

Lingua-Cultural Peculiarities of Facebook Bragging - Narcissism on Facebook

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Abstract

The social network site Facebook has gained a prominent place in the lives of many individuals. It provides narcissists a platform where they can promote themselves to a large audience in order to get attention and admiration they so desperately crave for. It is the perfect place to brag and seek praise or fish for compliments. Facebook bragging is an actual topic nowadays and it is meaningful to explore this phenomenon because of several reasons. Firstly, there are too many cyberpsychological studies about the correlation between social media and narcissistic tendencies, but linguistically Facebook bragging is not investigated at all. At the same time this is the first try of exploring Georgian bragging linguistically. Finally, the research is interesting because of being based on comparative analysis, studying the linguo-stylistic and cultural peculiarities of Facebook bragging in two completely different cultures - Georgian and American.

Keywords: Facebook bragging, narcissism, self-promotion, humblebragging, lingua-cultural study.

Introduction

Almost everyone is on Facebook nowadays and use it for different reasons. One of the most irritating reasons people use Facebook is to brag about their perfect lives: engagements, job promotions, weddings. Thanks to Facebook, we know that we have friends who wear only the most fashionable clothes, friends who make scrumptious pies and cakes, friends with perfect marriages, and friends who go on splendid vacations – with the photo to prove it. Because of too much bragging on Facebook, it is often called as ‘Bragbook.’

The people who brag on Facebook want to tell the world: ‘Hey! I am important!’ ‘Pay attention to me! Something has happened to me again in the last hour!’ John Carroll, a Broadway performer and writer calls the Facebook users ‘Facebook terrorists’ and believes that terror comes in the form of bragging (Carroll, 2013:1). According to J. Carroll there are different types of braggers / self – promoters on Facebook:

The Work Bragger: *Why do I only get cast as the sexy young Dad! I'm more versatile than that.*

The Relationship Bragger: *Missing my hubby Have not seen him in 20 minutes;*

The Body Bragger: *I haven't had carbohydrate food since 2003.*

The Death Bragger: *I am missing my dear friend Judy Garland.*

The Religious Bragger: *Feeling truly blessed today; So close to Jesus that the Father and the Holy Ghost are starting to call me "Yoko"! Truly anointed! Blessed and highly favored!*

The above mentioned classification is not complete. There are some other types of braggers as well.

Bragging mom: *I couldn't be prouder! My daughter just got promoted to the Paris office!*

My daughter just did poopies on the potty. It goes plop!

The Travel Bragger: *My thoughts and dreams are still there!*

The never-ending countdown: *Only 100 days to go now guys! Soooo excited, only 4 sleeps!*

the undercover bragger: (Bragging is hidden inside a complaint) *I just hate it when men wolf whistle at me while I'm walking along the street.*

Findings and Discussion

Language has long been understood to be a marker of individual differences and, more recently, has been used to understand personality (McGregor, 2010:3). What are the linguistic markers that reveal a bragger's personality? How does narcissism manifest in language? Is bragging culture based on individualistic in its essence? These are the questions that will be answered by me in the given paper.

The narcissist brags incessantly. His/ her speech is peppered with first person singular pronouns ‘I,’ ‘My,’ ‘Myself,’ ‘Mine,’ and most strongly with ‘I.’ Pronouns show grandiose sense of self-importance and ‘uniqueness.’ *I have the best bf in the world!*

Women think that my body is perfect.

Vabruneb dros minus 15 tseli – eksperimenti datskebulia sakutar tavze — feeling blessed.

The adjectives used by braggers are all positive. *Chemi pozituri, damajerebeli da gatsonastsorebuli* - boasts a local politician's wife. While a proud husband humblebrags: *chumad vitkvi, chemi tsoli magari*. Famous Georgian actress writes about her musician husband: *magaria es katsi magari*. It should be noted that Georgians

often use word ‘magari’ (‘rats magrebi vart qartvelebi vart!’- Georgians are the best!) which corresponds to English ‘the best.’ There are cases of bragging when adjectives are preceded by intensifiers: very, extremely, immensely.

*Jo isn’t spoiled, he’s just **extremely bright** so he gets bored easy and needs more interaction than the other babies.*

Narcissists’ language is extremely emotional which is revealed in the use of adjectives in superlative degree. The dominant lexemes are: ‘the best,’ ‘the greatest,’ ‘the most perfect.’

Just had the best weekend of my life!

I have the greatest friends ever!

I have the most perfect husband!

In order to make the statements more emotional and enigmatic, braggers choose elliptical sentences. Inversion and detachment are their favorite stylistic devices.

Only 100 days to go now guys!

Soooo excited, only 4 sleeps!

99 days left!

In the above mentioned sentences the speaker knows that something special is going to happen to him / her and wants to inform the friends. In the first sentence the speaker looks forward to going abroad. In the second one the speaker is happy returning to his native land and in the last one expectant mother is happy to announce that after 3 months she will have a baby.

Some sentences are much more enigmatic. The reason of happiness is not mentioned at all. In the sentence: ***Auuuuuuu uh uh uh ra bednieri var tkven ar iciiiiiiit!***, the speaker repeats interjection ‘uh’ three times and redoubles certain vowels, showing the strength of happiness. In the next sentence: ***me shevzleb amas, me gadavcurav zgvaas***, the speaker is self – confident of achieving success but does not mention the reason of happiness.

