“CELLU-LIT”: a pragmatic study of Body Positive Language on Instagram

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Abstract

In this paper, two female-led Instagram accounts within the Body Positivity movement were analyzed to see what type of linguistic strategies are employed in order to build solidarity with their followers, as well as establish and maintain a shared group identity. The analysis was carried out by utilizing Appraisal Theory as taxonomized by Martin and White (2005) and aspects of Politeness Theory, as taxonomized by Brown and Levinson (1987). The paper found that the two Instagram users linguistically employed several aspects of both theories in order to build and maintain a group identity within a common-identity community. In terms of Politeness Theory the positive politeness strategies were more common than the negative politeness strategies, specifically were the positive politeness strategies employed to build common ground and the strategy of presupposition manipulations the most prevalent. Within the Appraisal theoretical framework, the most common strategies by the Instagram users were the disclaim:deny and the proclaim:pronounce strategies.

Keywords

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background
This study will look into linguistic and pragmatic strategies by two female Instagram influencers deployed in order to oppose the canonical aesthetic standards of female bodies and build a sense of solidarity and community with their followers, sharing similar ideas of female value, appearance and conduct.

Previous literature regarding identity and self-image is plentiful, both within linguistic studies as well as within other areas, such as psychology and anthropology. Inherent to our perception of our self-image is the body image. Body image can be defined as the internal representation of one’s outer appearance. Furthermore, our perception of our own self-worth is often contingent on this internal representation of the outer appearance. This seems to hold true particularly for women’s self-image, especially since the standard of female attractiveness emphasized by society is becoming harder to adhere to (Fallon, 1990, as cited in Heinberg & Thompson, 1995). According to Hawkins, Richards, Granley and Stein (2004, as cited in Russello, 2009) as of 2004, most women portrayed in the media weighed 15% less than the average woman. Furthermore, studies have indicated body mass index and external shame as negative correlates, whereas self-compassion has been indicated as a positive correlate of body appreciation (Marta-Simões, Ferreira & Mendes 2016). According to Cash, one of the main influences on a disturbed body image are sociocultural factors which lead to discrimination against individuals deemed “unattractive” simply because they do not meet society’s ideals (1990, as cited in Heinberg & Thompson, 1995). Women are not only expected to be slim in order to live up to society’s beauty ideals, but the measure of an individual’s perceived attractiveness is often linked to their self-esteem (Archer & Bale, 2013) which in turn can be linked to an individual’s perceived self-worth. In order to live as a woman of self-worth in today's world and not adhere to the impossible beauty standards, the movement with the moniker Body Positivity has grown, especially within online communication. While the concept of body positivity, i.e. the notion that a person’s value is not contingent on their physical appearance, has been debated amongst people from different disciplines for at least a hundred years, perhaps most notably appearing alongside women’s liberation movements, it is only with the invention of the
internet that the concept has found a stable standing in people’s day-to-day lives. In a society where women’s value is based on their outer appearance and attractiveness, any woman who does not meet the criterion will inevitably fall short of value, even as a female being: “If an individual female does not conform to specific ideologies surrounding femininity, she is not considered to be adequately female” (Brokensha 2011, as cited in Roodt, 2015). Opposing the ideal of the female body held in society based on outward appearance, rather than factors traditionally used to sort individuals on a scale of human worthiness such as intelligence or morality (Roodt, 2015), and instead rejecting this ideal body image in favor of self-compassion and acceptance seems to support a positive and healthy relationship with one’s own body image (Marta-Simões, et al. 2016). Importantly, according to Roodt, the objectification and generalization of women and their value in today’s society is largely due to tabloid journalism (2015). A medium with a similar premise, however equally relevant to today’s societal body ideals, is Instagram with 1 billion users as of December 2019; (Instagram, 2019). Originally constructed to be a photo sharing app for friends and family, Instagram grew quickly after its launch in 2010, gaining users of all kinds, many of whom were young women amassing thousands and millions of followers. Around these women all sorts of communities began to form, many of them within the body positivity community. A recent search of the hashtag #bodypositive on Instagram elicited over 11,509,986 posts (Instagram, December 2019), similar hashtags #bodypositivity and #bodypos elicited 3,866, 653 and 87,356 posts, respectively (Instagram, December 2019). Even within the body positivity community there are a myriad of different subgroups. Some that focus on body positivity mainly through language use, some with the pictures they post, some who aim to have an intersectional point of view, establishing the position of the body activism on a spectrum. However, what all the users have in common is that they construct for themselves not only an individual but also an online group identity. According to Schwämmlein and Wodzicki (2012, as cited in Graham, 2015), there are two types of group identities within online interaction; firstly, common-bond communities and secondly, common-identity communities. Individuals within common-bond communities only exist because they are interested in each other, whereas individuals in common-identity communities focus on the interest shared by all participants within the community (Graham, 2015). According to Graham, a stronger focus on the core interest, or topic, within the group leads to a cohesive group identity, which establishes solidarity (2015). Hence, by
rejecting society’s ideals in favor of a more self-compassionate standpoint, Instagram users may support a positive and healthy relationship with their own bodies for themselves, as well as introduce an alternative value position to their followers, ultimately creating a bond between themselves and the people within their common-identity community.

