



universität
wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

“Huge chaos” and “syntactic nightmares”:
Exploring hyperbole in English as a lingua franca online
group chats

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2021

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt / degree
program code as it appears on the student
record sheet:

A 066 812

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt / degree
program as it appears on the student record
sheet:

English Language and Linguistics

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Priv.-doz. Mag. Dr. Marie-Luise Pitzl-Hagin

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Priv.-doz. Mag. Dr. Marie-Luise Pitzl-Hagin. It is thanks to her enthusiasm and dedication to the field that I developed an interest in ELF communication and that I was able to pursue my interest in the topic. She has been incredibly supportive, understanding, and generous with her time, expertise, and words of advice. I cannot thank her enough.

I am beyond grateful to my family for believing in me and cheering me on every step of the way. I thank my mom for all her love, encouragement, and everything she has done for me. This thesis is her achievement as much as it is mine. I thank my dad for his words of advice during this stressful time and for telling me to give my best and not worry about the rest. I thank my brother for his support and for being the only non-linguist I know who always welcomes a discussion about language. I am also forever grateful to the family Sulić and my Ceras for everything they have done for me.

Moreover, I wish to thank all my friends, especially Dzana, Theresa, and Melanie, for making me laugh, motivating me, and being amazing friends. I am lucky to call you my friends.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my boyfriend Hamed who is the most caring, giving, and supportive person I know. Thank you for inspiring me to expect more from myself and life. Your support and belief in me have made all the difference.

Mojoj nani.

(This is for you grandma.)

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List of abbreviations

CMC	Computer-mediated communication
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
IMR	Individual Multilingual Repertoire
L1	First Language
MRP	Multilingual Resource Pool
SMS	Short Message Service
TIG	Transient International Group
VOICE	Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English

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1. Introduction

We live in an era marked by unprecedented global interconnectedness. The effects of communicative obstacles such as language barriers and geographical distance have been minimized with the emergence of English as a global lingua franca and the internet providing a wealth of new communicative opportunities. In the light of the new communicative reality, English as a lingua franca and computer-mediated communication are often used in combination, creating a meeting point for “geographically dispersed” (Jenks 2013a: 95) and linguistically diverse speakers, who use English as the language they have in common. It is the aim of this thesis to investigate how hyperbole is used in WhatsApp chat communication between users of English as a lingua franca.

Hyperbole is considered a common feature of everyday talk (Popa-Wyatt 2020: 91) and a valuable asset to communication (Beare & Meade 2015: 64). Yet, it is still understudied compared to other related phenomena (Burgers et al. 2016: 163; Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017: 41; Popa-Wyatt 2020: 91). The research gap is particularly noticeable in CMC literature, where hyperbole is only mentioned in studies on irony, and in ELF research, where hyperbole is yet to be studied. In addition, while CMC and ELF now stand for well-established research disciplines and widely studied communication phenomena, the unique communicative context that is computer-mediated ELF has so far remained a minor interest.

Therefore, as a user of English as a lingua franca (ELF), quite frequently in computer-mediated communication (CMC), and also as someone who has been known to use phrases such as “the best thing ever” or “the end of the world” (Popa-Wyatt 2020: 91), it was a personal interest of mine to embark on a study that combines

exaggeration, computer-mediated and ELF communication. Moreover, in terms of scientific relevance, a descriptive study on hyperbole in both computer-mediated and ELF communication is an addition to the research on all three phenomena. It adds to the understanding of hyperbole by documenting its character and functions in settings other than those previously explored, and it contributes to CMC and ELF research by discussing how they as instruments of communication affect the construction and usage of hyperbolic language.

The main objectives of the present thesis include identifying and describing instances of exaggeration, exploring the circumstances under which they are constructed and what triggers them throughout the interactions, as well as discussing the main functions they perform. This is done on the basis of two separate WhatsApp group chats exchanged between students at the University of Vienna who work on their shared group projects over the course of one semester. Both groups feature students with diverse linguistic backgrounds who find common ground through English as their shared language. Thus, the interactions studied are by definition English as a *lingua franca* interactions. Another important feature of the dataset is that the members of both groups start off as predominantly unacquainted; the groups exist and develop over the course of one semester and stop communicating once the project is completed. As such, they are what Pitzl (2018c: 25) terms “Transient International Groups (TIGs)”. At the core of the TIGs framework is the analysis of the “micro-diachronic development” (Pitzl 2018c: 43) of both the group conventions and the phenomenon in question (Pitzl 2018c: 37, 38), which so far has only been applied to the study of spoken ELF (see Pitzl 2018c, 2020). Thus, the present thesis builds on this research by applying the micro-diachronic method to the analysis of computer-mediated ELF communication.

In order to understand the context of the communicative events analyzed in this thesis, Chapter 2 focuses on computer-mediated and ELF communication. It provides a brief outlook on the historical development of the two disciplines, the main linguistic properties of CMC (chats in particular), and ELF communication, and discusses how the properties may influence both the form and the function of a phenomenon under study. In addition, the chapter takes a close look at the emerging field of research that is computer-mediated ELF communication, discusses the applicability of the concepts *variety* and *community* to such communicative contexts, and elaborates on the concept of TIGs.

Subsequently, Chapter 3 puts the spotlight on hyperbole and examines various components that comprise the definition of the phenomenon. Aside from discussing various conceptualizations of exaggeration, the chapter focuses on the issue of identifying hyperbole on the basis of the contexts in which it occurs, its forms and functions. In Chapter 4, the peculiarities of the dataset and the process of data collection are presented, as well as the choices made concerning the method of data analysis. This, more precisely, includes the criteria for identification of hyperbole used in this thesis, as well as details on the implementation of the micro-diachronic approach.

Subsequently, Chapter 5 focuses on the analysis of hyperbole in the chat interactions. Aside from the general interest in the forms and functions of hyperbole in the datasets, the chapter also seeks to identify group-specific triggers and conventions concerning the use of hyperbole. The analysis is approached with an ELF perspective. Consequently, phenomena widely associated with ELF language use, such as creativity and accommodation, are of particular interest.

Lastly, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by discussing the limitations of the study and summarizing the main insights gathered in the analysis.

2. Computer-mediated and English as a lingua franca communication

The acronyms CMC and ELF encompass, on the one hand, areas of linguistic research, and on the other, ways of communicating. As a research field, CMC is concerned with studying communication that takes place in online contexts; ELF is a field of research whose primary aim is to describe communication among linguistically diverse speakers of English (see e.g. Seidlhofer 2001, 2009a, 2009b). As research disciplines, CMC and ELF share a similar journey from secondary interests to well-established fields of research. Likewise, as forms of communication, both have come a long way from being labeled as deficient and inferior to their presupposed normative counterparts to being recognized as highly productive and globally used communication phenomena. In the pages that follow, I will provide a summary of the previous work on computer-mediated (Section 2.1.) and English as a lingua franca (Section 2.2.) communication, and then critically discuss the findings, issues and questions deemed the most relevant for the topic of the thesis (Section 2.3.).

2.1. Computer-mediated communication (CMC)

2.1.1. CMC and CMC research: A historical outlook

As a form of communication, CMC was already used in the late 1970s (Herring 2019: 30), whereas academic involvement with the phenomenon started a decade later (Herring 2004: 341). In its early stages, as exclusively “English medium” (Crystal 2006: 229), the internet included initial phases of online multiplayer games, email, and chat exchanges as channels of communication (Herring 2019: 30-31). In other words, it supported only textual (Herring 2019: 31) and dyadic (Baron 2013: 135) exchanges, while failing to convey sound, gestures, or body language.

As a result, early research tended to question the effectiveness of computer-mediated communication by pointing out its limitations compared to face-to-face communication (e.g. Kiesler, Sieglar & McGuire 1984). The key shortcoming of the (at the time) new medium was said to be the absence of “the aural or visual feedback” achieved through “head nods, smiles, eye contact, distance, tone of voice, and other nonverbal behavior” (Kiesler, Sieglar & McGuire 1984: 1125). The idea that online communication is ineffective was rather prominent during the early phases (Herring, Stein & Virtanen 2013: 8), prompting an increasing interest in emerging features unique to CMC, such as emotes, which were “interpreted as replacing paralinguistic and non-verbal cues that are absent from the written repertoire” (Herring, Stein & Virtanen 2013: 8).

The nineteen nineties and early 2000s brought numerous changes and innovations with regard to the scope of CMC, which had immense effects on CMC research. Starting with the nineties, despite still being predominantly text-based (Herring 2019: 31), CMC was enriched with new textual communicative options during this period, including blogs, forums, instant messaging (Herring 2019: 39), as well as a group chat option with the emergence of the first public platform that supported multiparty exchanges (Herring 2019: 31). In addition to the new textual types of CMC, the increased scope of the internet also resulted in the emergence of the first CMC forms that were not text-based, including audio and video chat options (Herring 2019: 33). This trend continued well into the new millennium with the invention of social networks (Herring 2019: 40), which contributed to the development of “[w]eb communication [...] [as] pervasive and fully interactive” (Herring 2019: 36).