Some self – promoters aim to make friends envy, using enumeration, detached constructions and exaggeration:

*Just bought the apartment of my dreams, scored a major promotion and boyfriend turned up with a big bunch of flowers. **So Blessed.***

Currently sipping champagne in the Emirates First Class Lounge.... Our personal butler has just delivered a fruit platter.....

*Best gift **ever** from the best husband **ever.***

Relationship braggers often use words of thanks: ‘thank you,’ ‘thank you so much,’ ‘madloba minda gadagikhado’ in order to show that the relationship has already ended. In the first two sentences girls thank their boyfriends for the best years spent together. In the last one a grateful son thanks his deceased father for being a wonderful person. The adjectives used by a proud son for characterizing his deceased father are: exceptional, human, honest, full of dignity. He is thankful to God being the son of such a wonderful man.

*Thank you so much to my **amazing boyfriend Gary for the best year of my life living together!***

*Thank you for **the best 6 years of my life** baby. Love you*

*dges me 40 dgea... mjera sasufevens daimvkiidreb**minda madloba gadagixado samagalito, sufta da adamanuri 58 wlisatvis, madloba minda gadagixado imisatvis, rom mtels qalaqshi X patiosnebastian, girsebastian da did siyyarultan asocirdeba, madloba minda gadagixado chemi mama rom gqvya... .. shexvedramde.***

The most interesting is the case of humble bragging (false modesty / false humility / backdoor bragging) - a boast coached in self-deprecation. Humble braggers specifically use a negative complaint to mask the fact that they are bragging.

I hate it when people on the street ask me if I’m a model.

I’m so embarrassed that I finished reading “War and Peace” in only four days.

*Murakamis “Kafka plazhze” tvalsa da khels shua **Shemomekitkha**.... Anu isev formashi var.....*

Sentences expressing false modesty often start with ‘I hate,’ ‘I don’t like,’ ‘I’m so embarrassed,’ ‘Humbled that...’ But there are cases when bragging is hidden in the form of question: ‘Is anyone else going to be at X’s concert tonight? It would be great to meet up.’

It is clear from the examples, that Facebook truly has become a ‘digital bragging’ territory. People use it to add to their self-esteem or just make them feel better about their entire life. Some show off happiness by accident, but some in a deliberate attempt to manipulate others.

Conclusion

Analysis revealed that linguistic markers used by American and Georgian Facebook braggers are identical: first person pronouns, positive adjectives (sometimes with intensifiers), adjectives in superlative degree, elliptical sentences, exaggeration, inversion, detached constructions, interjections. But if we compare the examples of Facebook bragging culturally, we may see some differences.

I conducted the experiment in which 30 Georgian and 20 American respondents participated. Georgian respondents who I inquired and whose posts I have studied were my own friends from different regions of Georgia. As for the American respondents, I was helped by my American colleague from Nebraska and her Facebook friends.

Georgians have wonderful proverbs: ‘trabakhi ugvano kakis saqmeao’ (Only the worst boast), ‘trabakhi brikvebisaa’ (Only the silliest ones brag) but my analysis showed that boasting is a Georgian trait. Georgians are the best braggers - mainly relationship, work and travel braggers. They directly draw attention to their great personal qualities, something they have done. It is always Georgian women who try to convince the world how happy they are. For Georgian women ‘family welfare’ is of primary importance. They are happy if their family members have some accomplishments and want to share the news with their friends. Spaniards have a good proverb: ‘Tell me what you brag about and I’ll tell you what you lack.’ The same can be said about Georgians, they boast about what they lack. Georgia is a country where the percentage of unemployment is great. Not many people can afford to travel abroad. These are the reasons why so many people boast about their good jobs, about job promotion or having a holiday in foreign countries. My analysis showed that Georgians are death braggers as well. They are often proud to announce that someone famous has died and the deceased was their close friend or relative. Humble bragging is not peculiar to Georgian culture. There is nothing shameful in self-promotion.

It has been suggested that the U.S.A. has an increasingly narcissistic culture (Campbell, Miller, Buffardi, 2010:227). They brag all the time, about many things - money, sex, etc. Self-promotion is American cultural practice. The people I interrogated are all from Nebraska, the region of the U. S. A. and they are known to be very modest and humble. They told me that mostly they brag about relationships, which include families, friends and significant others. They boast about their children’s accomplishments, about their physical fitness and unforgettable vacations, but rarely about sex life or love affairs. American Facebook braggers are humble braggers. Many will post they have reached a goal by the help of other people. I can’t say that just because of humble bragging their boasting is less annoying and more acceptable. The irony of the brag is that it almost never produces the desired result. Elizabeth Bernstein writes ‘we have become so accustomed to boasting that we do not even realize what we are doing. And it is harmful to our relationships because it turns people off’ (Bernstein, 2012). The braggart wants more respect, his self-indulgence generates less. He seeks approval, he creates disapproval. He wants engagement, he creates disconnection. He wants to be more attractive, he becomes less. There is nothing bad in sharing good news on Facebook. However, there should be a line drawn between what is actually good news and what is just plain old bragging.

In spite of having disadvantages, there is no doubt that Facebook bragging is one of the most interesting psycholinguistic phenomena and it is desirable to be studied from different angles, especially from psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic points of view. Which age group do the most braggarts belong to, who are better in bragging – men or women, what are people’s responses to Facebook bragging, is bragging a type of self – compliment? – These are the topics for future investigations. As a researcher I believe that bragging as a linguistic phenomenon has a great future perspective and many linguists will become interested in exploring it.

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