While there is plentiful previous research on self-image and body positive language used within various domains, research is scant in terms of what is occurring linguistically within the body positive community in online settings such as Instagram. This paper aims to help fill this research gap by utilizing two different linguistic frameworks to analyze the linguistic strategies taking place within one specific body positive niche on Instagram. Through looking at the language used by the women who adhere to an alternative body image ideal, the aim is to gauge a sense of what is being done linguistically as well as socially. It is likely that we will find that the analyzed Instagram accounts @ariellanysa and @karinairby adhere to the body positive agenda through linguistically establishing and reinforcing a group identity based on solidarity and common ground. However, in order to see if this may be the case, and what types of linguistic strategies they employ for this aim, we first need to look at how they build their own public self-image. This image can be understood through the lens of Goffman’s (1967) and Brown and Levinson’s (1978) face and facework theory, in which terms the present analysis will be done. Face has been defined as an individual’s pride, sense of self, and self-esteem (Brown & Levinson, 1978); au fond their identity. In order to maintain this established face and identity individuals can resort to various types of facework, understood as maintaining, restoring or simply establishing one’s face (Goffman, 1967). Since the goal of body positive Instagram users is to establish a digital platform for their activism, their aim will not only be to build and maintain their own face, but also to take measures to adhere to their follower’s face. The present hypothesis is that this goal will be achieved through, primarily, positive politeness strategies used to redress the face-threat related to certain linguistic actions. Face threats, or face threatening acts (FTAs) are explained by Brown and Levinson (1987) as acts which threaten an individual’s positive or negative face. FTAs which threaten the addressee’s negative face impede their freedom of action (e.g., request). Conversely, FTAs which threaten the addressee’s positive face damage the addressee’s want to be
thought of and viewed in a certain way (e.g., disagreement). In order to establish the value positions regarding female body-ideals implicated in the language used by the two Instagrammers, the linguistic framework found in Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) will be used. Through this framework the value positions held by the Instagram users can be established and categorized. By utilizing Appraisal Theory as well as Politeness Theory to analyze the language used in the Instagram posts in question, this paper will attempt to explain how an alternative body image identity building takes place, how the group identity within the body positivity movement is linguistically realized, and in what ways the users try to reject the previous ideals of women’s bodies by means of the language and pragmatic strategies they choose.

1.2 Aim and Research Question
This paper will look into Instagram influencers who are challenging the narrative around women’s bodies. Two female led Instagram accounts, @ariellanyssa and @karinairby, both of which represent a body positive stance, have been chosen for this purpose. The body positive stance can be seen partly through the pictures posted where the women position themselves in normatively less-flattering lights and angles to achieve the desired effect of highlighting their flaws. While this visual aspect is taken into account, the main purpose of this study is to analyze the language that is utilized in relation to the pictures, focusing on the social identity, in terms of face and facework. To this end, this paper focuses on the interpersonal function of language, through the framework of Appraisal Theory. The paper also utilizes the Politeness theoretical framework to carry out an analysis of the politeness strategies used to build rapport between the account holder and their followers.

Consequently, the research questions are as follow:

1. How do the two Instagram users linguistically reveal the position they take on body positivity?

2. What kind of linguistic and pragmatic strategies are deployed to form group identity within the body positivity pursued by the analyzed Instagram influencers?
2. Literature Review

As previous research on identity construction and body positivity online, both of which are imperative aspects for establishing the situational context of the analysis, is mentioned in section 1.1 (Background), this section will focus on the two main theories that underlie the analysis of this paper. These are Appraisal Theory, as taxonomized by Martin and White (2005) and Politeness Theory, as taxonomized by Brown and Levinson (1987).

2.1 Evaluative Language: Appraisal Theory

In order to establish exactly how certain linguistic resources are used to construct the Instagram user’s own identities, and simultaneously create and maintain a group identity through common ground with their followers within the body positive movement, this study will look at the interpersonal function of language, focusing on the interpersonal metafunction using the framework proposed within Evaluative Language; Appraisal Theory, as established by Martin and White (2005). Within Appraisal Theory the analysis is interested in the linguistic resources by which the writer takes a stance towards the value positions being referenced by any specific utterance and with respect to the people addressed. Martin and White’s (2005) framework for characterizing the different manners of stance taking investigates the rhetorical effects associated with the different positioning and “exploring what is at stake when one chooses one stance over another” (2005, p.92). According to Bakhtin all utterances “exist against the backdrop of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgements” (1981, as cited in Martin & White, 2005, p. 93). Appraisal theory provides a systematic account of how these utterances convey stance linguistically. Through it, we can characterize a writer’s “interpersonal style and their rhetorical strategies according to what sort of heteroglossic backdrop of other voices and alternative viewpoints they construct for their text and according to the way in which they engage with that backdrop.” (2005, p. 93). In other words; Appraisal theory concerns itself with how writers approve or disapprove of other value positions, what stance they take towards specific value positions, and how they position their readers to do the same. Within the role they play in the meaning making process, writers negotiate the relationship of alignment/disalignment, that is, the attitudinal assessments, beliefs and assumptions we
all have about the world itself in relation to different value positions and the attached communities of shared attitudes and beliefs referenced by certain texts. When writers announce their own “attitudinal positions” they are not only speaking their own mind, but also inviting others to endorse and share their views: “…Thus declarations of attitude are dialogically directed towards aligning the addressee into a community of shared value and belief” (2005, 95). Furthermore, Martin and White point out that the intersubjective meaning, the shared belief system held by the group involved in the interaction taking place, is important to note regarding mass-communicative texts such as Instagram posts. They are all written to construct for themselves an ideal reader where the reader is “written into the text”, by taking for granted that the addressee shares the writer’s value position (2005).