As a natural consequence of the overwhelming expansion of computer-mediated communication, the field of research concerned with the phenomenon grew with the

medium. The new types of CMC represented additional sources of data and naturally, the field of research on CMC also became more prominent (Herring, Stein & Virtanen 2013: 3). With a number of available CMC forms, including SMS ¹, chats and chat rooms, emails, forums, and virtual worlds (Verheijen 2017: 74 -75), and a number of available platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr, Twitter, and Skype, CMC became a new “a new empirical arena” (Androutsopoulos 2006: 419) for researchers. Consequently, scholars explored CMC with a more narrow focus, studying emails (Crystal 2006; Danet & Herring 2007), chats ² (Crystal 2006; Danet & Herring 2007; Beißwenger 2008; Holmer 2008; Baron 2013; Markman 2013; Paolillo & Zelenkauskaitė 2013; Simpson 2013; Verheijen 2017), mobile phone communication, including SMS exchanges and phone calls (Danet & Herring 2007; Ling & Baron 2013; Thurlow & Poff 2013; Verheijen 2017;) blogs (Crystal 2006; Verheijen 2017), Twitter data (Verheijen 2017; Vasquez 2019), Facebook posts (Verheijen & Stoop 2016), virtual worlds (Crystal 2006) and forums (Angouri 2015).

Nevertheless, one of the most momentous developments in computer-mediated communication that started in the nineties and continued well into the new millennium was a dramatic increase in the usage of the internet around the world. Towards the mid-1990s, computer-mediated communication, as well as the internet, “[came] into a more popular use” (Herring 2019: 31) and “began spreading rapidly from the USA and the UK to other countries in the world” (Herring 2019: 33). By 2007, the internet reached a status of “a truly global communication network” (Danet & Herring 2007: 1), “enabling unprecedented numbers of people to be in touch with each

¹ SMS stands for short message service (Danet & Herring 2007: 5).

² In literature, the terms *instant messaging* and *chats* are often used synonymously (see Section 2.1.2). The term used for the interactions analyzed in the present thesis is *chats*.

other” (Crystal 2006: 3). This resulted in a more linguistically diverse computer-mediated communication, which in turn prompted research on CMC in languages other than English³, and introduced topics like multilingualism (e.g. Danet & Herring 2007) and code-switching (Herring 2019: 34) to scholarship on CMC.

As Danet and Herring (2007: 2) observe, despite the steady rise of internet users around the world, the dominant language of the internet continued to be English. However, according to the statistical data cited in their study, only one-third of all internet users in 2003 were native English users (Danet & Herring 2007: 2). As the authors explain, “hundreds of millions of people are already participating online today in languages other than English, **in some form of nonnative English**” (Danet & Herring 2007: 2-3, my emphasis). What the highlighted fragment of Danet and Herring’s quote describes is the emergence of English as a lingua franca in online communication (see Section 2.2.3. for English as a lingua franca communication).

2.1.2. Online chats: spoken conversations in a written form?

Having provided a summary of the main developments in CMC research, this subsection takes a narrower focus in exploring online chats. Online chat is defined as an “interactive text-based form of discourse” (Paolillo & Zelenkauskaitė 2013: 109) characterized by short messages (Crystal 2006: 151), which are usually organized “in the order in which [they] were received [...], each prefixed with the name of the sending user” (Paolillo & Zelenkauskaitė 2013: 110 - 111).

Typical linguistic features of language use in chats include emoticons (Baron 2013: 144; Paolillo & Zelenkauskaitė 2013: 123), acronyms, abbreviations, contractions

³ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to elaborate further but see e.g. Beißwenger (2008) for chat interactions among German users of CMC, Derks, Bos and von Grumbkow (2008) for a study on emoticons in Dutch CMC.

(Baron 2013: 144, 146), “unconventional spellings” (Verheijen & Stoop 2016: 255), “repetition of characters for emphasis” (Paolillo & Zelenkauskaitė 2013: 111), and “[e]motive punctuation [...] in an exaggerated form” (Crystal 2006: 170). What emerges from the literature is that these features are employed with a clear purpose; for instance reduced forms like “*cya* for *see you*” (Baron 2013: 146, original emphasis) “[optimize] writing efficiency by eliminating characters [...] that are not essential to the meaning” (Paolillo & Zelenkauskaitė 2013: 123). On the other hand, expressive devices such as “swearwords, intensifiers, and hyperbolic expressions” (Verheijen & Stoop 2016: 256), but also emoticons and repetitions seem to “substitute for (spoken) prosody” (Baron 2013: 149).

There are two main types of online chat documented in the literature, chat groups or rooms and instant messaging (Verheijen 2017: 75). It is interesting to note that the terms *chat* and *instant messaging* are used inconsistently in literature; for some scholars, *chat* only refers to chat rooms (Crystal 2006: 14), whereas *instant messaging* is used to refer to interactions between acquainted internet users (Crystal 2006: 14; Baron 2013: 154; Paolillo & Zelenkauskaitė 2013: 117). For other scholars, the term *chat* appears to be used interchangeably with *instant messaging* (Baron 2013: 155). In fact, it is pointed out by Baron that the two terms essentially describe the same form of communication and so interchangeable use might be due to the fact that “[i]n [...] Europe, ‘chat’ refers to what Americans call ‘instant messaging’” (Baron 2013: 155). In the present study, the term *chat* is used for “typed synchronous communication tool linking two (or more) interlocutors” (Baron 2013: 154), conducted via platforms such as WhatsApp, Skype, Viber, etc.

As an interactive textual form of CMC, chats are regarded as a synchronous type of textual CMC (Markman 2013: 539), meaning that communication in chats is carried

out between internet users who are online at the same time (Baym 1998: 43), communicating “in real time” (Crystal 2006: 156). On the other end of the spectrum are asynchronous modes, including emails and discussion boards (Markman 2013: 539), as well as text messages (Ling & Baron 2013: 202), which do not require the participants to be online at the same time, allowing them to contribute to the exchange at different times (Baym 1998: 43). As such, “synchronous modes tend to be more speechlike than asynchronous ones” (Danet & Herring 2007: 10). This classification, as useful as it has been in the past for capturing the properties of available CMC options, has been challenged in the last decade (cf. Baron 2013, Herring & Androutsopoulos 2015) with the emergence of communicative options that “enable real-time chat but also preserve a record of the interaction that can be accessed later” (Herring & Androutsopoulos 2015: 130). Bearing this in mind, the classification hardly applies to the interactions analyzed in this thesis, as the conversations shift from being highly interactive and “speechlike” (Danet & Herring 2007: 10) to the asynchronous end of the spectrum with contributions made hours or days later (see Chapter 4).

Nonetheless, real-time exchanges in general (see Crystal 2006; Paolillo & Zelenkauskaitė 2013), as well as those in the present dataset, bear several similarities with face-to-face communication. Much like naturally-occurring face-to-face interactions, the student chats under analysis are characterized by the “unpredictability of the subject-matter” (Crystal 2006: 151), for instance with frequent oscillations between project-oriented talk and casual, often humorous, exchanges (see e.g. Extract 2 from the Linguists’ or Extract 16 from the Economists’ chats). Also, what Crystal (2006: 151) describes as the “conversational feel” achieved through immediate and brief exchanges (Crystal 2006: 151) is very much a feature of the dataset at hand,

with frequent dynamic exchanges and instances of multiple students or subgroups *talking* at the same time about different topics.

Because interactive online chats resemble face-to-face conversations in multiple aspects, many research foci usually associated with spoken communication are also found in the literature on online chats. These include, to name but a few, turn-taking and floor management (Markman 2013; Simpson 2013), conversational maxims (Baron 2013), online communities (see Baym 1998; Herring 2004; Androutsopoulos 2006; Angouri 2015) (see Section 2.3.2. for a discussion on online communities). What these publications show is that despite numerous similarities between spoken language and online chats, terms such as *floor* or *turn-taking* have a different meaning in real-time textual CMC.

For instance, as Simpson (2013: 517) summarizes, turn-taking in online chats cannot be signaled by non-verbal cues, and turns are only visible after messages are sent. Also, interactions in online chats are characterized by the lack of “turn-taking competition” (Kitade 2000: 149), as there can be several active floors (Simpson 2013: 518). This poses a question of how one defines a turn in a transcript of online interactions. For Markman (2013: 532), there is a crucial difference between a post and a turn; what he calls *a post* is referred to as a message in the present dataset, i.e. one “transmission unit” (Baron 2013: 145). On the other hand, a turn in Markman’s (2013: 542) study seems to be what is referred to as an utterance in Baron’s (2013: 145) study, i.e. “a complete idea or thought” that can span across several posts (Markman 2013: 542). A discussion of these terms and their meanings has a methodological significance in the present thesis. Unlike the publications cited above, the aim of the present thesis is not to analyze the sequential organization of the chats. Thus, for the purpose of observing

the usage of hyperbole throughout the online chats, the term *message* is used as a unit for quantifying participant exchanges (see Section 4.3).

Finally, accommodative behavior on the part of the participants is another aspect in which online chats, and CMC in general, resemble spoken interactions (Crystal 2006: 152), and also, of course, spoken ELF interactions (see Section 2.2.2.). For instance, previous work reveals a tendency of chatgroup members to “develop a shared linguistic character” (Crystal 2006: 152). As Crystal (2006: 152) observes,

[a] particular locution may be taken up as a fad by several members, and be used intensively for a while before it dies away – though it may become part of the group’s communal memory, being resurrected from time to time.

