Marie-Louise Brunner[*] and Stefan Diemer[**]

MEANING NEGOTIATION AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN A DIGITAL BELF SETTING: A STUDY OF INSTAGRAM COMPANY INTERACTIONS

1. Introduction

Company interactions are a classical setting in English as a Business Lingua Franca (BELF) research. BELF interactions have been analyzed in face-to-face (Ehrenreich 2015; Komori-Glatz 2018) and video-mediated interactions (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, and Kankaanranta 2005), as well as in computer-mediated communication (Skovholt, Grønning, and Kankaanranta 2014; Kankaanranta 2005). In addition to analyzing typical English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) strategies in business communication, the study of BELF has been contextualized from a distinct business perspective (Kankaanranta and Planken 2010) and been described as "a 'neutral and shared' communication code" (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, and Kankaanranta 2005, 404). While BELF research started with the analysis of business interactions between companies, a second important focus has been its use in promotional texts and advertising (e.g. Gerritsen, Nickerson, van Hooft, van Meurs, Korzilius, Nederstigt, Starren, and Crijns 2010; Nickerson and Crawford Camiciottoli 2013). In the years since these studies were published, the role of English as an advertising medium in an international context has increased considerably (Edwards 2016). Internationally active companies increasingly have English-language social media channels, and interactions in these channels show a widespread use of English as a lingua franca for business purposes.

Meaning negotiation is a central issue in BELF research (Ehrenreich 2015; Komori-Glatz 2018). Although classical ELF strategies such as "let it pass," approximation, and repetition/rephrasing are employed, the challenge in these contexts is the "importance of clarity and accuracy in discussing business content" (Komori-Glatz 2017, 89; cf. also Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen, and Karhunen 2015). This makes meaning negotiation imperative in order to ensure economic success. Komori-Glatz (2017, 89) also points out that "participants in (B)ELF interaction are largely aware of the challenges of the multicultural context and frequently do actively orient themselves towards positive rapport management." These findings on the importance of meaning negotiation and rapport management in company-internal and business-to-business (B2B) contexts can be transferred to BELF in customer communication contexts, as this study illustrates.

Interest in customer engagement (CE) in business contexts, which can be compared to rapport management in a linguistics context, has increased considerably since social media have become available as tools for customer interaction. From a business perspective, CE is the "positive psychological state that occurs by virtue of a customer's interactive, cocreative customer experiences in focal service relationships" (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, and Ilić 2011, 260). The term extends to interactions between business and customer with the aim of reaching this positive state (Bowden 2009), which is also the definition of CE used in this study. The most visible customer engagement interactions in social media contexts are marketing and webcare.[1] In social media, these take place in an increasingly global and English-language context, particularly if customers from various language backgrounds are addressed.

This study aims at supplementing and extending the study of BELF interactions in a customer communication context by focusing on communication strategies used in a relatively new medium: customer communication

---

[*] *Marie-Louise Brunner is Doctoral Researcher and head of the Intercultural Communication program at Trier University of Applied Sciences and Doctoral Researcher and Lecturer in English Linguistics at Saarland University, Germany. Her research interests include corpus-based discourse analysis, in particular in the context of intercultural interactions and customer communication via social media, and ELT.*

[**] *Stefan Diemer is Professor of International Communication and Digital Business at Trier University of Applied Sciences and Associate Professor of Linguistics at Saarland University, Germany. He is head of the CASE project team which has compiled ViMELF, a corpus of ELF Skype conversations. His research interests include communication via social media, ELF, ELT, corpus linguistics, language and identity, and food discourse.*

[1] Webcare: The term has been characterized as "online damage control", or "the act of engaging in online interactions with (complaining) consumers, by actively searching the web to address consumer feedback" (Van Noort and Willemsen 2012, 115), but expanded to also include customer retention and post-sales interaction.

in the social medium Instagram. Social media offer an opportunity to not only examine BELF advertising, but also customers' reactions, customer engagement interactions between businesses and consumers, and webcare interactions such as complaint management. All these interactions are in the public domain and data for analysis can be collected easily. Instagram is the fastest-growing social medium in the important 20-35-year-old demographic. While it shares many affordances with other social media (see section 2), its extensive use for customer interaction makes it an ideal data source to study BELF interaction in a social media context. In the absence of previous studies on BELF social media interaction, we also present methodological considerations for the study of this exciting and growing field. As in much of BELF research, we follow a combined approach, combining multimodal discourse analysis with marketing analysis, particularly in the context of meaning negotiation and customer engagement. As a consequence of this dual perspective, it is necessary to describe both the interactional dynamics and the criteria for successful interaction in the respective business contexts. This provides a basis for a further valorization of the study: documenting best practice, formulating optimization strategies and ultimately enabling companies to customize their social media strategy. The study does not claim to provide a comprehensive overview of all communication strategies used in BELF interaction on Instagram, but rather focuses on the strategies that are distinct and salient in this particular medium and setting.

2. Social media marketing and Instagram

Almost from the beginning, companies have discovered social media as a tool for customer communication. Because they are inherently "characterized by interaction between participants and consumers of the medium" (Kalamas, Mitchell, and Lester 2009), they are ideal vehicles for addressing customers on a more direct and more differentiated basis, and for prompting and managing interactions between customers and businesses. Instagram has been continuously growing and attracting more and more customers since its founding in 2010. From its origins as a picture sharing website, it has turned into a dynamic, international social platform with more than 1 billion active users, of which more than 500 million are active on a daily basis, and more than 400 million post stories every day (Instagram – Our Story 2019). Instagram is now the third most popular social medium after YouTube and Facebook (Anderson and Jiang 2018). It is also the "youngest" social medium after Snapchat: 68% of users are less than 35 years old (Statista 2019).