The scope of this paper is not broad enough to deploy the whole taxonomy by Martin and White (2005). While the taxonomy includes both the categories engagement and graduation, this paper will only cover the category engagement, and its subcategories. Since the Instagram posts analyzed belong to the body positivity movement and therefore convey stance taking, the engagement category is the main relevant and

Figure 1.
applicable category, as it concerns itself with the meanings which in different ways construe for the text a heteroglossic backdrop of previous value positions. It is only through acknowledging, either overtly or covertly, previous value positions that one can take a stance against them. The engagement category can further be sorted into two subcategories, as shown in Figure 1.

These two subcategories, and their subsequent subcategories, construe a particular arrangement of previous voices and alternative viewpoints (Martin & White, 2005, p.97-98 and 117-124). Aside from using negation utterances, the disclaim:deny category can also be used to argue that the writer has a greater expertise on the subject at hand than the reader, as seen in the example below from Martin and White (2005, p.120):

“[3.21] The gas we use today, natural gas, contains more than 90 per cent methane, and was known long before the discovery of coal gas. Natural gas burns with twice the heat of coal gas, is not poisonous and has no odour.

[Bank of English – US academic sub-corpus]”

This subcategory is corrective rather than confrontational, presenting the writer as “sensitively attending to the addressee’s level of knowledge” (2005, p.120), correcting a misunderstanding (that natural gas would be poisonous) and adjusting the utterance accordingly. As such, it will enhance solidarity, provided that the addressee will accept the presentation of such viewpoint onto them, and provided that they do not themselves reject the viewpoint at hand (2005, p.120). Disclaim:counter formulations on the other hand, counter a proposition which would have been expected in its place, invoking a contrary position which is then said not to hold (2005, p.120), typically conveyed via conjunctions and connectives such as although, however, yet, or adjuncts such as even, only, still.

Instead of directly rejecting or overruling contrary value positions, the second subcategory mentioned above, proclaim, and its subcategory pronounce act to limit the scope of dialogistic alternatives in the conversation (2005, p.121). This covers
utterances which involve an authorial emphasis or intervention, such as: *the truth is... you must agree that ...* or use intensifiers such as *really*, or specifically placed stress on certain words such as: *it IS like this*. The *pronoounce* subcategory utilizes a clear intervention by an authorial voice, with the goal of proving the proposition justifiable. It is also a case of so called “vouchsafing” (2005, p.128) where the authorial voice is made more important from the mentioning of a contrary value position which it can then assert itself against. Formulations of this kind acknowledge the heteroglossic aspect of the discursive context, whilst placing the writer as challenging the previous value position. Pronouncement formulations which involve authorial intervention are dialogistic in the sense that they acknowledge the presence of the counter view, but contractive in the sense that they challenge this contrary alternative. This bares similarity to *disclaim:counter* and *disclaim:deny* in the sense that they all counter a contrary value position. The consequences for the writer/reader relationship in the case of pronouncements will vary depending on whether the challenge is to a position indirectly or directly held by the addressee, or if the challenge is to the value position of some alternative party (2005, p.129). When the pronouncement challenges some third party on behalf of the addressee this will inevitably build solidarity since the writer is standing with the reader against some dialogic adversary (2005, p.130).

**2.2 Politeness Theory**

In order to analyze how the two Instagram users linguistically establish and reinforce a group identity based on solidarity and common ground, we need to look at how they build their own public self-image. This will be done through the lens of *face* and *facework* theory as established by Goffman (1967). As mentioned in 1.1. (Background) all individuals have a so-called *face* which they wish to maintain. In order to maintain this established face and identity one can resort to various types of *facework*. Facework counteracts certain *incidents* which may instead threaten face. Brown and Levinson (1978) elaborate further on Goffman’s ideas of face and present a taxonomy of face-saving and face-threatening acts. Their taxonomy is what this study will build its base upon for analysis.
In this paper, the focus will be on the different strategies put in place to save face — for the current purposes — mainly positive politeness strategies. However, it is important to note first that the Instagram users may perform certain FTAs without redressing these by means of politeness strategies; these are called bald-on-record utterances, wherein the writer wants to perform an FTA with maximum efficiency and impact more than they want to satisfy the reader’s face. In the case of maximum efficiency FTAs, where the writer adheres to Grice’s (1975, as cited in Brown & Levinson, 1987) maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner, the face threat can still be minimized. Additionally, the negative politeness strategy pluralization of the singular “you” and “I” pronouns may provide a conventional “out” for the reader, since it does not single out the addressee. The writer gives the reader the option of interpreting whether the utterance is applicable to them rather than to others (1987, p.198-200). In such kinship based societies as the ones we find both in real life and, as is the case for this study, online, an individual’s social status is intrinsically linked to the membership of any specific group. Thus, to presuppose membership of any certain group, rather than presupposing the individual is standing alone, provides a buffer of sorts for the addressee.

The strategies of positive politeness can be broken down into 15 categories which themselves can be broken down into further categories (1987, p. 103). This section will only discuss the categories claim common ground, presupposition manipulations, and point of view operations, where the latter two are found within the same strategy: presuppose/raise/assert common ground. The 13 remaining categories are not applicable to the study at hand. The first politeness strategy a writer can use to redress an FTA is to claim common ground with the reader. This is of utmost importance to a writer whose goal it is to establish and reinforce a group identity which, according to the current hypothesis, is the case for both of the Instagram users. Claiming common ground with the reader can be done in three different ways: the writer can convey that some want or goal of the reader is admirable or interesting to the writer; the writer can claim common membership to a group or category; or the writer can claim common perspective with the reader (1987, p. 103-111).