Aside from accommodation on the lexical level, chat interactants have also been found to converge on a structural level, which refers to the length and the duration (intervals between contributions) of individual contributions (Riordan, Markman & Stewart 2013: 84). In their analysis, a chat interaction among unacquainted users was compared to chats among friends, with the aim of unveiling whether levels of familiarity between the chat interactants would play a role in whether and how they converge (Riordan, Markman & Stewart 2013: 84). The analysis reveals that, although both datasets featured convergent behaviors, convergence found in the interactions among friends was more long-lasting, whereas the dataset among unacquainted interactants showed a decline in convergence over time (Riordan, Markman & Stewart 2013: 92). Thus, the authors concluded that the levels of familiarity among the participants will determine the nature of their accommodative behaviors (Riordan, Markman & Stewart 2013: 93).

2.2. English as a lingua franca (ELF)

2.2.1. ELF research: history and insights

Ever since the publication of contributions that highlighted the importance of studying “the most extensive contemporary use of English” (Seidlhofer 2001: 133; see also Jenkins 2002) in the early 2000s, English as a lingua franca field of research has been in constant growth. Yet, English has been in use as a lingua franca for centuries in the countries affected by the expansion of Great Britain and started being discussed as a global language long before the first decade of the new millennium (cf. Smith 2015 [1976]; Knapp 2015 [1987]).

Already in the seventies, Smith (2015 [1976]: 159) used the term “English as an international auxiliary language”, with the term *international* referring to “one which is used by people of different nations to communicate with one another” and the term *auxiliary* standing for “a language, other than the first language, which is used by nationals of a country for internal communication” (Smith 2015 [1976]: 159). Arguing that “English belongs to the world” (Smith 2015 [1976]: 160), the author aimed to provide a new, more inclusive term as an alternative to the labels used thus far to refer to non-native English, such as *English as a foreign language* or *English as a second language*. However, as argued a decade later (Knapp 2015 [1987]: 178), Smith’s term is rather vague, seeing as it could also refer to international communication between different L1 varieties of English. Instead, Knapp (2015 [1987]: 178) used the term “English as an International *lingua franca*” and describes English as a language immune to national borders, used by those who share no other language to communicate internationally.

Despite the early appeals for more research on the use of English as a lingua franca (Smith 2015 [1976]: 164; Knapp 2015 [1987]: 184), only a number of linguists engaged

with ELF and ELF-related matters during the nineties (e.g. Widdowson 1994; Firth 1996). Nevertheless, these contributions have challenged the views of those who had long argued that the real English is that of its native speakers (cf. Widdowson 1994) and shown evidence that ELF interactions are communicatively successful (cf. Firth 1996). As such, they laid the ground for the array of subsequent research from the early 2000s and contributed to the establishment of ELF as a research discipline.

The early 2000s marked the beginning of the field's golden era. One particular milestone in the evolution of the field, described as “desirable and timely” (Seidlhofer 2001: 145) and “a radical but promising way forward” (Seidlhofer 2001: 134) by the author herself, was the compilation of the *Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE)*, the first corpus of spoken ELF communication. The VOICE corpus defines English as a lingua franca as “English used as a common means of communication among speakers from different first-language backgrounds” (VOICE 2013b). This corpus was designed as the first step in the establishment of “a research agenda [...] which accords lingua franca English a central place in description alongside English as a native language” (Seidlhofer 2001: 133) and as means of providing a source for descriptive work on ELF spoken data.

Since then, the research interest in and the number of publications on ELF grew consistently. Empirical ELF research has so far tended to focus on spoken face-to-face communication ranging from formal contexts such as academia (e.g. Klimpfinger 2007; Cogo 2009; Björkman 2011; Komori-Glatz 2015, 2017, 2018; Metsä-Ketelä 2012, 2016) and business (e.g. Firth 1996; Ehrenreich 2010; Rogerson-Revell 2010; Angouri 2012; Cogo 2012; Pitzl 2019, 2020) to casual, leisure interactions (e.g. Pietikäinen 2014; Pitzl 2018c). This has yielded insights on a large number of phenomena such as multilingual practices (Cogo 2012; Pitzl 2020) and code-switching

(Klimpfinger 2007; Cogo 2009; Pietikäinen 2014), idioms (Seidlhofer 2009b; Pitzl 2018a, 2018b, 2018c), metaphors (Pitzl 2018a, 2018b), disagreement (Angouri 2012; Komori-Glatz 2018), strategies that facilitate understanding (Cogo 2009; Björkman 2011; Cogo & Pitzl 2016) and vagueness (Metsä-Ketelä 2012; 2016).

Empirical work on ELF has revealed much about the nature and success of ELF communication. Communication in ELF settings is unpredictable (Cogo 2012: 288), fluid (Seidlhofer 2009a; Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey 2011: 284; Cogo 2012: 290; Ehrenreich 2018: 48), and dynamic (Pitzl 2019: 9). Yet, despite the inherent “[h]ybridity, fluidity, and variability” (Cogo 2012: 290), ELF interactions generally tend to be “communicatively successful” (Pitzl 2018a: 39). Success in ELF communication is determined by shared understanding (Hülmbauer 2009: 328), not by “conformity to any [...] set of language norms” (Seidlhofer 2009b: 211). Thus, effective communication in ELF is a result of recognizing and reacting to the need to “adjust [one’s] communicative behavior to that of [one’s] interlocutors” (Cogo 2009: 254), i.e. to accommodate to the needs of the conversation partners and the communicative situation at hand⁴.

This is why several scholars highlight the importance of accommodation, in particular convergence (e.g. Hülmbauer 2009; Cogo 2009; Seidlhofer 2009b; Rogerson-Revell 2010; House 2013; Pitzl 2018c, 2020), and the “factors [of] situationality and ad hoc negotiation” (Pitzl 2018c: 25; see also Hülmbauer 2009). As Hülmbauer (2009: 324) explains, “the situationality factor [...] determines every lingua franca interaction anew and on its own”. In this respect, several strategies have been documented that contribute to successful communication, but also to the establishment of solidarity

⁴ Definition of accommodation and accommodation strategies used is from Dragojević, Gasiorek and Giles (2016), which is not an ELF publication.

among the speakers (Cogo 2009: 255). These include code-switching (Cogo 2009: 254), repetition (Cogo 2009: 254; Hülmbauer 2009: 328; Kaur 2012: 593), simplification (Hülmbauer 2009: 328), paraphrasing (Kaur 2012: 599; Cogo & Pitzl 2016: 340), and repair (Kaur 2011: 2704).

One area of research that has only recently begun gaining scholarly attention is computer-mediated ELF research. Even though “communication routes [...] have developed into significantly diversified [...] settings, and encounters in virtual spaces have become as real and meaningful as face-to-face ones (Vettorel 2014: xxi), research on CMC in ELF has not received much attention (Bosso 2018: 12). In the following subsection, I will discuss studies that address the unique communicative context that is that is computer-mediated ELF communication.

2.2.2. Computer-mediated English as a lingua franca communication

Among the scholars who have studied the combination of computer-mediated and ELF communication are, for instance, Jenks (2012, 2013a, 2013b), Vettorel (2014), Komori-Glatz (2015), Bosso (2018), and Brunner and Diemer (2018). The importance of studying ELF interactions conducted via CMC is highlighted by Vettorel (2014: xxiv),

the use of English by non-native speakers in web-related practices is increasing, with communication shaped both by the specificities of the medium and by the communicative aims of the participants.

In line with the findings on spoken ELF, ELF interactions in CMC are characterized by cooperative behaviors and employment of communication strategies. For instance, Brunner and Diemer (2018) analyze Skype interactions and report that code-switching is a useful strategy for establishing rapport (Brunner & Diemer 2018: 59). The participants frequently switched to their mother tongues, but also the L1s of their

communicative partners (Brunner & Diemer 2018: 59). The pattern has also been observed in Komori-Glatz's (2015) analysis of Facebook exchanges among students. The author remarks that, while English is used as a primary language of communication among the students, there are instances of insertion of lexical items from other languages, frequently from the first languages of their teammates (Komori-Glatz 2015: 121). This indicates that both in online and offline settings, accommodation plays a significant role in ELF interactions. Facebook exchanges among students have also been examined by Bosso, who identified a number of both verbal and non-verbal communicative techniques such as images, both in the form of emojis and photographs, interpreting them as "mitigators and [devices used] for rapport building" (Bosso 2018: 32).

In a more elaborate study on the contexts in which ELF and CMC interact, Vettorel (2014) examines blogs with the aim of unveiling the most common functions English as a lingua franca performs in the CMC mode (2014: xxiii). Vettorel's analysis supported previous findings on ELF communication in finding that successful flow of communication is prioritized over the notions of accuracy (Vettorel 2014: 288) and maintained through "all the linguistic resources available to participants" (Vettorel 2014: 288). The author further notes that language is "appropriated and adapted to suit the participants' self-expressive and communicative aims" (Vettorel 2014: 288), which is illustrated in the dataset by the instances of innovative lexical forms that are "often related to the need of expressing concepts connected to the interactants' linguacultures" (Vettorel 2014: 287). Aside from providing valuable insights into how English as a lingua franca users communicate via textual CMC, Vettorel (2014) addresses the issue of the terms *community* and *variety* in research on computer-

mediated English as a lingua franca communication, which is another crucial topic for the present thesis and will be discussed in the next subsection.