Instagram can be used by both private and corporate users. It follows the classical model for social media (i.e. Facebook) in that it allows participants to post, comment and interact, but is more visual and includes novel features such as Instastories and more interactive elements such as polls. The platform is mainly intended for mobile use, but there is also a desktop interface. Users can use Instagram to share photos and videos, which other users can then comment on. There are numerous additional features such as providing locations, effects, filters, stickers, animations, polls, and questions. Users can tag and mention other users, and posts can be edited, deleted and shared to other social networks (Instagram 2019). A very successful tool available to users are Instagram Stories, or Instastories, introduced in 2016. This feature allows the posting of short stories that disappear after 24 hours unless saved (Hu, Manikonda, and Kambhampati 2014). Businesses can use the platform for advertising and sales, and the platform provides numerous tools for analyzing customer interaction. Due to its global reach, it is, as of January 2019, well on the way to becoming a key international company advertising and webcare channel, with 80% of users outside the US (Clarke 2018). More than 70% of US businesses used Instagram for marketing in 2017, a significant increase from 32% in 2015 (eMarketer 2015). Instagram has supplanted Facebook and Twitter as a prime medium of customer interaction for small and medium-sized enterprises and companies that address an international customer base, particularly in the younger age segment. Many companies, particularly in the sectors examined in our study (see section 3), use English for their main or default social media presence in order to reach a larger audience. Though companies can and do maintain localized company social media profiles, English plays a large role in these international settings, and many customers use the English-language profile independently of their language background. The British smoothie manufacturer Innocent, for example, has an English-language Instagram main profile as well as French and German profiles. The main profile has 96,000 followers with 2,200 posts, the German and French profiles 12,000 followers and 400 posts and 36,000 followers with 600 posts, respectively. The German car manufacturer Mercedes, usually portraying a rather traditional image, has an English-language main profile. Even on localized profiles, the interaction is often multilingual, with English as a key medium in both

company posts and interactions. This focus on English makes Instagram an ideal source of BELF customer interaction data.

While there are already numerous studies on social media such as Facebook or Twitter, research on Instagram from a linguistic perspective is still rare, and there is, to our knowledge, no published research of BELF use in Instagram. Existing studies focus on storytelling (Dayter and Mühleisen 2016; Amâncio 2017), self- branding (Liu and Suh 2017; Mapes 2018), and the expression of emotion (Lee and Chau 2018). More studies discuss the importance of Instagram for social media marketing from a business perspective (Bergström and Bäckmann 2013), customer-specific marketing (Hassan 2014) or brand attitudes (De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders 2017). There are also studies on marketing in specific sectors, such as restaurants (e.g. Salleh, Hashima, and Murphy 2015) and political marketing (e.g. Muños and Towner 2017). The existing research presents Instagram as an ideal medium for branding, in particular self-branding, and storytelling, where companies can reach and influence the general public, specific customer segments, and even individual customers, and as a place to perform both advertising and brand management.

3. Data and methodology
In this section we describe the dataset that is used to analyze company interaction on Instagram and discuss the wider research context as part of a project to enhance companies' competitiveness in a European context. We discuss the parameters according to which the companies and posts were selected and explain the final list of companies used for analysis. We then describe the method by which Instagram posts were collected, followed by an explanation of the mixed methodology used for the analysis in this study. Finally, we give brief examples for the data and discuss the affordances of Instagram posts, comments, and Instastories.

3.1 Data collection
The dataset for this study is a collection of Instagram posts, comments and stories by twenty internationally active companies from six industrial sectors which was compiled at Trier University of Applied Sciences in 2018 (see Figure 1). The selection represents a cross-section of the thirteen key EU industrial sectors listed by Eurostat (2018), providing a comprehensive overview of company interaction practices.

Sector	European companies (with headquarters location)
Cosmetics	Yves Rocher (France), L'Occitane (France)
Food	Bitburger (Germany), Karlsberg (Germany), Mymuesli (Germany), Zec+ (Germany), Innocent (UK), True Fruits (Germany)
Manufacturing	Mercedes (Germany), BMW (Germany), Renault (France), Adidas (Germany), Chilly's Bottles (UK), Soulbottles (Germany), 24bottles (Italy), Equa (Slovenia)
Wholesale	Aldi (Germany), DM Drogeriemarkt (Germany)
Software and Services	SAP (Germany)
Social Entrepreneurship	Viva con Agua (Germany)

Table 1: List of companies for the study of Instagram company interactions (Brunner and Diemer 2019)

In order to choose the companies for observation, a pool of ca. sixty potentially interesting companies was selected across the six sectors. The companies were chosen based on existing social media interaction, press reports, best-practice recommendations, and anecdotal evidence. Social media activities of potential candidates were then evaluated for two months to gain an understanding of posting frequency and level of customer interaction. For the purposes of the study, we equated followers with (potential, former, or current) customers, though obviously there is no direct correlation, apart from cases of explicit testimonials by followers. In a final step, twenty companies were selected for the main study according to the following criteria: 1)

reasonable frequency of social media activity, 2) cross-border/international interaction, 3) representation of different sectors. Additionally, mentions by other media, such as marketing awards, were considered.

After selection, each company was observed for two to four months during the twelve-month data collection period from January to December 2018. During that time, all Instagram interactions were collected, and salient interactions identified. Criteria for salience were feedback and high interaction prompted by the original post, likes, prominence ranking (the weighted position of posts in a sequence by Instagram), and reach (repeated sharing of posts, e.g. by tagging people). In addition, event-specific "storylines," i.e. repeated company posts referring to special events or holidays and the ensuing CE were taken into account. Data were archived through screenshots of the original images and anchor posts, as well as copies of follower feedback and interactions. Instagram Stories were archived through screenshots of the separate story elements, including recordings of the video and audio components. The resulting dataset comprises more than 1GB of data (Brunner and Diemer 2019).

3.2 Methodology

To analyze the dataset, we use a two-step approach, combining *corpus-assisted multimodal discourse analysis* with *content analysis*. The corpus-assisted multimodal discourse analysis allows us to study the key BELF issue of meaning negotiation in a novel multimodal social media environment. The content analysis contextualizes the negotiation practices by describing how they constitute (or contribute to) successful customer engagement. We argue that it is essential to have these two levels of analysis in order to gain an understanding of how the interaction works both in terms of the BELF local meaning negotiation framework and in the context of the broader marketing perspective.

