprising that ideologies connecting discourse markers to gendered and age-graded categories have been imported into this Spanish-language context, in a similar sense to the "semiotic hitchhiking" of creaky voice across different contexts (Mendoza-Denton 2011). In fact, metalinguistic commentary on youth language in Argentina specifically highlights one of the English affiliative stance markers under consideration here.

Figure 1

This image shows an online headline from *Los Andes*, a regional newspaper from the north-central Argentine city of Mendoza. The article headline reads: *Milipilis, same, and ahre: this is the Argentine teen dictionary.* Subheading: *Words that young people use on social media are*

showing up in everyday conversation. Learn what each one means. The article describes "same",

in particular, as "import from English, used to demonstrate that the person identifies with a

tweet", locating it specifically within the context of digital discourse and social media, although

not connecting it to fandom. Indeed, I do not wish to suggest that *only* participants in

Anglophone media and pop culture fandoms make use of English discourse markers**.** However,

as Roig-Marín (2016) discusses in her study of anglicisms among American pop music fans in

Spain, the fact that fan communities demonstrate such a deep engagement with these mediatized

sources of English makes them a prime group through which to study the importation of such

lexical items (185). And, since a huge portion of fandom activity occurs in online communities,

where global flows of linguistic and semiotic exchange can be easily accessed, it seems probable

that this lexical item (and the others discussed in this paper) entered Argentine Spanish via this

route.

Stand-alone "same" as an affiliative marker seems to be a rather recent innovation in English.

UrbanDictionary.com entries have it becoming widespread as a youth linguistic practice in the

United States in the early 2000s. It is typically used as the second part of an adjacency pair

(Levinson 1983), where the first speaker shares a comment, and the second speaker utters

"same" as a way to index alignment or affiliation with what the first speaker uttered. Currently,

this usage of "same" has morphed into a more general way to index enjoyment, pleasure,

alignment with, identification with, or affiliation with, a range of semiotic material, even if the

propositional content of the material is not entirely transparent. This produces a sort of absurdist

humor and "concise flippancy" (Highfield 2016, 48) that is considered an important

characteristic of internet linguistic styles and fandom linguistic styles (Davison 2012; Nagle 2017; Phillips and Milner 2017; Zappavigna 2018). Consider the following example.
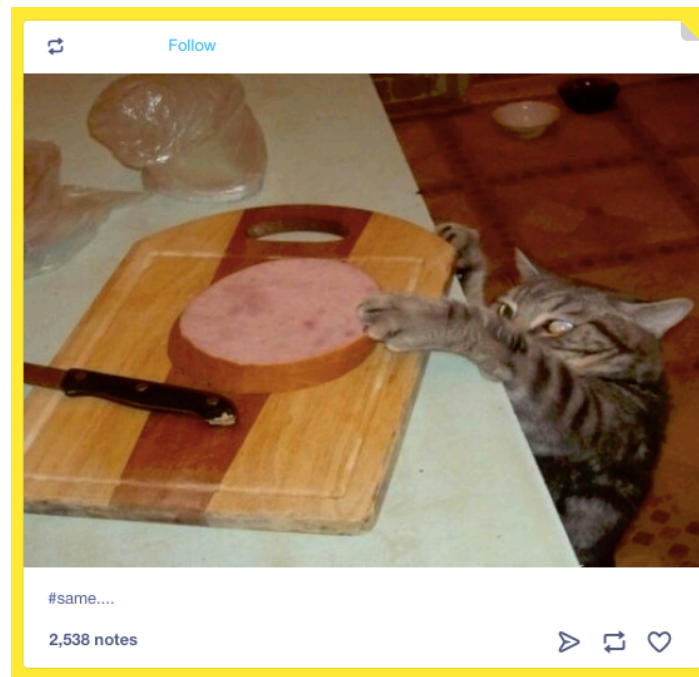
This image is a screenshot from the blog of one of the Argentine Tumblr users who chose to participate in my study. It shows an imagine of a cat reaching onto a counter, possibly to grab the thick slice of sandwich meat that is resting on a cutting board. Aside from the text and figures that display aspects of Tumblr's functionality (number of "notes" i.e. interactions with the post on the bottom left; the reblog/heart icons on the bottom right; the user name, here whited-out but normally in the upper left—see Petersen 2014), the only text that appears is the tag that this user has employed to categorize the post, #same. This is an example of what Bourlai (2018) and Hurtig (2017) refer to as a "comment tags"—using Tumblr's taxonomizing and categorizing affordances to add metatextual or metalinguistic commentary to a post. Rather than tagging the post with information that reflects the content of the image—perhaps things like #cat or #funny—the user who reblogged this post tags it just as "#same….", which doesn't obviously

correspond to any part of the content of image. Tumblr users (and "always on" internet users) interpret this particular tag-image relationship as a purposefully humorous, purposefully absurd statement of affiliation with some kind of vague feeling or emotion expressed by the image. Here, the feeling may be something along the lines of "surreptitiously trying to steal a snack from whoever is preparing a meal", although it could be something else entirely. It doesn't really matter what the meaning of the image is—in fact, it is often the case that the more absurd, the more humorous. It is also not felicitous to explain the aspect of the meme or image or text that the blogger feels aligned with, as part of the absurdity of the humor arises from the "unsaid-ness" of the joke. The use of a #same tag communicates the blogger's mastery of the ironic, absurdist style of humor that is indexical of a youthful, digitally-connected, internet-aware persona**.**