2.3. Subjects of controversy: *varieties* and *communities* in CMC and ELF research

This subsection focuses on the terms *variety* and *community* and questions their applicability in computer-mediated and English as a lingua franca communication. The limitations of the aforementioned concepts have been raised by, for instance, Herring (2004: 338) whose argument addresses CMC research, but is equally relevant to ELF contexts.

Internet research often suffers from a premature impulse to label [...] phenomena in broad terms, for example, all groups of people interacting [...] are ‘communities’; [...] the language of the Internet is a single style or ‘genre’ (Herring 2004: 338).

As Herring (2004: 338, emphasis mine) adds, despite being “familiar and evocative, [these terms are] notoriously slippery, and unhelpful (or worse) **if applied indiscriminately**”. What this argument highlights is that there is a danger of “overextend[ing] [the terms] to the point [where they] [become] meaningless” (Herring 2004: 344). In the following subsections, the two notions will be discussed separately in relation to both CMC and ELF research, supported by arguments of scholars who recognize the need for acknowledging the complexity of interactions that take place in CMC and ELF settings.

2.3.1. Computer-mediated language and ELF as language varieties?

The trend of classifying language in CMC based on its prototypical features that is said to be typical of the early research on CMC (Herring, Stein & Virtanen 2013: 3), started to be questioned in the mid-2000s (e.g. Androutsopoulos 2006). The term *variety* is, for instance, used in Crystal’s (2006) study on the prototypical features of language in

CMC. Based on a detailed analysis of various CMC genres, Crystal argues that there are “clear signs of the emergence of a distinctive variety of language” (2006: 258), which he terms “Netspeak” (Crystal 2006: 19). For Crystal, each CMC genre displays unique features, making the variety of Netspeak “a collection of distinct dialects” (Crystal 2006: 272).

This, rather problematic, approach to language use in CMC has been questioned by Androutsopoulos (2006) who argues against “homogenized and simplified conceptions of language use in CMC” (2006: 420) that promote “stereotypes in language [...] research” (Androutsopoulos 2006: 420). While acknowledging the effects of the medium, Androutsopoulos (2006: 421) argues for “a shift of focus from medium-related to user-related patterns of language use”. Thus, as he explains, “the question is how these communication technologies are locally appropriated to enact a variety of discourse genres” (Androutsopoulos 2006: 421). That the concept of an online language variety is a problematic one is also pointed out by Verheijen (2017) who emphasizes that “the new media are extremely varied, and thus the communication that takes place via these various platforms can also be surmised to be rather diverse” (Verheijen 2017: 75). As she adds, “even though language use in CMC has several prominent linguistic peculiarities, computer-mediated texts do not always display the same features to the same extent” (Verheijen 2017: 74).

The same view is adopted in the present thesis and it is argued that the term *variety* is rather misplaced in the context of computer-mediated communication, which “is shaped by a variety of technical and situational factors, making it variable within as well as across modes” (Herring & Androutsopoulos 2015: 129). Thus, what is interpreted by Crystal as “clear signs of the emergence of a distinctive variety of language” (2006: 258), is here (i.e. in this thesis) “understood as resources that

particular (groups of) users might draw on in the construction of discourse styles in particular contexts” (Androutsopoulos 2006: 421).

In a similar fashion, scholars who employ the English as a lingua franca perspective have been explicit and adamant about not using the term *variety* in ELF description (Seidlhofer 2009a; Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey 2011). The research discipline has come a long way since “the ultimate aim of some kind of codification” (Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey 2011: 287), and the “need for a post-variety approach” (Vettorel 2014: 26) has been met with publications that recognize that,

ELF is a means by which English is continually being re-enacted and reinvigorated through the inventiveness of its speakers as they respond to their immediate communicative and expressive needs. (Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey 2011: 304)

The characteristics of ELF interactions listed in Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey’s statement are what defines all ELF interactions, be it online or offline, which is why it is crucial to bear in mind that “ELF is *not* a matter of identifying (or even looking for) features in order to document a potential *variety” (Pitzl 2018a: 15, original emphasis)⁵. The same approach is adopted in the present study. What this means for a study on the use of hyperbole in computer-mediated ELF is that the features of hyperbolic language identified in the analysis are not seen as indicative of or tailored to fit into a particular variety, but rather as products of a skillful and communication-oriented utilization of the available resources. The concept of communities in CMC and ELF research is discussed in the following subsection.

⁵ The asterisk symbol expresses the author’s critical stance (see Pitzl 2018a: 8).

2.3.2. CMC and ELF users as communities?

As already pointed out, the term *community* first appeared in CMC research in the nineties and has since “become increasingly fashionable in Internet research” (Herring 2004: 344) (see Baym 1998, Herring 2004; Walther & Bunz 2005; Angouri 2015). The term has been used to describe groups of people with similar interests who interact online (Angouri 2015: 324) and has thus “denote[d] large demographically based categories (e.g., women) as well as much narrower ones (e.g., the users of one forum)” (Angouri 2015: 324). As such, the term “has been overextended to the point of becoming meaningless” (Herring 2004: 344).

On the basis of previous literature on online communities, Herring (2004: 355) lists six requirements that a group would need to fulfill to be classified as a community. These include: (a) consistent contact and regular participation, (b) common goals, history, and group culture, (c) acts of solidarity and cooperation, (d) presence and resolution of conflict, (e) establishment of group awareness, and (f) establishment of hierarchy within the group (Herring 2004: 355). However, the author herself points out the significant role of circumstantial factors in the presence or absence of the above-listed criteria (Herring 2004: 357) and questions whether the requirements are “equally indicative of community” (Herring 2004: 364). Furthermore, even though the set of criteria can help determine the “extent of community-like behavior” (Herring 2004: 365), it is arguable whether it is “sufficient to justify labeling [a group] a virtual community” (Herring 2004: 365). This, combined with the fact that many groups will only share one communicative event (Baym 1998: 47) and will therefore “never generate a stable set of social meanings nor offer a sense of group-specific community” (Baym 1998: 63), makes the concept of community “a challenging concept to demonstrate” in online discourse (Herring 2004: 365). For the purpose of the present

paper, the groups under analysis are not considered communities, but Transient International Groups (Pitzl 2018c, 2019, 2020) who communicate online (see Section 2.3.3).

In English as a lingua franca settings, where language users also frequently engage in communicative events that do not fit “neatly [...] into familiar categories” (Seidlhofer 2009a: 239), the appropriate terminology for groups of ELF speakers has also been discussed. As a result of a general consensus among ELF researchers that the concept of a community in a traditional sense hardly captures the nature of ELF communication (see Hülmbauer 2009; Seidlhofer 2009a), the concept of a Community of Practice (see Ehrenreich 2010, 2018; Pitzl 2019) became widely accepted in ELF research and employed in several ELF studies (e.g. Cogo 2009; Seidlhofer 2009a; Ehrenreich 2010; House 2013).

However, especially in recent years, “ELF researchers have [...] emphasized the transient [...] nature” (Pitzl 2018c: 25) of many ELF communicative episodes (see Pitzl 2018c, 2019, 2020; see also Mortensen 2017). Pitzl (2018c: 27) emphasizes that as useful and applicable the concept is for constellations of ELF speakers that “exist long enough in a stable fashion to [...] form ELF-Communities of Practice” (Pitzl 2018c: 27), the concept hardly applies to more “ephemeral and short-lived” (Pitzl 2018c: 29) constellations of ELF speakers. With that in mind, Pitzl accurately points out that “ELF speakers are often organized in *groups*, not necessarily in communities of any kind” (2018c: 27, original emphasis). Considering that Pitzl’s framework is tailored for the analysis of “constellations of ELF speakers” (Pitzl 2019: 5) that do not fit the description of communities (2018c: 30; 2019: 10), it is by its very definition relevant for the present thesis. Thus, it is argued that the two groups under analysis constitute

“Transient International Groups” (Pitzl 2018c: 25), not communities, and the TIGs framework is discussed in the following subsection.

2.3.3. Transient International Groups

Transient International Groups are defined as “groups of multilingual ELF users who interact for a particular purpose at a particular location for a certain amount of time [...] and then dissolve again” (Pitzl 2018c: 30). Thus, the two groups under analysis qualify as TIGs in so far as the participants are unacquainted multilingual ELF users who communicate with the aim of completing their shared group project over the course of one semester. In terms of the location, the participants in this dataset communicate online, i.e. they “use the virtual setting [...] as a ‘barrier-free’ extension of the physical one” (Bosso 2018: 15). Additionally, both groups start off with either a low or no level of familiarity, labelled as (*To*) in Pitzl’s (2018c) work, communicate and evolve as a group (*T₁*), and establish their own shared group conventions and patterns (*T₂*) (see Pitzl 2018c: 34; see also Section 4.2. for data description). The labels *To*, *T₁*, and *T₂* are labels used in Pitzl’s (2018c) work and indicate phases in communication and development of a TIG. Thus, *To* stands for the initial stage of communication when a TIG is created (Pitzl 2018c: 36), whereas *T₁* represents the stage in which the members of a TIG communicate and “actively share” (Pitzl 2018c: 52) their linguistic resources with other members (cf. Pitzl 2018c: 34-35). Finally, *T₂* stands for the phase of communication in which a TIG develops a shared linguistic repertoire through the process of active communication (Pitzl 2018c: 35). It should be noted however, that *T₁* and *T₂* are not static points in the development of a TIG but represent an ongoing process in a TIG’s communication (Pitzl 2018c: 36).