In step 1, the Instagram data is analyzed qualitatively with a focus on discourse and meaning negotiation practices between company and customers. The discourse analytical approach (Brown and Yule 1983; Gee 2014) was selected because it is well-suited to describe interactions, their contexts and their respective outcomes. Its "bottom up approach to the analysis of language-in-use, 'situated meaning'," (Schwartz 2014, no pages) provides a detailed picture of how language is used to create meaning in context. Rather than focusing on single examples, corpus-assisted discourse analysis uses a larger dataset so as to have a broader perspective on the instances we analyze qualitatively. This permits the identification and comparison of usage patterns and allows us to gain an understanding of what can be considered 'typical' interactions in the respective medium. A multimodal perspective is particularly important, even central, for the analysis of Instagram data, not only in the analysis of the image or video component, but also in the analysis of multimodal elements in the discourse itself, such as emojis. For the multimodal component of our analysis we follow O'Halloran (2014), who advocates the integrated analysis of all semiotic resources, pointing out that "[t]he analysis and interpretation of language use is contextualized in conjunction with other semiotic resources which are simultaneously used for the construction of meaning." (O'Halloran 2014, 1). In practical terms, we analyze in step 1 how interactions are started, what linguistic means are used, how the topic is discursively negotiated, how problematic issues are resolved and in which narrow and broader context the interaction takes place. This reflects key issues in previous BELF research as detailed in section 1. We look, for example at language and multimodal features of the initial Instagram post, at the responses it prompts, including the interaction between customers, multimodal and intertextual aspects, and at the reactions and follow-up by other customers or the company itself.

In addition to this multimodal discourse analytical perspective, we also perform a content analysis from a marketing perspective in step 2. In the marketing paradigm, the interactions observed in the dataset constitute instances of advertising, customer engagement, and webcare. Step 2 involves a qualitative examination of the marketing and webcare strategies used, as well as the degree to which customer engagement takes place, and what its outcomes are in terms of customer attitudes and resolution of the interactions. This second step is crucial for evaluating the outcomes of the interactions as either successful or unsuccessful, which in turn permits best-practice recommendations for a business context.

3.3 Data examples: Instagram posts, comments, and Instastories

Interaction with the customer on Instagram mainly occurs via image posts accompanied by an initial comment that users post in their profile. Followers see these posts in their Instagram feed and can comment or discuss

in the comments section, as shown in Figure 2. The images can be modified using filters and additional features can be added as stickers, e.g. animated emojis, GIFs, polls, or questions.

Fig. 2: Instagram post by @Innocent (Innocent Instagram 2018, in Brunner and Diemer 2019)

An increasingly popular feature of Instagram are Instastories, which are also used for marketing purposes. Instastories allow private users and companies to post short stories that disappear after 24 hours, unless they are added to the user's profile highlight section. The feature was adapted from the social medium Snapchat and has become one of the key features of Instagram's success. It has also been adapted by messenger services such as Whatsapp (Wagner 2017). Stories can consist of photos and video clips, and can be captioned and edited to include special features such as boomerangs, "a burst of photos that loops forward and backward" (Instagram 2019), and superzooms, "a video that automatically zooms in on an object and plays a dramatic sound" (Instagram 2019). Users can include hashtags and "mention other users by using the @ symbol (which effectively creates a link from their posts to the referenced user's account) before posting them" (Hu, Manikonda, and Kambhampati 2014). Stories appear in users' Instagram feeds when following a company, interspersed with sponsored stories containing advertising by other companies. Stories play automatically and can only be paused temporarily, and users can skip through slides or whole stories. Users cannot comment on Instastories unless they are highlighted, but their user behavior while watching is tracked and can be analyzed (e.g. skipping or pausing, number and duration of views, engagement with interactive elements). Very popular Instastories are featured in other users' feeds, ensuring wide dissemination (Instagram 2019)[2]. Example 1 shows a story sequence by the British smoothie manufacturer Innocent and one by the German car manufacturer Mercedes-Benz. Both demonstrate the versatility of Instastories and also include interactive elements such as captions, questions, polls, and hashtags.

---

[2] The features described here are current as of January 2019.

Example 1: Instastories by @Innocent and @MercedesBenz (Innocent 2018; Mercedes-Benz 2018, in Brunner and Diemer 2019)
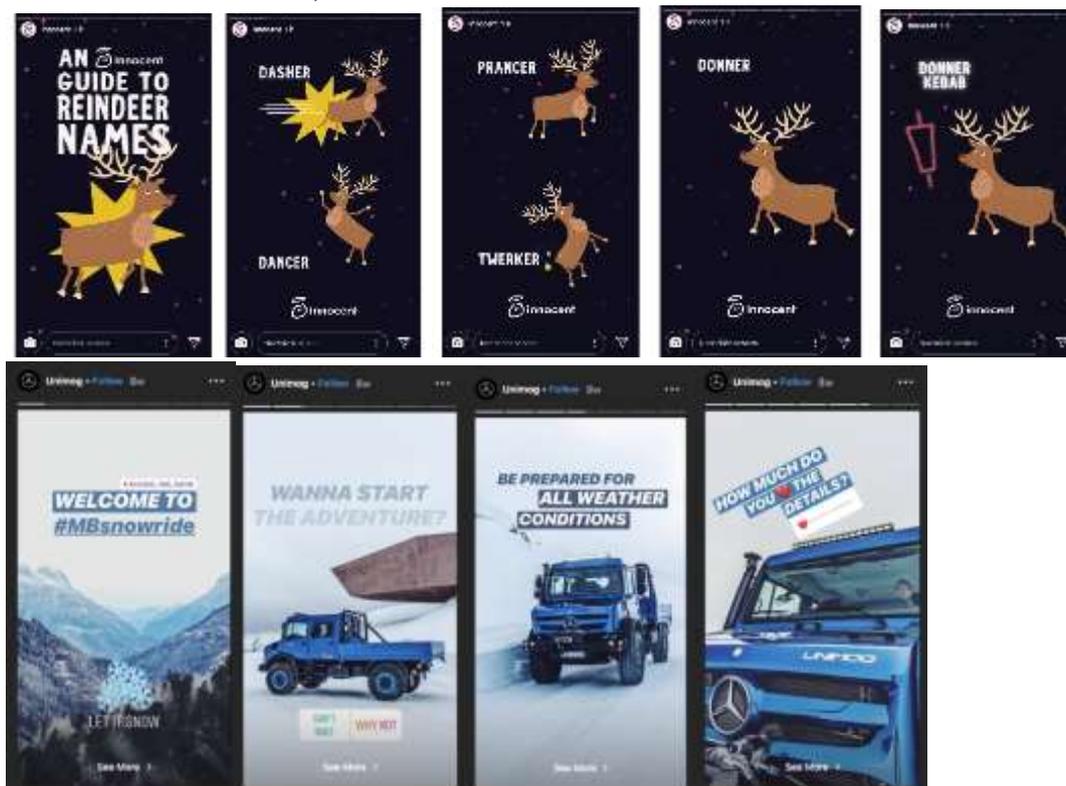
4. Analysis