"mood"

The affiliative stance markers "mood" and "kin" have—unlike "same—not entered popular conversations about "teen" or "internet" language, but they accomplish largely similar pragmatic functions. "Mood" as an affiliative stance marker is used to express that something is relatable. It can be applied to linguistic content with clear-cut propositional meaning, but also to images, gifs or clips that don't hold any obvious propositional or semantic meaning. For instance, the Tumblr user who reblogged the cat image in Figure 2 could probably just as easily have tagged the post with #mood. However unlike "same", "mood" seems to be amenable to various forms of lexical and morphological modification. See, for instance, this screenshot of a Tumblr post.

Here, the Argentine Tumblr user who reblogged a (humorous, written-in-English) post about a student abruptly leaving a classroom, has added the comment tag "#MONUMENTAL mood". Both the modifier itself and the use of capitalization suggest an intensification of the affiliative stance marker, communicating that the blogger feels especially identified with the sense of abrupt fed-upness that is communicated in this short story. "Big" is another common modifier used to intensify "mood", although it may also be the case that "big mood" is considered a stand-alone element on its own. UrbanDictionary.com lists a separate entry for "mood" and "big mood", but not, e.g. "monumental mood". "Mood" is also the only English affiliative stance marker that I found to allow blending with Spanish morphology, such as in the next screenshot shown, in which the blogger adds a commentary tag "#moodazo" to a meme criticizing the Marvel comic book/film character Tony Stark. The "-azo" (sometimes spelled "-aso") suffix intensifies or augments the meaning of "mood" (cf., for instance, "amigazo" *a great friend*, "golazo" *a great/awesome goal*).
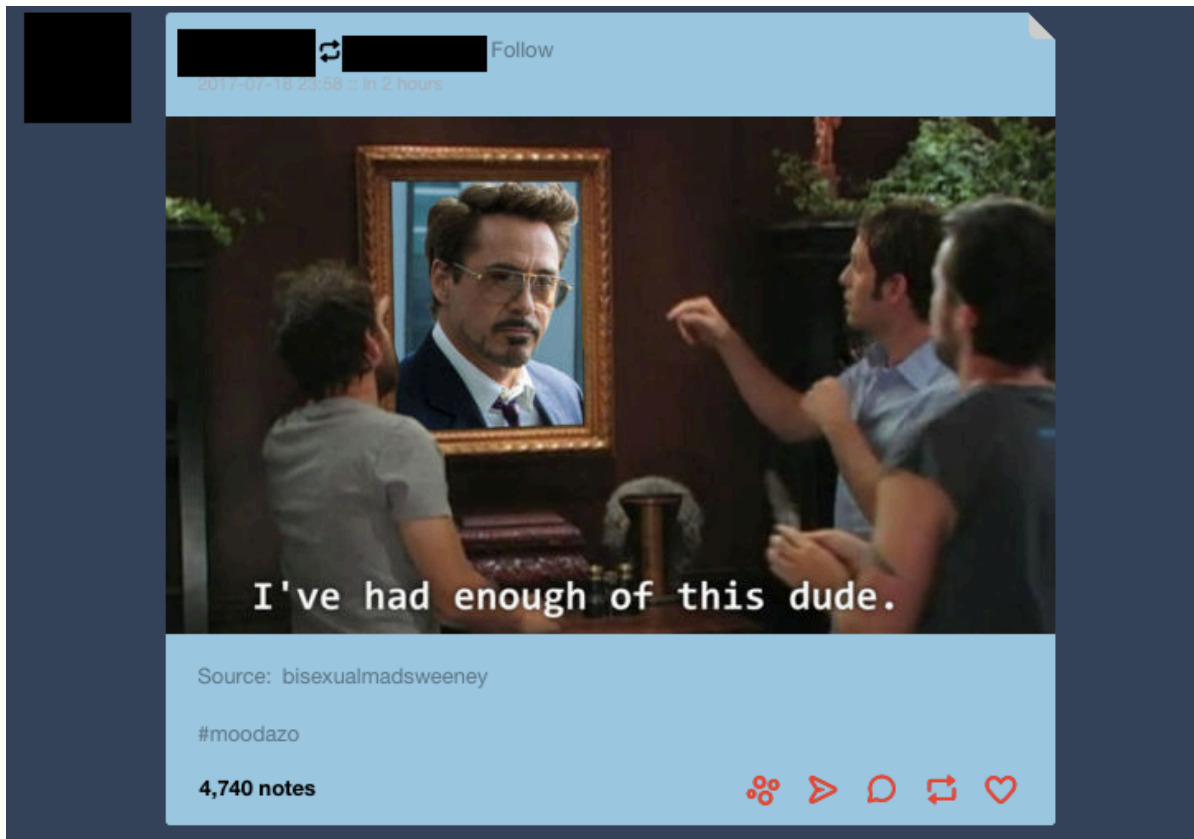
Figure 4