At the heart of the TIGs framework are (a) holistic representation of metadata with a focus on group characteristics and (b) the micro-diachronic approach (Pitzl 2019: 9).

The former proposes consideration and visualization of various “group parameters” (Pitzl 2019: 11), such as the speakers’ professions, the languages involved, levels of familiarity (Pitzl 2019: 10-11) in order to establish what the group shares linguistically, culturally or professionally at the initial stage of the interaction, i.e. To (Pitzl 2018c: 34). For instance, an observation of the linguistic diversity of a TIG would involve a consideration of all languages of every speaker’s repertoire or their “Individual Multilingual Repertoires (IMRs)” (Pitzl 2018c: 33), as well as their shared “Multilingual Resource Pool (MRP)” (Pitzl 2018c: 33). As a result, this would position a TIG on a scale from “diverse [to] bilateral” (Pitzl 2018c: 31).

The importance of the holistic perspective for the present analysis is manifold. For instance, the insight into the linguistic diversity of the group and the areas that overlap provides a window into (a) potential and (b) most likely resources that might be used to produce hyperbole (see Section 4.2.1. and 4.2.2.). In addition, a consideration of the levels of familiarity between members of the newly formed groups provides an easily observable variable in the process of monitoring the development of the hyperbole usage. This is done by applying the “micro-diachronic approach” (Pitzl 2020: 108; see also Pitzl 2018c, 2019) to data analysis, in other words observing how “[hyperbole] is used not just within an interaction as a whole, but also throughout the duration of an interaction” (Pitzl 2019: 11). The approach was originally developed for and so far only used on spoken ELF data; however, numerous aspects of my dataset and the phenomenon under analysis lend themselves to a micro-diachronic analysis. The way the approach is implemented to the study of hyperbole in computer-mediated ELF communication is discussed in Chapter 4 and illustrated in Chapter 5.

2.4. CMC, ELF, and computer-mediated ELF: A summary

The goal of this chapter was to present and discuss the publications deemed the most relevant for the topic of the present thesis from the fields of CMC and ELF communication. Aside from providing an overview of the development of CMC and ELF (as communication phenomena and research disciplines), the chapter looked at the most prominent features of chat communication and ELF interactions with the aim of understanding the circumstances in which hyperbole is produced in the present dataset. With respect to chat communication, the most prominent and relevant features include the use of emojis, acronyms, abbreviations, and characteristic features on the level of spelling (cf. Section 2.1.2.). As will be shown in the next chapter, devoted to hyperbole, and in the examples from the present dataset, these features also represent ways of expressing hyperbole in online communication. With regard to ELF communication, the chapter highlighted the main findings of previous ELF research as well as the role of accommodation strategies in achieving and maintaining successful communication (cf. Section 2.2.1.).

In addition, limitations of the terms *variety* and *community* were discussed in relation to both CMC and ELF communication. As noted in Section 2.3., the two terms are not deemed suitable for the present thesis and will not be used. Thus, the features of hyperbole use identified in the analysis (cf. Chapter 5) are not interpreted as signs of a CMC or ELF variety in this thesis. Likewise, the present thesis views the two groups under analysis as TIGs (cf. Section 4.2. for characterization of the two TIGs) and focuses on studying the development of their communication over the period of time they spend communicating.

3. Understanding hyperbole

One could easily argue that using untruthful, exaggerated expressions and expecting the conversation partner to infer that they were not meant literally is not the best recipe for proper and successful communication. In academia, the use of superlatives would likely compromise the author's credibility, for "to accomplish good ([...] rhetorically effective and moral), precise arguments, one must eliminate that which is excessive or inaccurate" (Beare & Meade 2015: 67). Yet, hyperbole is *everywhere* and "usually pass[es] without challenge by listeners" (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 150).

Despite being less prominent in research than, for instance, metaphor and irony (Burgers et al. 2016: 163), hyperbole has intrigued a number of scholars who have challenged unfavorable views on the rhetorical figure and highlighted the variety of communicative benefits linked to its usage (cf. Gibbs 1994; Claridge 2011; Beare & Meade 2015). The present thesis is in line with these views and argues that rhetorical figures "are not linguistic distortions of literal mental thought but constitute basic schemes by which people conceptualize their experience and the external world" (Gibbs 1994: 1).

With that in mind, the present chapter aims to provide an overview of the previous work on hyperbole, focusing on the definitions and the challenges that come with defining hyperbole in Section 3.1. and the contexts, functions, and formal realizations linked to hyperbole in Section 3.2. As already mentioned, hyperbole is generally a less frequently studied form of figurative language. This is particularly noticeable in CMC research and ELF contexts, where hyperbole is yet to receive attention. Therefore, Section 3.3. will not focus on hyperbole specifically, but review available findings on figurative language in CMC (Section 3.3.1.), and then explore ELF studies on figurative

language (Section 3.3.2.), in order to achieve a better understanding of how rhetorical figures are constructed and received in computer-mediated and ELF contexts.

3.1. Defining hyperbole

Before diving into the discussion on the definitions of hyperbole, a short remark concerning terminology is due. The available literature on hyperbole shows a considerable degree of inconsistency in the usage of terms such as *trope*, *rhetorical figure*, *figure of speech/thought*. For the purpose of this paper, the generally more common terms *figure of speech* and *rhetorical figure* will be used interchangeably as superordinate terms to refer to hyperbole and other relevant devices (see e.g. Brdar-Szabó and Brdar 2010 for a discussion of the aforementioned terms).

In basic terms, hyperbole is defined as “say[ing] more than [one] can objectively justify” (Norrick 1982: 172). It is “a form of extremity or excess that either magnifies or minimizes some real state of affairs or fact” (Cano Mora 2008: 107). Hyperbolic language typically includes exaggerated and factually untrue expressions (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 150) that are used to present a more positive or a more negative version of reality (Popa-Wyatt 2020: 91).

However, the matter of defining hyperbole in greater depth is a far more complex one (Beare & Meade 2015: 67) and is determined by several factors, such as the aspect of intentionality, the relationship between overstatement and understatement, and the status of hyperbole as an independent figure of speech, especially in relation to other rhetorical devices. These factors have been approached differently in literature and have led to a number of different definitions. What this means for a researcher conducting a study on hyperbole, especially in a communicative setting in which hyperbole has not yet received attention, is that these factors need to be carefully

examined to arrive at a definition suitable for and applicable to the dataset at hand. Considering that, to my knowledge, no studies have up to date examined hyperbole in computer-mediated ELF interactions, the discussion of the most significant factors in defining hyperbole and the definition used in the present thesis are provided in the following sections.

3.1.1. Hyperbole vs. exaggeration vs. overstatement

This section aims to discuss how the terms *hyperbole*, *exaggeration*, and *overstatement* are used in literature in order to outline and determine how the terms will be used throughout this thesis. Considering that a core property of hyperbole is “overt exaggeration” (Carston & Wearing 2015: 81), the terms *exaggeration*, *overstatement*, and *hyperbole* are often used interchangeably in the literature. Still, there have been disagreements on whether these terms indeed refer to the same kind of exaggeration, and the main aspect used for their differentiation is the factor of intention behind the use of hyperbole. For instance, Gibbs (1994: 391) focuses on hyperbole and overstatement and argues for a distinction between them. For him, the term *hyperbole* only refers to purposeful exaggeration, whereas plain overstatement⁶ is an unconscious act and not used with particular communicative aims in mind (Gibbs 1994: 391). In addition, the matter of intention behind the use of exaggerated forms is addressed in Walton’s (2017: 106) study. The author highlights that her study is focused exclusively on figurative usage of overstatement and understatement while excluding non-figurative over- and understatements (Walton 2017: 106). Non-figurative uses would mean “say[ing] less or more than is *true* (whether one is fibbing

⁶ See also Norrick (2004) for distinction between hyperbole, overstatement and extreme case formulations.

or just mistaken)” (Walton 2017: 106, original emphasis), whereas figurative stand for “saying less [...] or more than one *means*” (Walton 2017: 106, my emphasis).

While it is clear that there is a difference between (a) conveying false information that a hearer is expected to take literally and (b) using exaggeration figuratively without wanting to be taken literally, it is not clear on what grounds, for instance, a researcher faced with written transcripts of data would argue for either interpretation. This distinction has been criticized in literature (e.g. McCarthy & Carter 2004; Claridge 2011; Beare & Meade 2015), with the remark that a “clear-cut dividing line between intentionality and non-intentionality” is hardly applicable to examples of hyperbole (Claridge 2011: 7).