The aim of our analysis is the documentation of communication strategies that support customer engagement and the negotiation of meaning in BELF interactions on Instagram. In order to find these strategies, we analyze salient instances of customer communication in our dataset that also constitute successful business outcomes. These are examined qualitatively both in detail and in their respective context in order to identify and document key communication strategies in use.

4.1 Customer engagement

We identify three salient communication strategies in the dataset that support customer engagement: emotional framing, the use of plurilingual resources, and intercultural negotiations. Essentially, emotional framing (frequently through emojis, cf. also Herring and Androutsopoulos, 2015) and plurilingual framing (e.g. through hashtags) in the initial posts contribute to mitigating potential face-loss and engage customers in a way that is comparable to rapport strategies in international teams using BELF (Komori-Glatz 2017). The ensuing interactions illustrate customers' attitudes towards the company and its communication strategy. Culture-specific images may additionally lead to intercultural negotiations in the comments section, engaging customers further and prompting interaction and dissemination.

4.1.1 Emotional framing in Instagram posts and comments

Emojis are an established tool to overcome the limitations of written discourse in computer-mediated communication settings (Herring and Androutsopoulos 2015). They play an important role in instant messaging and in social media contexts. In Instagram, they are used strategically by companies in initial posts to emotionally frame their message, but also to prompt customers to reciprocate. Customers often respond with (frequently multiple) emojis. The considerably large share of emojis in Instagram comments can be partly explained by the fact that emojis also constitute a key feature of Instagram's short answer feature which can be accessed while viewing the post and without first going through the full process of posting a comment (Instagram, 2019).

Example 2 shows an initial post by the French car manufacturer Renault framed with emojis relating to the image of a couple leaning out of their respective vintage Twingo compact cars and kissing. The image post itself is already on its own quite emotionally charged. The anchor post additionally emulates a personal communication style in instant messaging services ("look what we found […] time to get your family albums out!"). The emojis allude to the content of the post, both illustrating and emotionalizing it: a raffle (crossing fingers emoji) prompting customers to share memorable (star sparkle emojis) pictures (camera) featuring Renault vehicles evoking nostalgia (hand over mouth). The post implies that having a Renault helps you find a partner ("own a #Renault is one of the first rules to choose a partner (orange heart emoji)"). The image, the anchor post, the emojis and the raffle together create a sentimental and nostalgic prompt that initiates an emotional customer reaction.

Example 2: Emotional framing by @GroupeRenault (Renault 2018, in Brunner and Diemer 2019)

Example 3 illustrates the followers' reactions to the initial post by Renault[3]. The successful emotional engagement is clearly visible through the selection and the number of emojis used by followers. The emojis chosen express approval (okay hand emoji), joy (face with tears of joy emoji), and nostalgia ("I love renault" with sad but relieved face emoji), with repeated emoji use signaling intensity. The company answers the comments immediately and reciprocates the emotions both verbally ("We Love you too") and by using the ":)" emoticon and the heart emoji. The speed of turnaround as well as the emotional framing increase both rapport and customer engagement and also provide positive testimonials for the community.

Example 3: Customer answers by @GroupeRenault (Renault 2018, in Brunner and Diemer 2019)

---

[3] Examples here and in the following sections display and group relevant reactions together in chronological order rather than displaying all reactions to a post.

Emojis and image posts are, of course, not the only way in which posts can be framed emotionally. In example 4, an Instagram post by the French cosmetics company L'Occitane illustrates the complex interaction of multimodal elements in the initial video post, anchor post, hashtags, and emojis to achieve emotional framing. The post contains a short video sequence which shows a gift box opening next to cake and flowers. The image uses yellow and brown colors, complementing the pink and yellow company logo next to it. The feelings evoked are nostalgia, love and happiness, which are also alluded to in the anchor post which exhorts customers to "show their (sparkling heart emoji)", reinforced by the culturally emotionalized term "#family" to further frame the emotional setting. Followers reciprocate the emoji use, posting multiple hearts, sparkling hearts, revolving hearts and heart eyes emojis. Worded comments are less frequent and also evoke positive emotions, such as the feeling of opening a L'Occitane gift box.

Example 4: Emotional framing by @LOccitane (L'Occitane 2018, in Brunner and Diemer 2019)

These selected examples show that emotional framing is an effective strategy in Instagram in order to increase customer engagement and create rapport. While emojis are a key means of framing discourse emotionally in social media, framing can be achieved through various means such as the composition of the image post, the text of the anchor post, and hashtagging, and reinforced by the followers' reactions.