Within the strategies to claim common ground there are four subcategories:
i. The writer can notice and attend to the reader (their interests, wants, needs). The writer can take notice of the reader’s condition (noticeable changes, remarkable possessions etc.) and approve of it.

ii. The writer can exaggerate interest, approval, or sympathy with the reader, through exaggerated intonation, stress, intensifying modifiers.

iii. The writer can intensify interest to the reader (through overstatements, exaggerations). The writer can communicate to the reader that they share some of their wants by intensifying the interest of their own contributions to the conversation; “you know?” “see what I mean?” “isn’t it?”

iv. The writer can use in-group identity markers.

Within the fourth subcategory labeled *in-group identity markers* there are an additional few subcategories:

i. Use of address forms. In many languages, the second person plural pronoun of address (you) doubles as an honorific form to singular respected or distant others. The use of a singular non honorific pronoun to non-familiar others can claim solidarity. Other address forms used to convey this include generic names and terms of address such as buddy or babe; both of which have the function of claiming common ground and softening commands.

ii. Use of in-group language or dialect. A writer can engage in code switching or use of codes associated with in-group values.

iii. Use of jargon or slang. By referring to an object with a slang term, the writer can invoke all shared associations and attitudes.

Another positive politeness strategy the writer can use to claim common ground is by *point of view operations* or attending to the so called “deictic centre”. The general unmarked deictic centre is where the writer is the central person, the time of writing is the central time, and the place where the writer is at central time is the central place. However, if the writer means to claim common ground, they can switch into the addressee’s point of view by writing as if the central place or central person is where or whom the reader is (1987, p. 118-120). In other words, the deictic center can change
from writer oriented (I) into reader oriented (you) or simply into the more inclusive “we”.

The final positive politeness strategy that will be explained here is the presupposition manipulation strategy. This is where the writer presupposes something by presuming it is mutually taken for granted. The manipulation of such presuppositions, which might actually not be mutually taken for granted, can save positive face (1987, p. 122-124). This is illustrated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Presupposition manipulations.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presuppositions to claim common ground</th>
<th>Presuppose knowledge of reader’s wants and attitudes</th>
<th>Presuppose reader’s values are the same as writer’s values</th>
<th>Presuppose familiarity in writer-reader relationship</th>
<th>Presuppose the reader’s knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mostly through the use of negative questions which presume a “yes” answer.</td>
<td><em>Wouldn’t you?</em> <em>Don’t you?</em> <em>Isn’t it?</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presuppose the reader’s value judgements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly through the use of familiar address forms</td>
<td><em>Short or tall, ugly or beautiful</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presuppose the reader’s knowledge of specific terms</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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</table>

*Jargon or slang*
3. Methodology

3.1 Material
The investigated material consists overall of 14 Instagram posts by two different Instagram users posted to their public accounts. The material was gathered during November and December 2019.

The selection process for the Instagram accounts is based on the following criteria:

1. The Instagram users should exhibit a good level of English in order for the study to assume they are aware of the type of speech they choose to use.
2. The Instagram users should mainly post pictures where they show off the perceived “flaws” they aim to denounce, such as posing with their stomachs rolled, or with their cellulite clearly visible.
3. The Instagram users should speak directly to their followers, rather than mainly talk about themselves.

3.2 Procedure
In order to establish what type of value is attributed to the language used, and consequently gauge how the Instagram users try to establish group identity (as value judgments are one of the key concepts of building and maintaining solidarity within group settings), the previously mentioned Appraisal Theory (see section 2.2.) will be used. Similarly, aspects of Politeness Theory (see section 2.3.) will also be utilized, focusing on the specific politeness strategies which are used with the aim of establishing bonds and solidifying the already established group identity. Through a close reading of the posts the aim is to perform an analysis searching for a presence of the categories mentioned in sections 2.2. and 2.3. This is an exploratory study — while it is assumed in the aforementioned sections that certain categories and strategies are likely to be found, this cannot be known until after the analysis has taken place. Furthermore, this is a corpus-driven study, however as the scope and the sample size are quite limited it should still be regarded as a qualitative analysis.
Finally, it is important to point out that not all users within the body positivity movement on Instagram have the same purpose with their posts. Some mainly mention themselves without focusing on the larger group identity at play. Since the aim of this study is to focus on the users who do build a sense of community amongst their followers, the selection process is focused on the users who meet this criterion, in order to find the appropriate features needed to answer the research questions. This is in line with the assumptions of Herring’s (2004) language focused content analysis, according to which a researcher can carry out the analysis simply adhering to a common sense-based practice focusing on choosing a research question that is answerable from the available data; a researcher may have the option of sample type, be that time-based, event-based or participant-based; a researcher can also focus on coding categories, either pre-existing or emergent from the data collected (Herring, 2004).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Evaluative language and the Politeness aspect
All the pictures related to the text samples below feature either @ariellanysa or @karinairby with minimal clothing on, mainly in a bikini, often with their belly and/or buttocks exposed. Furthermore, the pictures are mainly taken in unflattering light in order to enhance these “flaws”.