Furthermore, the view of hyperbole as “say[ing] less [...] or more than one *means*” (Walton 2017: 106, my emphasis) also appears problematic in that it implies a mismatch between the thought and the language. On the contrary, the position taken here is that the whole point of hyperbole is conveying one’s subjective and exaggerated thoughts and emotions, which are meant to be understood as nonliteral by the listener (Norrick 2004: 1728). Thus, as Norrick (1982: 172) also argues, even though hyperbolic language may appear as the most accurate representation of reality to an emotionally biased speaker, hyperboles are produced with the aim of being understood as nonliteral. Regarding the factor of intent in distinguishing between hyperbole, overstatement, and exaggeration, I follow Claridge (2011: 7) in not attempting to differentiate between purposeful and inadvertent hyperboles and treating all instances as deliberate. In addition, in the majority of publications the term *hyperbole* is the primary term, used interchangeably with the terms *exaggeration* and *overstatement* (e.g. McCarthy & Carter 2004; Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2010; Carston & Wearing 2015;

Walton 2017; Popa-Wyatt 2020). Likewise, the terms *hyperbole*, *exaggeration*, and *overstatement* will be used interchangeably in the present thesis.

3.1.2. Hyperbole vs. understatement

Another important factor in arriving at a comprehensive definition of hyperbole is the question of a clear distinction between overstatement and understatement. These two figures are generally treated separately in literature and often described as “logical opposite[s]” (Carston & Wearing 2015: 81) that perform distinct functions in distinct contexts (Walton 2017: 108). However, it has also been pointed out that the distinction between the two is not always obvious and that there are instances that could be interpreted as both (see Claridge 2011; Walton 2017).

As Claridge (2011: 11) exemplifies, when a speaker promises to arrive “*in a second*”, perhaps the default interpretation is that the speaker is understating the amount of time required; however, by doing so, they are also overstating the speed of their arrival. In Walton’s words (2017: 112), “to understate how large a quantity is, is to overstate, to exaggerate, how small it is, and vice versa”. However, Walton (2017: 112) also points out that not all understatements can be read as overstatements (and vice versa), seeing as contextual factors can help determine whether an utterance was meant as understatement or overstatement. As Walton (2017: 107) illustrates with the following examples:

- 1) “There are a couple of cops out there.”
- 2) “There are hundreds of cops out there.”

the reason that it is more natural to interpret the first example as an understatement, and the second one as an overstatement, when in fact the speaker sees a dozen of cops, is that what is of interest is “how large the number of cops is, not how small it is”

(Walton 2017: 112). The stance taken in the present thesis is that the amount of contextual and background knowledge required for a clear distinction may not always be accessible to a researcher, which is why figurative instances that read as understatements and overstatements will be included and regarded as instances of hyperbole.

3.1.3. Hyperbole in hyperbolic figures

Several scholars have drawn attention to what is said to be a fundamental feature of hyperbole, namely, to partner with other rhetorical figures (Carston & Wearing 2015: 81; Popa-Wyatt 2020: 91). To phrase it figuratively, hyperbole is described as the most sociable figure of speech (Cano Mora 2008: 106), regularly accompanied by, for instance, metaphor, metonymy, simile, idioms (Carston & Wearing 2015: 81), irony, and rhetorical questions (Snoeck Henkemans 2013: 2). This has raised a series of questions as to how “hyperbolic figures” (Popa-Wyatt 2020: 91) should be analyzed (e.g. Claridge 2011; Burgers, Renardel de Lavalette & Steen 2018; Popa-Wyatt 2020), but also whether hyperbole can be analyzed and defined without other rhetorical figures (e.g. Brdar 2004; Brdar- Szabó & Brdar 2010; Carston & Wearing 2015). The term “hyperbolic figures” (Popa-Wyatt 2020: 91) will be used in the present thesis to refer to instances of hyperbole combined with another rhetorical device. In what follows, I will first discuss the role of hyperbole in hyperbolic figures and demonstrate how such examples will be analyzed in the present thesis. Subsequently, I will also briefly address the status of hyperbole as an independent form of non-literal language (i.e. isolated from other figures of speech) by discussing the perspectives from the literature and, finally, present the perspective adopted in the present thesis.

In Popa-Wyatt’s (2020) publication devoted to hyperbolic figures, the author focuses on “hyperbolic irony” and “hyperbolic metaphor” (Popa-Wyatt 2020: 91) and proposes

an approach to interpreting and analyzing the mixtures. Of primary concern to the analysis is the question of how and in what order such figures should be interpreted (Popa-Wyatt 2020: 94). In her words, “do we do we first interpret the utterance hyperbolically and only then determine the other figurative interpretation, or the other way round?” (Popa-Wyatt 2020: 94). Consider the following examples ⁷ from Carston and Wearing (2015: 81):

- a) “That child is the devil incarnate.” (hyperbole and metaphor)
- b) “It’s the end of the world. (hyperbole and irony)
[describing someone’s angry reaction when he finds he’s got a parking fine]”.

For Popa-Wyatt (2020: 93), such constructions are not principally hyperbolic and the motivation behind combining hyperbole with metaphor and irony is “to make a metaphoric and ironic point, respectively, not a hyperbolic one”. Thus, as she concludes, “hyperbole in hyperbolic figures [is merely] an interpretative effect”, whereas the dominant rhetorical devices are metaphor and irony, respectively (Popa-Wyatt 2020: 104). Along these lines, the role of hyperbole is to strengthen the intensity of the other rhetorical figure (Popa-Wyatt 2020: 93).

In the framework of the present thesis, such examples are interpreted differently. Firstly, the view of hyperbolic metaphors, such as “a devil incarnate” (Carston & Wearing 2015: 81) or “an angel” (Popa-Wyatt 2020: 94), as primarily metaphorical is perhaps a natural choice on the lexical level, seeing as one can point to the lexical items and identify them as metaphors, whereas no such straightforward local identification is possible for the hyperbole. Yet, the exaggerated meaning is clearly communicated in both examples. Based on this, the present thesis argues that in mixtures of metaphor

⁷ These examples are also cited and discussed in Popa-Wyatt’s study (2020: 93)

and hyperbole, hyperbole operates on a thought level⁸, and “is linguistically, i.e., semantically *realised* by metaphor” (Claridge 2011: 41).

To refer back to the two examples cited above, if we consider the choice of describing someone as “a devil incarnate” (Carston & Wearing 2015: 81) or “an angel” (Popa-Wyatt 2020: 94), instead of, for instance, in plain hyperbole as *the worst/ best creature imaginable*, is it not the metaphor that helps the speaker exaggerate just how negative or positive their view is on the person they are describing? If we consider that in using hyperbole to express their attitudes speakers employ “particular lexical items and composite expressions that serve to demote the objective content [...] in favour of a subjective, more attitudinal content” (Claridge 2011: 74), would it not be reasonable to argue that the above-cited examples communicate the speakers’ evaluations (which are subjective, emotional and exaggerated) and that metaphor is chosen as it helps to express them? Also, what lends further support to this view, is that the examples cited above seem to perfectly illustrate the intent of evaluation, which is said to be a distinguishing and integral feature of hyperbole (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 155; Claridge 2011: 82; Carston & Wearing 2015: 86).

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the differences between metaphor and hyperbole in all its detail. For the purposes of this analysis, co-occurrences of metaphor and hyperbole are considered as examples of hyperbole manifested through metaphor (see Section 3.2.2 for realizations of hyperbole). Thus, whether labeled “hyperbolic metaphor” (Popa-Wyatt 2020: 91) or “metaphorical hyperbole” (Claridge 2011: 41), such examples are seen as potentially interesting and relevant for both a study on metaphor and a study on hyperbole and will count as instances of hyperbole in the present analysis. Furthermore, the position taken in this thesis is in line with

⁸ In classical rhetoric, hyperbole is defined as a figure of thought (cf. Habinek 2005)

Claridge (2011: 41) in arguing that in combinations of hyperbole and irony, “hyperbole is used for the effect of irony” and is as such a matter of function, rather than of a formal property (Claridge 2011: 41).

As to the question of hyperbole as an independent rhetorical figure, Brdar (2004), and Brdar-Szabó and Brdar (2010) question the possibility of hyperbole appearing without other rhetorical devices, arguing that “many examples of hyperbole can be shown to instantiate or at least involve some other tropes” (Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2010: 385). Both publications examine numbers and superlatives (see Brdar 2004: 376- 381; Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2010: 390- 394) as the “most promising candidates for ‘pure’ hyperbole” (Brdar 2004: 382), i.e. realizations of hyperbole without the presence of other rhetorical devices. Yet, such independent realizations of hyperbole were not found in the two studies (Brdar 2004: 382; Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2010: 423), leading Brdar-Szabó and Brdar (2010: 395) to conclude that “the case for unsupported ‘pure’ hyperbole seems to rest on very shaky grounds”. For the purposes of the present paper, cases in which hyperbole clearly interacts with another rhetorical device are treated as hyperbolic figures; all other instances are treated as instances of (pure) hyperbole (see Section 4.3.2. for classification).

3.2. Characterizing hyperbole

Having engaged with defining hyperbole based on its character, i.e. what it is and is not, the focus now shifts to the exterior and examines where and how hyperbole can be identified. The task of identifying hyperbole may be challenging due to the variety of contexts in which hyperbole occurs, the number of functions it performs across contexts, as well as the wealth of forms it has been found to assume. These aspects are discussed in the following, along with an outline of the guidelines for the identification of hyperbole provided in the literature.