4.1.2 Plurilingual practices in Instagram posts and stories

Instagram provides an ideal platform for companies to reach an international audience. Because of its easy setup, its aesthetic focus and the universal appeal of the image prompt, it is also a good first business to customer (B2C) social media channel for small and medium sized companies and startups who want to reach a young and growing audience. Our study shows that companies can reach a plurilingual audience without resorting to expensive localization tools or potentially ambiguous automated translation through the use of plurilingual resources. The use of plurilingual resources as strategy is well-documented in ELF and BELF, and researchers have commented on the inherent (and increasing) super-diversity of BELF contexts (e.g. Cogo 2012). The adaptation of plurilingual practices is particularly useful for companies that post in languages other than English and still want to expand internationally. Because anchor posts accompanying the image are

usually short, they can more easily be phrased in multiple languages, e.g. German and English. In this respect, multilingual hashtags can be eminently useful. The functions of hashtags in social media have been analyzed in several detailed studies in the last years. Wikström (2014) creates a detailed taxonomy of hashtag functions based on Twitter data, distinguishing, in addition to their central categorizing function, their use as information structuring devices, as well as vehicles for playful language use and reflexive meta-commentary. In our data, hashtags play even more versatile roles. They play a central part in framing posts and are almost universally used by companies to accompany their posts, often in the form of "hashtag clouds" with more than ten hashtags grouped together. In this configuration, hashtags in our data are frequently used to frame posts plurilingually. Example 5 shows a post by the German brewery Bitburger. The post itself is in German and English, the hashtags are mixed. The bilingual post "Wir lassen den ersten Tag der Woche schon mal einzigartig ausklingen xxx best thing to do on a Monday xxx" does provide a direct translation of the German phrase ('We are already finishing off the first day of the week in a unique way'), but rather attempts to convey the emotional frame of the situation at the end of the first workday of the week in a culturally appropriate setting. In addition to bilingual thematic tagging ("#beer" and "#bier", "#brew", "#brewery" and "#brauen", "#hops" and "#hopfen"), the hashtags refer to products ("#bitburger", "#pils"), the company slogan ("#bitteeinbit", 'a Bit, please'), and a company event ("#anniversary" and "#geburtstag", "#200jahre", '200 years'), evaluate the product positively ("#premium", "#tasty" and "#lecker"), position it in an authentic craft setting ("#quality" and "#qualität", "#craft"), introduce humorous puns ("#instabeer", "#beerstagram" and "#bierstagram") and prompt comments and interaction by alluding to the cultural tradition of cheering and clinking mugs in three different ways, German ("#prost"), English ("#cheers"), and through emojis (#two mugs of beer emoji). The followers react by reciprocating with German variants of cheers, "Prost!" and "Zum Wohl (okay hand sign emoji)." The multilingual tagging is obviously effective, as there are two English-language answers. Additionally, the repeated reposting of the slightly changed slogan "Bitt ein Bitt" by English-speaking participants may indicate that the German-language slogan may also partially work in an English-language context (as a pun).

Example 5: Multilingual hashtags by @Bitburger (Bitburger 2018, in Brunner and Diemer 2019)

Example 6 illustrates how plurilingual practices form part of Instastories. It shows excerpts from a story posted by the German drugstore chain Dm Drogeriemarkt.

Example 6: Multilingual story by @dm (Dm 2018, in Brunner and Diemer 2019).
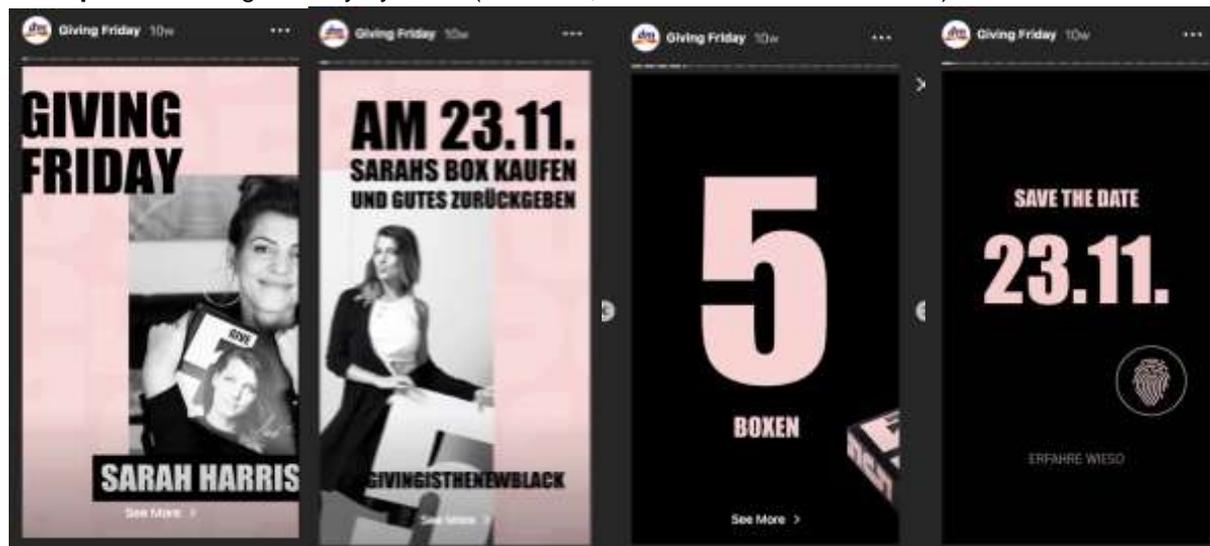
The story was posted in the run-up to Black Friday, an American shopping event with major discounts after the Thanksgiving holidays. In recent years, the event has been used as a marketing opportunity in Germany, too, but consumers are still not familiar with the term in a general context. Instead of participating in the rebate battle, Dm created the tag "Giving Friday" instead of "Black Friday", betting on the plurilingual resources of its consumers and positioning the event as an opportunity to aid various social causes by donating 5% of its sales. The campaign had a distinct color scheme involving black and pink, and was very successful, generating almost 1.5m € in donations (Dm 2019). The story shows extensive use of English: in addition to the color scheme and the event name "Giving Friday," the hashtag chosen to support the event was "#givingisthenewblack" as an intertextual reference to the fashion cliché 'the new black.' To advertise the date, the phrase "Save the date" was used. The story is, as of January 2019, still featured in Dm's Highlight section. Even though customer feedback is not available in Instastories, the amount in donations the campaign generated is a clear indicator if its success, validating the plurilingual strategy.