"kin"

"Same" and "mood"/ "big mood" are used across various social media platforms, but the affiliative stance marker "kin" is much less common outside of Tumblr. While at first glance seemingly related to the English word referring to familial relationships, its use in digital spaces has more to do with a unique internet subculture that found purchase on Tumblr in the mid-2010s. Some journalistic work, e.g. Mamatas 2001, has traced such identifications back to fantasy genre email listservs of the late 1990s; Proctor 2019 is the only academic work I know of that exists on this topic. I do not have the space to dive into a history of "kinning" here, so I will just briefly mention that this term refers to wide-ranging set of individuals who identify as fictional characters, animals, historical people, and other sorts of non-human identity categories.

Other Tumblr users, including my participants, critique and mock such identifications and the people who engage in them as excessive, absurd, attention-seeking, and/or psychologically disturbed. However, *knowledge of* "kinning" can be used to index an "always on" (Baron 2010, boyd 2012) persona and thus, for Argentineans, a stance of global and cosmopolitan awareness of the various intricacies of digital subcultures. Here, then, the adoption of "kin" as an affiliative stance marker serves a dual purpose: both to indicate a sense of alignment or affiliation with content expressed in the previous turn, and also as an ironic or sarcastic critique of actual "kin culture".
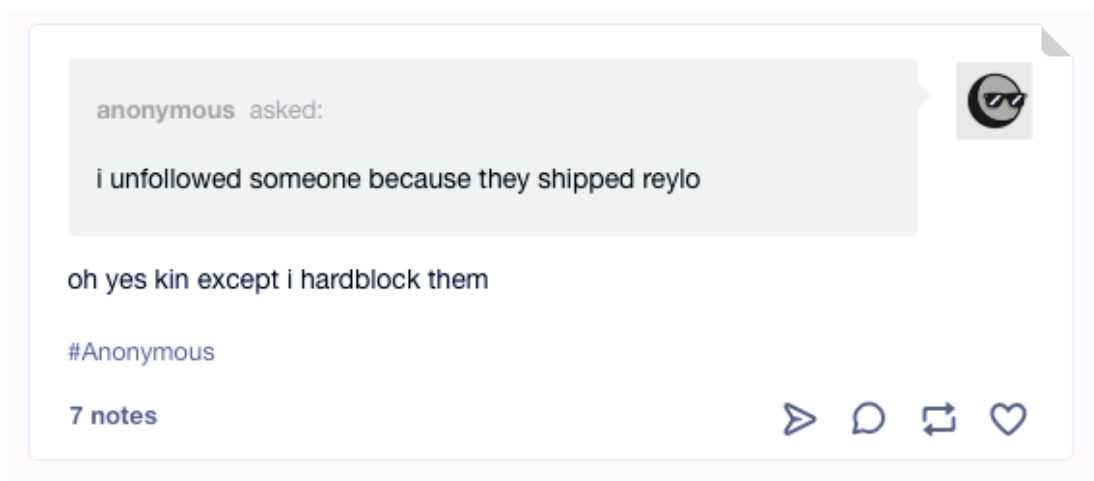

Figure 5

This image shows a screenshot from another Argentine participant's blog. These screenshots also highlight the "ask" function of Tumblr in which other users—anonymously or not—can submit questions or comments to blogs they follow. The blog owner who receives the ask can then publish their response to their blog. "Kin" is used here mid-"utterance" to communicate affiliation with the proposition expressed in the anonymous ask—the blog owner, like the anonymous asker, also unfollows blogs that support a relationship between Rey and Kylo Ren/Ben Solo (characters in the current iteration of the Star Wars franchise).

Conclusions

For Argentine fans of Anglophone media who use social media platforms to engage with fan communities, the use of these English affiliative stance markers allows them to demonstrate alignment with the English-dominant, digitally connected, youthful styles of internet-based fan culture, in which absurdist humor styles—such as indexing alignment with nonsensical images or text posts—dominate the interactional landscape. Furthermore, these discourse markers allow them to demonstrate their mastery not just of the actual media texts/products their fandoms center on, but also of the sociolinguistic contexts in which such media was produced, linking them to a global, cosmopolitan positionality. Because the pragmatic effects of these English words are to showcase alignment and silliness, the indexical potentiality of English to index elitist and snobbish positions is neutralized, or at least mitigated. Generally, though, these brief snippets of data also show that online interactional contexts seem to license a greater amount of English use without triggering English's indexical links to snobbery (Valentinsson 2019)— probably due to the ongoing perception that the internet generally and certain social media sites specifically are largely English-dominant places (Thurlow et al 2004). Thus, it is not surprising that these affiliative stance markers have found purchase in the online spaces for Argentine fans of Anglophone pop culture. But while "same" has clearly spread to offline contexts—as suggested by the newspaper excerpt, maintaining largely the same pragmatic and indexical effects—it remains to be seen if and how English affiliative stance markers as a class can accomplish the same social meaning work across both online and offline contexts.

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