In terms of Appraisal theory, the disclaim:deny strategy can be identified in the sentence “they don’t fit into how society sees us”, in which the writer is acknowledging the dialogic alternative of society’s standards of beauty, in order for this value position to then be rejected: you don’t need to delete the pictures that don’t fit into the idea you or society have of how you should look. Instead, you should post them. The disclaim:deny
feature is corrective rather than confrontational, in that it presents the reader as “sensitively attending to the addressee’s level of knowledge” (Martin & White, 2005, p.120), and aims at enhancing solidarity if the reader is not against having this contrary idea placed upon them. Due to this possible face threat towards the reader’s negative face, through the form of direct order/request, certain politeness strategies have been deployed. To redress the FTA, the writer claims common ground through taking notice of the reader’s wants and needs and approves of it. “…how we want to see ourselves”, and “realise how beautiful you really are”, both take notice of the readers wants, but it also presupposes these wants. Additionally, it presupposes the reader’s values of what is beautiful and what is not are the same as the writers. Finally, the pluralization of the “we” both asserts common ground and presupposes familiarity.

2. 

Text sample #2 by @ariellanysa

“You are the most disgusting thing I’ve ever seen”, “you need to lose weight”, “your legs look like my saggy balls”, “you need to go to the gym”, “you are lazy”, “you look like old cottage cheese”, “your cellulite looks like an old plastic bag buried under sand and left for years”. Comments that have been posted to my Instagram in the past that years ago I would have let effect me. I would have taken them upon myself and tried to drastically change my body because of people’s opinions.

Now... NOW, let’s replace these negative words with positive ones. I am beautiful. My stretch marks tell the story of my beautiful body. My weight is fine. I am worthy. My cellulite is CUTE! My little flabby and Juba ROCKS! I am kind. I am smart. I am unique. I am special. I am ME! And my beauty is only in the eye of the beholder, and that beholder is me. YOU decide your beauty. YOU decide your worth. Never let ANYONE make you feel ugly, fat or inferior. YOU are BEAUTIFUL INSIDE AND OUT

Here, the category proclaim:pronounce can be identified. Like disclaim, this strategy also introduces a contrary challenge which the writer then asserts themselves against. However, pronouncement involves a clear authorial intervention, in this case through the use of stress on certain words, mainly the several capitalized “you”. This type of formulation is acknowledging the heteroglossic aspect, by quoting contrary opinions that have been uttered before, as seen in the beginning; “You are the most disgusting thing I’ve ever seen” and challenging this narrative. There is also a case of disclaim:deny, in the following part of the text: “never let anyone make you feel ugly…”, where the writer position herself at odds with the idea that you should feel ugly. Furthermore, the writer claims common ground by exaggerating sympathy with the reader through the stress placed on certain words: “YOU decide your worth”. Additionally, the FTA of boasting through self-praise is very visible through “My
cellulite is CUTE!”. Finally, we also find an FTA that on the surface could be seen as threatening the reader’s face by means of to the order or request: “never let anyone”. However, since the aim of this directive is to protect the reader’s desired identity, the directness involved proves the assumption of the in-group bond by limiting the distance between the interlocutors. The writer also presupposes the reader’s values when she assumes that the reader shares her value judgment of what can be constituted as “ugly”, “fat” or “beautiful”, since this might not actually be mutually agreed upon — this is the very reason the contrary value position mentioned in the text exists — the fact that it is presupposed also redresses the imposition on the reader’s positive face, since it places the writer and reader within a community of shared values. Even though the comments quoted by the writer regard the writer herself, the switch to the reader being the central person builds solidarity against a common adversary, i.e. society and its ideals. The use of a singular non honorific pronoun to a non-familiar other help in this aim by claiming solidarity, common ground and softening the command. The use of in-group language or dialect can also be seen in this example, through the section “My little flubba and Jubba ROCKS”, in which the writer uses codes associated with in-group values, “flubba” and “jubba”, presupposing the reader’s knowledge of slang for jiggling fat or visible cellulite.

3.

**Text sample #3 by @ariellanyssa**

Wait you don’t think bloating is cute ? NEWS FLASH: bloating is normal and just because I don’t have a six pack doesn’t mean I’m not beautiful. Just because I don’t have a flat stomach all day everyday doesn’t mean I have to feel “embarrassed” or “ashamed” of my body. You bloat, I bloat, EVERYBODY BLOATS! Don’t you dare feel inferior for it missing my jiggles @karnairby

Here, the writer uses an amalgamation of the two disclaim categories. The utterance uses the disclaim:counter strategy in the sense that it presents the writer as indeed lacking a “six pack”, yet still being beautiful: “Just because…. doesn't mean”. It also uses the disclaim:deny strategy simultaneously rejecting the idea that bloating is not cute. It is corrective in the sense that it presents the reader with the alternative information that bloating is cute, rejecting the readers possible misapprehension regarding bloating and body image. Additionally, this is a case of an FTA in the form of a rhetorical question used as camouflaged criticism against the norm — society’s view on cellulite — thus, the negative politeness strategy pluralization of the singular
pronoun is employed to soften this. It is fairly common to see a pluralization of the pronoun in English texts, since the singular “you” and plural “you” are indistinguishable without context, nevertheless it provides the reader with an “out” in case they do not actually agree with this value position. Hence the face threat is minimized. The use of the second person plural pronoun of address can also be seen as both presupposing and claiming familiarity through common perspective by speaking directly to the reader. Alongside this, the presupposition of the reader’s values also redresses the FTA of the order “don’t you dare”. This is not only an FTA towards the reader’s positive face, i.e. the reader’s possible lack of “proper” self-image, but also an FTA towards the reader’s negative face, the reader’s freedom to act, softened by the generalization of “you”, hence the reader can choose to understand this as not meaning them personally.