Numerous other examples from the data show that multilingual tagging works effectively in reaching a wider, multilingual audience and thus is an effective marketing and customer engagement strategy that reflects the super-diversity and plurilingual nature of BELF.

4.1.3 Intercultural framing in Instagram posts

Company posts on Instagram frequently refer to seasonal and cultural events, celebrations, and holidays. In an international context, these may create interest, but also lead to cultural issues. The interactive nature of Instagram posts enables customers to explain and negotiate meaning through the comments section, leading to increased customer engagement. Obviously, cultural negotiations can also create issues that have to be overcome, particularly if the tradition referred to is not universal or controversial. Example 7 shows an instance of intercultural negotiation following an Instagram post by Mercedes-Benz referencing Christmas.

Example 7: Intercultural negotiation in a @MercedesBenz post (Mercedes-Benz 2018, in Brunner and Diemer 2019)

The issue starts with the image, which is taken in a traditional Christmas setting. Mercedes does not follow current trends to frame holidays in a neutral, non-religious way in the dataset, referencing the term "Christmas," and not "holidays." By applauding Mercedes' choice, user @mjg_1000 portrays the company's decision as a conscious move against overly 'politically correct' behavior, thus drawing attention to the potential cultural issue. His tagged addressee, @karlinfrance, picks up on the comment, asking for clarification. After

@mjg_1000 explains the issue further, @karlinfrance concludes with the philosophical observation that "people can make a fuss just about anything." The issue could have escalated if other users (i.e. proponents of political correctness) had intervened but does in this instance not cause further controversy. As the resolution takes place between customers and the company does not have to step in, this can be characterized as an instance of "peer webcare." The short exchange also illustrates how even mainstream cultural references may be problematic in an international context, and how companies can profit from customers solving issues for other customers without company involvement.

4.2 Meaning negotiation in Instagram customer interactions

A decisive advantage of Instagram interactions in comparison to classical advertising settings is the possibility to analyze customer reactions together with the original post. This permits us to evaluate whether instances of meaning negotiation are resolved successfully. In this section, we discuss how customers negotiate meaning between each other and with the company that provided the original impulse. The study illustrates two salient communication strategies that are used to negotiate meaning: the use of plurilingual resources and the negotiation of technical vocabulary between customers.

4.2.1 Plurilingual resources in customer interactions

One of the most unexpected features in our data is the polyphonic nature of the interactions. Although the initial posts are, for the most part, either in English or bilingual, followers frequently use plurilingual resources, ranging from limited instances of other language use to multilingual parallel discourse. Example 8 shows the reactions to the post by Renault discussed in example 2.

Example 8: Customer use of plurilingual resources in a @GroupeRenault post (Renault 2018, in Brunner and Diemer 2019)

In example 8, followers use four different languages, English, Spanish, French, and German. In addition to the reactions to the original post and the feedback provided by the company discussed in example 4, there are also four side interactions between customers, one in English between @carlosilverab and @cindycaro30, one in French between @valentinplance and @marinouch_ , and two in Spanish between @dangcamp and @eluelmo and between @lucasmpesa and @puchomelano. These side interactions all reference the original image and involve their respective conversation partners by tagging them in the conversation. They also pick up on the original emotional framing. The sequence illustrates how effectively Instagram posts can be

disseminated by customers as word-of-mouth or peer marketing. Different from Facebook, Instagram does not yet provide a thread structure (as of December 2018), so that the comments in our data are not organized in subgroups, but rather chronologically. As a consequence, multilingual interactions overlap and mix, with English as one of the most important languages in cross-border communication even if the L1 is different. Example 9 illustrates discussions relating to Mymuesli's sale of an Advent calendar on its main Instagram profile, which mostly contains German-language posts. The anchor post, published in September during a heat wave, offers a discount on early orders for advent calendars. Even with this very culture-specific item, English-speaking customers are attracted through the innovative multilingual hashtag "#hitzefreiundmerrychristmas" (a combination of the German term "Hitzefrei," 'heat break,' and "Merry Christmas"). The resulting webcare event is also handled in English.

Example 9: Plurilingual hashtags and webcare in a @mymuesli post (Mymuesli 2018, in Brunner and Diemer 2019)

In sum, the polyphonic nature of the interactions shows that BELF can be used flexibly in an international social media context. It is supplemented by extensive use of plurilingual resources, which illustrates the multilingual background of consumers as well as their readiness to make use of their plurilingual repertoires.

4.2.2 Negotiation of meaning in customer interactions

Many company posts in our data feature specific vocabulary and business-specific content, which is foregrounded through targeted posts. Depending on the level of technical vocabulary, both company and customer posts partake in domain-specific discourse, particularly in the examples from the manufacturing sector.

Questions and disagreements about specific terminology or described facts can lead to meaning negotiations of technical vocabulary and interactive clarification strategies. These negotiations have also been documented in other BELF contexts, where they have been shown to be essential for communicating clear facts and arriving at an accurate interpretation of what was stated (e.g. Komori-Glatz 2017). Example 10 shows the discussion

following a post of a vintage BMW car on BMW's Instagram page. The color of the car is visible, but the community discusses the correct color designation for two days (in addition to a minor disagreement about the type of car pictured, which peters out). During the discussion, the participants insert technical jargon ("6 cylinder in-line engine") and/or reminiscences ("I miss my 1987 325") that positions them as experts. The correct answer ("cirrus blau") is reached with the help of the photographer (@weshootcar), who in this instance plays a semi-official role, which satisfies (almost) all questioners. The company does not need to interfere in the discussion.