3.2.1. Contexts of occurrence and multifunctionality of hyperbole

With respect to the contexts in which hyperbole frequently occurs, literature has documented a large number. Traditionally associated with rhetoric and persuasive spoken language (Claridge 2011: 6), hyperbole is still commonly found in politics (Claridge 2011: 151), public addresses, and discussions (Claridge 2011: 2; Burgers, Renardel de Lavalette & Steen 2018: 72), but also in news broadcasts (Beare & Meade 2015: 65), marketing (Claridge 2011: 151; Snoeck Henkemans 2013: 5), literature (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 166; Claridge 2011: 2), casual spoken everyday language (Cano Mora 2008: 105) and computer-mediated discourse (cf. Hancock 2004; Whalen, Pexman & Gill 2009; Whalen et al. 2013; see also Section 3.3.1.).

In these contexts, hyperbole has been found to perform a number of different functions. First of all, it has been emphasized that despite conveying an exaggerated version of reality, hyperbole “is not considered as a form of lying” (Snoeck Henkemans 2013: 3) and is not employed to misinform (Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2010: 415). Paradoxically, this fact is sometimes made explicit by, for instance, marking an instance of exaggeration with the adverb *literally* (Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2010: 418). In that sense, hyperbole is employed in communication due to its communicative benefits (Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2010: 415).

One such benefit is communicative efficiency. Hyperboles are said to be highly expressive (Beare & Meade 2015: 76), but also economical (Hancock 2004: 447; Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2010: 416; Beare & Meade 2015: 64) in that they conveniently and accurately reflect the speakers’ feelings “while maintaining brevity” (Beare & Meade 2015: 64). As such, they “[function] as mental and linguistic shortcuts in cases where a non-hyperbolic expression would require a lot more linguistic material and time”

(Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2010: 385), which makes them “often potentially more communicative and useful than literal language” (Beare & Meade 2015: 76).

In addition, and related to the previous function, hyperboles are used to express emotional involvement (Cano Mora 2009: 33; Claridge 2011: 264), attitude (Claridge 2011: 18), or evaluation (Snoeck Henkemans 2013: 5; Carston & Wearing 2015: 85). In particular, hyperbole has mostly been documented in negative contexts as a means of expressing negative emotions (Claridge 2011: 81), including disapproval, annoyance (Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2010: 401), or criticism (Snoeck Henkemans 2013: 5). Nevertheless, it has also been documented as a means of conveying or arousing positive emotions such as positive self-representations (Claridge 2011: 229), compliments (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 165; Claridge 2011: 168), praise (Snoeck Henkemans 2013: 5), and humor (Norrick 2004: 1738; Carston & Wearing 2015: 81). The convenience of using hyperbole to express emotions ties to its subjective quality (Cano Mora 2009: 33). As such, it allows speakers to convey their thoughts and emotions (Cano Mora 2009: 28) when they are too intense for “plain expressions” (Gibbs 1994: 392).

In addition to contributing to communicative efficiency and expressing emotions, a key function of hyperbole is to persuade (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 178; Claridge 2011: 175; Snoeck Henkemans 2013: 5). In Claridge’s (2011: 9) words, “saying it is freezing is a more convincing argument for putting on a winter coat, scarf and gloves than saying it is cold or cool”. As she adds, the reason hyperbole is in this respect more effective is that it captures the attention of the listener (Claridge 2011: 9). The ability of hyperbole to draw and maintain the attention of the audience has also proven to be effective in argumentations where it renders “information that is to the arguer’s advantage [...] more salient to the audience” (Snoeck Henkemans 2013: 4) and thus

helps in “achieving the arguer’s aims in the stage concerned” (Snoeck Henkemans 2013: 8).

3.2.2. Realizations of hyperbole

The fact that hyperbole is a versatile rhetorical figure has already been shown in the previous subchapter through its applicability and usefulness in many contexts, as well as its ability to perform a myriad of functions. However, what makes the scope of its versatility perhaps even more striking is the number of forms it can assume. In the following, I will summarize the most frequently mentioned formal realizations of hyperbole and briefly discuss the attempts to classify hyperbole according to its forms.

Various studies concerned with formal realizations of hyperbole have identified the figure in the form of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions (Cano Mora 2009: 28; Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017: 55). These are referred to as “single-word hyperbole[s]” (Claridge 2011: 56) and are said to be the most common realization of the figure (Claridge 2011: 49). Within this category, the most frequently mentioned types are numbers (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 163; Cano Mora 2009: 28; Claridge 2011: 51; Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017: 55), “adjectives and adverbs of size, degree, and intensity” (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 172, emphasis omitted), and “universal quantifiers, such as *all*, *every*” (Claridge 2011: 51; see also Norrick 2004⁹). The less frequently mentioned members are compound hyperboles, such as *stone-cold* or *dog-tired* (Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2010: 399), fictional numbers, e.g. *zillion* (Brdar 2004:

⁹ For Norrick (2004: 1728), items “built around extreme expressions such as *every*, *all*, *none*, *best*, *least*, *as good as it gets*, [...] *absolutely*” are a separate category called “extreme case formulations (ECF)” (Norrick 2004: 1727). However, in most publications such expressions are treated as one of the manifestations of hyperbole (e.g. McCarthy & Carter 2004; Claridge 2011) and will also be treated as such in the present thesis.

377; Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2010: 409), downtoners (Claridge 2011: 11), and imperatives (Beare & Meade 2015: 77).

In addition to one-word hyperbole (Claridge 2011: 56), exaggeration has also been found on higher levels of syntax in the form of phrases, clauses, sentences, or even whole texts (Claridge 2011: 5). For example, scholars have documented hyperbolic comparatives and superlatives (Claridge 2011: 64; Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017: 55), phrases denoting time (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 176), repetitions (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 175; Claridge 2011: 45) and numerical clauses (Claridge 2011: 58). However, as Claridge (2011: 11) cautions, many forms are not inherently hyperbolic and may only become exaggerated in given contexts. As she argues, this is particularly the case for maximizers and minimizers (Claridge 2011: 11). Likewise, with repetition as a realization of hyperbole, Claridge (2011: 67) only refers to “the re-occurrence of the same item or phrase in strict sequence without interruption by other material” and explains that lexical items that are not by default hyperbolic develop a hyperbolic meaning through repetition (Claridge 2011: 45).

What becomes apparent from the realizations of hyperbole documented in the literature is that the phenomenon is found in syntactic classes (Norrick 1982: 170; Cano Mora 2009: 28), functions (Claridge 2011: 11), semantic fields (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 163- 174), discourse strategies (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 175; Cano Mora 2009: 28), but also in the form of typographic features (Beare & Meade 2015: 77), emoticons (Hancock 2004: 455), and even gestures (Ferré 2014: 42). The fact that its realizations “lack any readily identifiable unifying principle” (Beare & Meade 2015: 67) has so far stood in the way of consistent classifications with clearly distinguished categories. Building on previous work on classification of hyperbole¹⁰ and attempting

¹⁰ See Spitzbardt’s (1963) classification of hyperbolic forms, as cited in Claridge (2011: 46)

to provide a categorization based on exclusively morphological and syntactic patterns, Claridge (2011: 47, 48) finds words, phrases, sentences/clauses, comparisons, and repetitions as separate categories. However, several limitations of this typology are discussed in Peña and Ruiz de Mendoza's (2017: 53) study, who observe "an undesirable crisscrossing of categories", seeing as comparisons can be found on both phrase and clause/sentence level (Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017: 53).

The matter of classification becomes even more complex if considering that practically any of the categories can also simultaneously be metaphorical, idiomatic, ironic, etc. (see e.g. examples cited in Carston and Wearing 2015: 81; see also Claridge 2011: Chapter 3). In addition, and perhaps the greatest challenge in classifying hyperbolic forms, is the role of the context in which hyperbole occurs. The context is not only the key factor in identifying hyperbolic instances (Norrick 1982: 169; Cano Mora 2009: 28; Claridge 2011: 15) but also the key factor in determining which category an example of hyperbole belongs to (Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017: 53). Thus, the alternative may be acknowledging that the previously done classification schemes may only apply to certain contexts and classifying hyperbolic forms according to the nature and the needs of the dataset at hand (Beare & Meade 2015: 75). The classification used in the present study is discussed in Section 4.3.2.

3.2.3. Identification of hyperbole

As previously stated, literature puts great value on the context and background knowledge in the process of identifying hyperbole (Gibbs 1994: 5; Cano Mora 2009: 28; Claridge 2011: 4). This is because "hyperbole does not readily lend itself to an automatic examination in terms of fixed formal patterns" (Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017: 46), but rather claims a variety of forms that do not seem to share a common feature (Beare & Meade 2015: 67). With this in mind, several scholars have provided

guidelines for identifying hyperbole (cf. McCarthy & Carter 2004; Claridge 2011; Burgers et al. 2016), which are perhaps even more vital in studies on written conversations, considering the lack of, for instance, prosodic features (Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2010: 418).

As advised by Burgers et al. (2016: 164), in the process of identifying hyperbole, it should be borne in mind that “hyperbole (1) is scalar, (2) involves a specific shift between the propositional and the intended meaning, and (3) includes a specific referent”. A more extensive list of criteria is found in McCarthy & Carter’s (2004: 162,163) study, where the authors note that at least three criteria should be met for an expression to be labeled as hyperbolic. For them, clear signals of hyperbole include, (a) discrepancy between the statement and the factual, (b) presence of other devices that add to exaggeration, such as polysyndeton¹¹, (c) presence of intensifiers, (d) supportive behavior by the addressee(s), (e) co-construction of “fictitious worlds where impossible, exaggerated events take place” (2004: 162), (f) interpretation of the expression as nonliteral, but not as untrue (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 162, 163).