4.

Text sample #4 by @ariellanyssa

Get ready for some CELLU-LIT holiday pics

The use of slang “Cellu-lit” instead of cellulite invokes shared association and attitudes within both the body positive community as well as within the online community, with the notion of cellulite being “lit” meaning “exciting” or “excellent” (“It’s Lit”, 2019). Furthermore, this also presupposes the readers previous knowledge of said in-group values. Thus, this maintains the shared common ground and builds solidarity with the followers of the same value positions.

5.

Text sample #5 by @ariellanyssa

A photo I would have hated years ago. It still took a bit of courage for me to post this but I need too. I need to because it makes the love I have for ME so much greater. In order to love your entire being, you need to LOVE every aspect of yourself. So I love this photo. I love my rolls. I love everything and so should YOU! Remember to love the parts of you that are scary to love in this day and age. Don’t let society fool you! YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL!

The Disclaim:deny strategy is utilized here, where the writer positions herself as at odds with the contrary position of society that you are not beautiful, introducing the
alternative position that you DO not have to let society fool you, thus acknowledging society’s position so that she can reject it. Furthermore, this is a very clear case of the FTA of boasting through self-praise, “I love my rolls”. The bald on record directness of the utterance however softens this FTA, partially by moving the deictic centre towards the community. Initially the self-praise is uttered to establish her own journey towards self-acceptance and body positivity, and later it includes the reader in sharing the same viewpoint and take the same action; making the reader’s point of view, the central person, the centre instead. This claims common ground by implying the reader shares the same struggles as the writer. The writer is attending to the readers wants and needs, approving of them: “you should love everything about yourself”, “you are beautiful”. This also presupposes the readers wants and needs, wanting to feel beautiful despite society’s view. Additionally, the use of slang associated with internet usage amongst young people as well as jargon used within the body positivity movement: “rolls” meaning fat help assert common ground.

6.

Both the category proclaim:pronounce and disclaim:deny can be found in this example. Using the pronouncement strategy, the writer uses specifically placed stress on certain words such as “…not SELFISH”, “We DESERVE…”, “…NEVER let…”, to intensify what is being said, as well as to enhance her own opinion on the matter. Simultaneously she distances herself from the alternative value position through the strategy disclaim:deny, with “Don’t ever feel…” “Don’t give into this lie”. In terms of politeness strategies, the writer uses bald-on-record strategies, not hedging the utterance, but using clear assertions such as “Confidence is not SELFISH”, and “YOU are a miracle”. She is also building common ground by taking notice of the readers wants and needs as well as expressing sympathy with the reader to not have to feel ashamed, to feel that they are enough and beautiful. This is done through certain stresses on words, as mentioned
above, but also through exaggerations as can be seen in “YOU are a miracle”. The writer also presupposes the reader’s wants and attitudes, as well as their values and presupposing familiarity. If the follower does feel ashamed of their “self-love journey”, and that they are not beautiful or valid enough, then this strategy will include them in the shared idea world the writer is proposing, thus establishing solidarity between them.

7.

The FTA of disagreement is here seen in the sentence “I’m sick of males and females having an opinion of my weight … so when other bodies are seen they are SLAMMED …”. This is then followed by the inclusive pronoun “we”, softening the FTA by pointing out the common ground shared with her readers. This is further cemented by using a familiar address form, referencing the readers as her “beautiful followers”. Through the use of the proclaim:pronounce strategy, with some specifically placed stresses, e.g. “I NEEDED to change my diet”, she also introduces the alternative viewpoint “…my butt was melting when I was sitting down” so as to emphasis that she does not agree with it and instead, using the inclusive “we”, stating that “WE are BEAUTIFUL”. This is one of the only examples where the writer overtly addresses the alternative viewpoint, as seen in “One last piece of advice for the media and brands? Don’t claim to be “body positive” and show only two types of women? I WANT TO SEE BEAUTIFUL BODIES ERRRRYWHEREE rant over

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doubt and hatred towards myself?”, covertly criticizing these men, or society’s, viewpoint of what women’s bodies should look like. Interestingly, by means of the FTA “Fight the fight and NORMALISE EVERY. SINGLE. BODY”, she makes a positive statement which reinforces both her own and her reader’s positive face.

The analysis will now move on to the second influencer, @karinairby.

1.

This is a case of disclaim:counter, where the contrary position is: there are men who do care about cellulite, which the text asserts itself against claiming: these are not real men. It is also the case of proclaim:concur, in terms of the leading statement “I mean that’s all it is after all”. The writer also uses the politeness strategy of address forms, through “ladies”, claiming common ground and softening the command “wear your skin with pride”. Additionally, through the use of “ladies”, familiarity with the readers is also presupposed by the writer. As stated before, in kinship-based societies being associated with a group greatly reduces the face threat for the reader. This is visible through the use of the plural form of “lady”. There is also in-group slang being used, through the term “lumps” and “bumps” referencing certain aspects of cellulite or fat cells, presupposing in-group knowledge. The writer is also exaggerating sympathy with the reader through intensifying modifiers such as “every single inch…”. Furthermore, she also presupposes knowledge of the reader’s values, assuming that her readers share the value judgment that men should not care about “lady lumps”.