Example 10: Negotiation of meaning on the @BMWClassic Instagram page without company interaction (BMW 2018, in Brunner and Diemer 2019)

io_penso_dunque_io_sono What is this color code?

norocehcap That e46 tho

summereskimo @stephencjones8 it has to be an e30 Touring though 😣

orichginal_e30 Must be Baltic blau metallic? @bmwclassic @weshootcars

cebae Name of color please?

weshootcars @alan_e91_328 cirrus blau 👍

alan_e91_328 @weshootcars Thanks! Haven't seen this color around in a while!

beauschmo @bmwclassic Cirrusblau?

kaixzfh The most iconic 3 series! My dad had a 320 i when I fall in love with 6 cylinder in-line engines. Predecessor of current 2 series!

gurrado_automotive_art 😍😍😍😍

The example illustrates important differences between this type of meaning negotiation on Instagram and those in B2B company contexts or intercultural teams as observed in other BELF interactions: Instagram interactions are shaped by the specific affordances of the medium, in particular, the sequential thread structure, the topic limitation to an initial multimodal impulse, and the potential absence of a moderation structure. The interactive dynamics of face-to face intercultural team negotiations observed by Ehrenreich (2015) and Komori-Glatz (2017) are replaced by a sequential, less interactive structure anchored by the company post, which makes interaction more schematic and leads to redundancies, as in example 10. Because the topic is fixed through this initial post, the interaction is also narrower in scope. The role of moderator is left vacant, so that in the absence of company information the decision as to the correct meaning has to be reached by a sequential consensus. While this direct interaction strengthens customer engagement in the short term, a continued lack of feedback may also lead to a reduced engagement in the long term, particularly if there is a negative feedback loop (see example 11). At the same time, the example also illustrates commonalities between BELF interaction on Instagram and other BELF settings: Participants use rapport strategies extensively, for example through emojis, explicit politeness ("thanks", "please") and general positive tone ("so beautiful", "love the color"). There is also a focus on accuracy in the extensive discussion of the correct terminology, similar to Komori-Glatz' observations (2017, 89).

Example 11 shows an instance where BMW does intervene, which may indicate that the company is aware of the potential for long-term reduced engagement when feedback is absent. After posting an incorrect hashtag designating the car model, customers post repeated complaints with various degrees of aggressiveness. While @xdedex and @aidswoody just state the correct model, @michael_pildahl implicitly corrects the mistake and simply uses the correct model in his praise of the picture, and @68jeanmarc ("E28!!!"), @gerteche30 ("Come on BMW"), @silverwoodcars ("Wow we thought you guys employed geniuses") and @lorenzodematte5772 ("Lol") are more critical. The issue is resolved when the company finally steps in and corrects the original post, replacing the incorrect with the correct hashtag. They personally address most complainers with an identical response, i.e. a thank you for drawing their attention to the problem and a confirmation that they have corrected the mistake. They frame the apology in a very humorous way by stating that the poster was distracted by the great picture ("drooling over the photo"). One of the customers, @aidswoody, responds with "I'll let you guys off (peace hand emoji)" and offering to provide additional pictures, which BMW again takes up, indicating that not only was the instance of webcare successful, but that the company also succeeded in increasing customer engagement (i.e. involving customers by sharing their own pictures). Interestingly, the user names in this BMW

forum, as generally with the car manufacturers that we examined, also often indicate expertise and engagement by referring to car models (@gerteche30), car-related activities (@themotortailor) and other car-related terminology (@petrolicious).

Fig. 3: Original post by BMW with the hashtag #e12, corrected version posted by BMW with the hashtag #e28

Example 11: Negotiation of meaning on the @BMWClassic Instagram page (BMW, 2018, in Brunner and Diemer, 2019)

> **bmwclassic** @aidswoody Thank you for bringing this to our attention, we corrected it. That's what happens when you are distracted while writing the hashtags because you are drooling over the photo. 😉

> **aidswoody** @bmwclassic I'll let you guys off ✌ might have a pic of my pair of red e36 and e30 3 series together for you some day anyway.

> **bmwclassic** @aidswoody We're always looking for great content, so just send us a DM with your photos! 😉

The negotiation of meaning thus exemplifies both advantages and drawbacks of BELF company interaction on Instagram: on the one hand, companies can offer an added interactional value to customers that are already engaged, while at the same time attracting new customers. On the other hand, customers come to expect webcare and are fast to point out mistakes.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was the analysis of BELF interactions in a customer communication context in the social medium Instagram, using a corpus of posts from twenty European companies. Results indicate that BELF interactions on Instagram are widespread and exhibit some of the same features as BELF interactions in face-to-face and video-mediated interactions in company and international team settings, though mediated by the affordances of Instagram as a communication channel. Company communication on Instagram focuses on customer engagement, using a range of successful strategies such as emotional framing, negotiation of cultural issues, use of plurilingual resources, and meaning negotiation in domain-specific discourse. The examples from our data show that the study of Instagram company interactions can enhance our understanding of BELF communication in an international social media context. In addition – and from an applied perspective – the study illustrates the advantages and pitfalls of social media marketing and provides several best-practice examples of strategies used to create an authentic and effective social media presence, which can serve as recommendations for companies with an increasingly globalized customer base.

Works Cited

Amâncio, Marina. *Put it in Your Story: Digital storytelling in Instagram and Snapchat Stories.* 2017, Uppsala University, MA thesis.

Anderson, Monica, and Jingjing Jiang. "Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018." *Pew Research Center* website, 2018, http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018. Last Visited April 30, 2019.

Bergström, Thamwika, and Lisa Bäckman. *Marketing and PR in Social Media: How the Utilization of Instagram Builds and Maintains Customer Relationships.* 2013, Stockholm University, Bachelor's thesis.

Bowden, Jana Lay-Hwa. "The Process of Customer Engagement: A Conceptual Framework." *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* 17.1 (2009): 63-74.

Brodie, Roderick J., Linda D. Hollebeek, Biljana Jurić, and Ana Ilić. "Customer Engagement: Conceptual Domain, Fundamental Propositions, and Implications for Research." *Journal of Service Research* 14.3 (2011): 252-271.

Brown, Gillian, and George Yule. *Discourse Analysis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Brunner, Marie Louise, and Stefan Diemer. "Customer Communication via Social Media in 2018." 2018, Trier University of Applied Sciences, Electronic Corpus.

Clarke, Todd. "24+ Instagram Statistics That Matter to Marketers in 2019." *Hootsuite Social Media Management* website, 2019, https://blog.hootsuite.com/instagram-statistics/. Last Visited April 30, 2019.