2.
The writer uses in-group jargon or slang in her very first sentence, “Booty dimple”, meaning cellulite, and expresses how “These features make us who we are! (Awesome)”, using the inclusive pronoun “we”, which presupposes familiarity and shared values, making it a very in-group strategy, leaving no room for her readers to identify with any other opinion. Furthermore she uses the strategy proclamation:proclaim which can be seen in the sentence “I truly hope everyone can be as happy in their own skin and join me”, acknowledging the alternative position that perhaps not everyone is happy in their own skin, and rejecting it by inviting her readers to share common ground with her. Through the aforementioned sentence, and the intensifying modifier “truly”, it can also be seen how the writer exaggerates sympathy with her readers, while at the same time presupposing they share the same values, or at least that they should share in her values that cellulite, scars, or acne can be seen as perfection. Even though this post is self-praising, “Now I couldn’t care less and I’ve [n]ever felt more happier to be ME.” the FTA is softened by the bald-on-record way it is written with no hedges, just directness, exclamations and boosters.

3.

While the writer does introduce the dialogistic alternative, she does so in order to present a contrary position. She proposes that the reader looks at her body, and then at their own, to gain some new perspective. Thus making this an instance of the disclaim:deny strategy. This is a clear FTA yet because she is very direct with her readers, assuming closeness and solidarity, which minimizes the face threat. With the presupposing value judgment of “harmless cellulite”, presupposing that the reader will also agree with this definition, there is a clear authorial intervention. The dialogic
adversary is stated through the mention of “society” not having portrayed cellulite in an acceptable way. With the subsequent exclamation “Fact” followed by a statement “98% percent of women have cellulite” the **proclaim:pronounce** strategy helps establish shared common ground — the reader and the writer both have cellulite and in both of these cases it should be acceptable. Furthermore, common ground is asserted and solidarity built through the politeness strategies which convey that the reader and writer share the same goal (this can also be viewed as a presupposition manipulation strategy in the cases where the reader does not share the same goal, thus redressing the face threat) mainly visible through the last sentence in all caps “WELCOME TO BEING A SEXY HUMAN”, intensifying acceptance to the reader, as well as literally welcoming the reader in to the ideological group identity at play. Accepting their bodies the way they look. By speaking to the reader directly through the familiar address form, the second person plural pronoun “you”, solidarity and shared group membership is also established.

4.

4.

Text sample #4 by @karinairby

Hello and welcome to Karina’s sunday night hot tip. Topic - Booty dimple and cellulite. The less you care, the happier you’ll be. #welcometobeinghuman Hope this makes you smile ladies

In the very first sentence of this post @karinairby invites the reader to join in learning and sharing her alternative point of view, which can be seen through the use of “Hello and welcome” and introducing a “hot tip”. With the hashtag “#welcometobeinghuman, she performs a **proclaim:concur** strategy though a rhetorical statement referencing the previous assertion; “the less you care, the happier you’ll be”, stating that the **less you care about your cellulite the happier you’ll be, because this cellulite is part of being human**. Furthermore, she attends to the readers wants and needs by using a positive politeness strategy to claim common ground, specifically through the wishful utterance that “this makes you smile ladies”. The slang term for cellulite, “booty dimple”, as well as the use of the familiar address form “ladies”, helps establish in-group identity markers further claiming common ground. In case the reader’s wants, attitudes or values differ from those expressed by the writer, the possible face threat is redressed by these presupposition manipulations.
In this example @karinairby immediately uses a bald on record strategy, asserting “Cellulite is BEAUTIFUL!”, explaining how the picture of her “showing off her lady lumps” goes against society’s view of cellulite, asserting it actually is beautiful. She then goes on to suggest her readers do the same; that they too should be “comfortable with it”. The way they can do this is simply by “caring less”. These statements are quite face threatening if the reader is not someone who shares the wants and values of the writer. So, the statement rather presupposes them, mainly through the opening statement “Cellulite is BEAUTIFUL!” In order to soften the FTA taking place, the writer also claims common ground by the use of the familiar address form “you”, by speaking directly to the reader, showing an interest in the reader’s wants and needs, wanting to be comfortable with their cellulite, and by using an in-group identity marker (also presupposing they share the same group values), with the slang “lady lumps”. Furthermore, she hedges the assertion in “And yours should be too!” with “should”, followed by a conditional statement “if…”, which leaves some room for those followers who do not agree with this statement, thus saving the reader’s negative face.

The FTA of the above utterance, specifically the; “Oh relax”, directed at the reader’s negative face (infringing on their freedom of action) is partially softened by doing this in a bald on record manner. Even though it is infringing on the reader’s negative face, some positive politeness strategies actually help redress the FTA as well. By using the in-group identity marker “lady lumps” she can claim common ground with possible likeminded readers. Furthermore, by using the proclaim: pronounce strategy, showing a
clear authorial emphasis overruling the contrary value position — *lady lumps, or cellulite, is actually real, regardless of whether the readers have been trained to think otherwise* — acknowledging the previous alternative but rejecting it, the writer claims solidarity with the readers who this statement might resonate with, simultaneously presupposing their wants and values, and who agree with the value position proposed.

7.

**Text sample #7 by @karinairby**

> Who wants a 6 pack when you can have an entire keg!? Ladies! This ones for you! Feeling crappy and bloated? ME TOO! You're not alone and your not any different to the girl next to you.