Cogo, Alessia. "ELF and Super-Diversity: A Case Study of ELF Multilingual Practices from a Business Context." *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* 1.2 (2012): 287-313.

Dayter, Daria, and Susanne Mühleisen. "Telling Stories about Self in Digital Contexts: Same, Same, but Different?" *Open Linguistics* 2.1 (2016): 572-576.

De Veirman, Marijke, Veroline Cauberghe, and Liselot Hudders. "Marketing through Instagram Influencers: the Impact of Number of Followers and Product Divergence on Brand Attitude." *International Journal of Advertising* 36.5 (2017): 798-828.

Eurostat. *Business Economy by Sector*. Eurostat, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/. Last Visited April 30, 2019.

Edwards, Alison. *English in the Netherlands: Functions, Forms and Attitudes.* Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2016.

Ehrenreich, Susanne. "English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in International Business Contexts." *Exploring ELF in Japanese Academic and business contexts: Conceptualisation, research and pedagogic implications*. Ed. Kumiko Murata. London: Routledge, 2015. 135-155.

Gee, James Paul. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method.* 4th ed. London: Routledge, 2014.

Gerritsen, Marinel, Catherine Nickerson, Andreu van Hooft, Frank van Meurs, Hubert Korzilius, Ulrike Nederstigt, Marianne Starren, and Roger Crijns. "English in Product Advertisements in Non-English-Speaking Countries in Western Europe: Product Image and Comprehension of The Text." *Journal of Global Marketing* 23.4 (2010): 349-365.

Hassan, Areej. "Do Brands Targeting Women Use Instamarketing Differently: A Content Analysis." *Proceedings of the Marketing Management Association* (2014): 62.

Herring, Susan C., and Jannis Androutsopoulos. "Computer-Mediated Discourse 2.0." *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis 2*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2015. 127-151.

"Instagram – Our Story." *Instagram* website, 2019, https://instagram-press.com/our-story/. Last Visited April 30, 2019.

"Instagram: Age Distribution of Global Audiences 2018." *Statista* website, 2019, https://www.statista.com/statistics/325587/instagram-global-age-group/. Last Visited April 30, 2019.

Kalamas, Maria, Tyra Mitchell, and Deborah Lester. "Modeling Social Media Use: Bridging the Communication Gap in Higher Education." *Journal of Advertising Education* 13.1 (2009): 44-57.

Kankaanranta, Anne. "'Hej Seppo, Could You Pls Comment on This!': Internal Email Communication in Lingua Franca English in a Multinational Company." *Business Communication Quarterly,* 69.2 (2005): 216-225.

Kankaanranta, Anne, and Brigitte Planken. "BELF Competence as Business Knowledge of Internationally Operating Business Professionals." *The Journal of Business Communication* 47.4 (2010): 380-407.

Kankaanranta, Anne, Leena Louhiala-Salminen, and Päivi Karhunen. "English in Multinational Companies: Implications for Teaching "English" at an International Business School." *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* 4.1 (2015): 125-148.

Komori-Glatz, Miya. "(B)ELF in Multicultural Student Teamwork." *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* 6.1 (2017): 83-109.

---. "Conceptualising English as a Business Lingua Franca." *European Journal of International Management* 12.1-2 (2018): 46-61.

Lee, Carmen, and Dennis Chau. "Language as Pride, Love, and Hate: Archiving Emotions Through Multilingual Instagram Hashtags." *Discourse, Context & Media* 22 (2018): 21-29.

Liu, Rendan, and Ayoung Suh. "Self-Branding on Social Media: An Analysis of Style Bloggers on Instagram." *Procedia Computer Science* 124 (2017): 12-20.

Louhiala-Salminen, Leena, Mirjaliisa Charles, and Anne Kankaanranta. "English as a Lingua Franca in Nordic Corporate Mergers: Two Case Companies." *English For Specific Purposes* 24.4 (2005): 401-421.

Mapes, Gwynne. "(De) Constructing Distinction: Class Inequality and Elite Authenticity in Mediatized Food Discourse." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 22.3 (2018): 265-287.

Nickerson, Catherine, and Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli. "Business English as a Lingua Franca in Advertising Texts in The Arabian Gulf: Analyzing the Attitudes of the Emirati Community." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 27.3 (2013): 329-352.

"Number of Companies Using Instagram to Nearly Double Next Year." *eMarketer,* 20 Oct. 2015, https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Number-of-Companies-Using-Instagram-Nearly-Double-Next-Year/1013122. Last Visited April 30, 2019.

O'Halloran, Kay, ed. *Multimodal Discourse Analysis: Systemic Functional Perspectives*. London: Continuum 2004.

Salleh, Salmalina, Noor Hazarina Hashima, and Jamie Murphy. "Instagram Marketing: A Content Analysis of Top Malaysian Restaurant Brands." *E-Review of Tourism Research* 6 (2015): 1-5.

Schwartz, Michael. "Review of James Paul Gee, An Introduction to Discourse Analysis." *The Linguist List*, 2014, https://www.linguistlist.org/pubs/reviews/get-review.cfm?subid=33314424. Last Visited April 30, 2019.

Skovholt, Karianne, Anette Grønning, and Anne Kankaanranta. "The Communicative Functions of Emoticons in Workplace E-Mails: :-)." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 19.4 (2014): 780-797.

Van Noort, Guda, and Lotte M. Willemsen. "Online Damage Control: The Effects of Proactive Versus Reactive Webcare Interventions in Consumer-Generated and Brand-Generated Platforms." *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 26.3 (2012): 131-140.

Wagner, Kurt. "WhatsApp is Rolling Out its Own Version of Snapchat (and Instagram) Stories." *Recode*, 20 Feb. 2017, www.recode.net/2017/2/20/14663674/whatsapp-rolling-out-version-snapchatinstagram-stories. Last Visited April 30, 2019.

Wikström, Peter. "#srynotfunny: Communicative Functions of Hashtags on Twitter." *SKY Journal of Linguistics* 27 (2014): 127-152.