In this example, the writer uses a rhetorical question in the form of a joke, comparing the societal beauty ideal of having abdominal muscles, “a 6 pack”, to a 6-pack of beer, and stating that she would rather have an entire keg (a small barrel of beer) “keg” being a play on words for her bloated stomach. In this sense she uses the *proclaim:concur* strategy, through which she concurs with a dialogic partner; the body positivity movement and its stance on body image. This is also an example of referencing an object, her belly, using a slang term recognizable within certain communities she and her followers are a part of; the body positivity community, certain young people, and English speaking people who know these terms. Furthermore, she utilizes a familiar address form in the form of “ladies” directly addressing these “ladies” and asserting her reader is *not alone* in feeling *crappy* and *bloated*, she too feels these things — thus both presupposing and establishing shared values, shared wants and goals, and familiarity leading to strengthening the communal values and bond. This is further established by the phrase “the girl next to you” which is a strong presupposition of the existence of someone else like the reader, reinforcing the idea that it is the whole community that share this same point of view.

The following section will briefly summarize the strategies discussed in the current chapter.
4.1.1 Proportions of the strategies used

The two pie charts below show the proportions of the appraisal and politeness strategies employed by both of the Instagram accounts. As mentioned in section 3.2 (Procedure), the current analysis is primarily qualitative. Hence, the purpose behind these pie charts is not to make any quantitative claims about the strategies used by the two Instagrammers in all their social media activities (for the simple reason that the samples and hence the frequencies are very small) but rather show a general overview of the proportions of the strategies found in the current corpus.
Based on this, it is evident that within the Appraisal theoretical framework the 
disclaim:deny, at 46.7%, and proclaim:pronounce, at 33.3%, features seem to be 
prevailing in the text samples featured. Similarly, it seems that the positive politeness 
strategies were, overall, most prevalent at 77.1% total, with the remaining 22.9% being 
bald-on-record FTAs. While there are a few instances in the text samples of the negative 
politeness strategy pluralization of pronouns, providing the reader with an “out”, these 
were rare and were thus only mentioned in the running text but not taken into 
consideration when assembling the pie charts.

Interestingly, there are certain differences between how the two Instagrammers deploy 
certain strategies (which were earlier noticed in the qualitative analysis). For instance, 
the normalized frequencies of all positive politeness strategies involved differ between 
@ariellanyssa (16.7 per 1000 words) and @karinairby (38.1), which means that the 
latter user may be more eager to deploy certain strategies. However, verifying these 
observations, and finding the underlying reasons for such differences and their potential 
significance for the community, would require a different focus and a quantitatively 
oriented study.
5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusions and recommendations for further research

The aim of this paper was to answer the following two research questions: (1) How do the two Instagram users linguistically reveal the position they take on body positivity? (2) What kind of linguistic and pragmatic strategies are deployed to form group identity within the body positivity pursued by the analyzed Instagram influencers?

The first noticeable aspect from the analysis is that the two Instagram users perform many self-face threatening acts of self-praise. They do this with the goal of dismantling the alternative value position presented and reinforced by society; that a woman’s core value is determined by her appearance. They provide not only a voice of positive body image reinforcement through self-compassion (Marta-Simões, et al. 2016), but also one of self-praise, rejecting not only external but internal shame as well. Furthermore, many of the examples can be construed as face threatening towards the reader’s negative face— the two writers are in many cases explicitly telling the reader to do something — this could partially be due to the writers not fearing retribution from the reader (Brown & Levinson, 1987); in other words, the Instagram users use of bald-on-record FTAs may be a sign that they believe they have the power to affect what the readers will believe and do. This might be because they presuppose the group identity and community they wish to build. Additionally, in a few examples the writers utilize the negative politeness strategy pluralization of the pronoun which provides the reader with a safe “out”, thus redressing the face threat to the addressee. Furthermore, the various positive politeness strategies employed also redress the FTAs through establishing familiarity, common ground, and strengthening the bond within the community.

Through the purpose of the group: to create an alternative body praising context which challenges society’s idea of femininity and beauty, and despite society's value judgment, assert themselves as “adequately female” (Brokensha 2011, in Roodt, 2015), solidarity with likeminded readers redress possible FTAs of boasting or giving orders. The two users @ariellanyssa and @karinairby recognize and refer to previous value positions on female body ideals and anticipate the response from their readers. When these previous
ideologies of body ideals for women are mentioned, it is done so in order to reject them and instead construct for themselves and their readers an alternative body positive viewpoint. “‘Whenever speakers (and writers) say anything, they encode their point of view towards it’” (Stubbs 1996, as cited in Martin & White 2005, p.93); thus the Instagram users present themselves as standing in defiance of certain other speaker’s value positions (previous rhetoric on female existence and body shaming) and together with others; other body positive voices on Instagram. More specifically, the users tend to favor the disclaim:deny and proclaim:pronounce strategies, both of which acknowledge a contrary value position in order to challenge or reject it. By linguistically conveying that the same threat on body image posed by society affects both the writers and the readers equally, thus establishing a dialogistic adversary, a common-identity community is formed. A linguistic focus on the core topic proposed within the body positivity movement, fighting against a discursive adversary, demonstrates a cohesive group identity taking place, furthering solidarity (Graham, 2015).

From the findings in this study it can be reasonable to conclude that certain types of language use, mainly Evaluative language as found in Appraisal theory, as well as certain positive politeness strategies might have a significant effect on building solidarity within the body positive movement on Instagram. The primary limitations of this study due to the time/space restrictions of the project meant that only two Instagram accounts could be chosen for analysis. While these were enough to provide an insight into exactly how these two accounts conducted themselves linguistically, a larger study taking into account several more users and their followers would be beneficial to ascertain exactly how, and to what extent, solidarity and common group-identity are realized linguistically within the body positivity movement on Instagram.
References


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