However, McCarthy and Carter’s criteria have been criticized for not being exclusive to hyperbole (e.g. Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017: 44). As they point out, “a clash with the context [is] also present in irony” (Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017: 44), backchannels are a part of any supportive talk (Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017: 45) and it is not clear why exactly three of these conditions need to be met in order for an expression count as hyperbolic (Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017: 45). Especially, if considering that the criteria feature “a mixture of syntactic, pragmatic, and discourse evidence” (Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017: 45). In addition, as McCarthy and Carter

¹¹ McCarthy and Carter define polysyndeton as “the use of several conjunctions in close succession, typically involving repetition of the same conjunction” (2004: 163).

(2004: 163) themselves admit, their set would only be effective with obvious instances of hyperbole, whereas less transparent cases would likely not be captured with this set of criteria.

This is a serious shortcoming if considering that some examples may only be hyperbolic in given contexts (Claridge 2011: 16) or occupy a lower position on the scale of intensity (Claridge 2011: 9-10). Bearing this in mind, the identification procedure in the present thesis will combine a number of guidelines provided in the literature and take into account all the formal realizations of hyperbole discussed in the previous subchapter (see Section 4.3. for the method of identification).

3.3. Figurative language in CMC and ELF research

An important and generally agreed upon point is that hyperbole is understudied compared to other non-literal forms (Cano Mora 2003: 13; Cano Mora 2008: 105; Beare & Meade 2015: 64; Carston & Wearing 2015: 79; Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017: 41; Popa-Wyatt 2020: 91). This becomes even more obvious when attempting an analysis on hyperbole in computer-mediated communication and English as a lingua franca communication, where studies devoted to investigating hyperbole have yet to be published. Therefore, studies on other forms of figurative language from these two areas (i.e. CMC and ELF research) will be discussed below as means of understanding how other types of figurative language closely related to hyperbole are constructed in CMC and ELF settings.

3.3.1. Figurative language in CMC research

In literature on figurative language in spoken contexts, insights on hyperbole can often be found in literature devoted to irony (McCarthy and Carter 2004: 150). The same pattern is observable in research on online communication, where insights on

hyperbole are found in studies on verbal irony (Hancock 2004; Whalen, Pexman & Gill 2009; Whalen et al. 2013).

Originally listed as one of the forms of irony alongside sarcasm, rhetorical questions, jocularity, and understatement in a study on verbal irony in face-to-face communication (Gibbs 2000: 12), hyperbole was investigated along the same lines in Hancock's (2004) study. Hancock's (2004: 452) is a comparative study, focusing on the production of hyperbole in elicited face-to-face and synchronous chat dyads. The main differences between the two communicative settings observed by the author are the overall higher usage of irony in CMC settings, more frequently signaled instances of verbal irony in the face-to-face setting, and fewer reactions to verbal irony in the CMC setting (Hancock 2004: 454, 455, 456). However, among the five types of irony explored, hyperbole and understatement were the least frequently used ones (Hancock 2004: 454). When it comes to the signals used to introduce irony in CMC, the author documented ellipsis, amplifiers, emoticons, and punctuation (Hancock 2004: 455).

The same types of irony were investigated in Whalen, Pexman, and Gill's (2009) analysis of email communication, and Whalen et al.'s (2013) analysis of blog posts. Contrary to Hancock's findings, hyperbole was the rhetorical figure most frequently used in both the email exchanges (Whalen, Pexman & Gill 2009: 273) and the blogs (Whalen et al. 2013: 563). Observing the highest usage of exclamations points as cues for irony in the email exchanges, the authors note that "exclamation points likely add emphasis in a way similar to using hyperbole", whereas "hyphens, parentheses, and ellipses [...] assist the reader in detecting those portions that are to be interpreted non-literally" (Whalen, Pexman and Gill 2009: 275).

While these findings provide valuable insights into the use of ironic hyperbole in online communication, the studies differ in many aspects from the present study.

Firstly, hyperbole is only analyzed as a form of irony and is not the primary focus of either study. Secondly, the studies either feature elicited data (Hancock 2004) or work with an asynchronous type of CMC communication (Whalen, Pexman & Gill 2009; Whalen et al. 2013). And thirdly, they are not ELF-based studies. In the following, previous work on figurative language from the domain of spoken ELF communication will be outlined and discussed.

3.3.2. Figurative language in ELF research

Considering that so far, ELF scholars have not studied hyperbole, but have tended to focus on metaphors and idioms, this chapter takes a closer look at publications that reveal how idioms and metaphors are constructed and used in ELF. What makes these publications relevant for the present thesis is the close connection between hyperbole and other devices, such as idioms and metaphors (see Section 3.1.3.). Intending to understand how hyperbole might behave in ELF contexts on the basis of what is known about figurative language in ELF contexts, the section focuses on functions of non-literal language in ELF and insights on “ELF-distinctive” (Franceschi 2013: 75) realizations of figurative forms.

Both phenomena have been identified as valuable assets to communication and have not been observed to hinder understanding or the quality of interactions in ELF settings (Pitzl 2018b: 249). Among the array of functions of idioms and metaphors documented in the literature, the most prominent are linked to humor (Franceschi 2013: 95; Pitzl 2018a: 140; 2018b: 240), establishment of rapport, and group membership (Seidlhofer 2009b: 197; Pitzl 2018a: 140), “[s]ignaling [...] multilingual identities” (Pitzl 2018b: 240), as well as a function of summarizing, adding emphasis, and enhancing explicitness in communication (Pitzl 2018b: 240).

An important factor in achieving communicative benefits through rhetorical devices is the orientation of ELF users towards the communicative episode they are engaged in (Seidlhofer 2009b: 201). In Seidlhofer's (2009b) study on accommodation and idioms, the author illustrates that cooperation is achieved by not aiming at "native-speaker idiomaticity" (Seidlhofer 2009b: 201), but producing "creative expressions which do not conform to [...] the established idiomatic wording" (Seidlhofer 2009b: 203). In fact, as Seidlhofer (2009b: 211) adds, "they will generally only function effectively if they do not". Creativity and innovation in the use of metaphors and idioms have also been documented by Pitzl (2012, 2018a, 2018b), both in "formal variation[s] of idioms" (Pitzl 2018a: 154) and in novel meanings given to established idioms (Pitzl 2018b: 234). As illustrated in Pitzl (2018b: 238), a frequent way of introducing innovation is by replacing a word in an idiom with a semantically similar word, "*draw the limits* (cf. 'draw the line') (Pitzl 2018b: 238) [emphasis in the original]. With regard to creativity exhibited on the level of meaning, Pitzl (2018a: 157) has also discussed metaphors that on a formal level resemble L1 English phrases, yet convey a different meaning in the ELF interaction (see the analysis of the idiom *head and tails* in Pitzl 2018a: 157- 158).

In addition, as Pitzl (2018a: 156) explains, creativity in idiomatic language is connected to "the use of metaphors and the concept of metaphoricity" (Pitzl 2018a: 156; see also Pitzl 2012, 2018b). In such cases, creativity is achieved through the process of "re-introduc[ing] or re-emphasiz[ing] [metaphoricity] in otherwise conventionalized idioms" (Pitzl 2018b: 236). Creative metaphors in ELF communication are observed to originate from idioms that already exist in English, from idioms that are introduced from other available languages (Pitzl 2018b: 238-

239), or as a result of an immediate “metaphorical image [...] created ad hoc by the speaker” (Pitzl 2018b: 239).

The final point made in this subsection is that although these studies make no explicit reference to the use of hyperbole in ELF settings, their findings undoubtedly carry significant implications for concepts relevant for an ELF study on hyperbole. Aside from providing evidence that creative metaphors and idioms, and by extension forms of figurative language, tend to not be “disrupting factor[s] in ELF conversations” (Pitzl 2012: 46), these insights also emphasize the importance of considering “what terms like *idiomatic*, *idiom* and *idiomaticity* actually mean” (Pitzl 2018a: 39), and the same applies to the term *cooperative* (see Seidlhofer 2009b: 200- 202). Bearing this in mind, the present thesis aims to reveal whether such conclusions can be drawn for the use of hyperbole and for computer-mediated ELF conversations as the setting in which figurative language is used.

3.4. Hyperbole: Summary of the chapter

Throughout the previous chapters, I have outlined and discussed theoretical concepts relevant for the study of hyperbole, i.e. the topic of the present thesis. In doing so, I have highlighted that what this thesis combines in a qualitative study are phenomena that interact on a daily basis, which is nonetheless still to be mirrored in linguistic research. That exaggeration is a common feature of communication goes without saying; yet, a scientific study on the phenomenon requires careful considerations as to what the word *hyperbole* means and how it can be communicated in a given context.

For the purposes of the present thesis, hyperbole (used synonymously with the terms *exaggeration* and *overstatement*) is defined as a rhetorical device that conveys exaggerated and subjective interpretation of reality and is not meant to be taken

literally by the recipient. Exaggeration is achieved in numerous ways; the nature and the range of its realizations will most likely be determined by the context and the medium used for communication. Bearing this in mind, in addition to already established and prominent manifestations of hyperbole (extreme and overstated expressions in any syntactic category), this thesis leaves room for any realizations of overstatement that are specific to the dataset at hand. More specifically, it acknowledges the role of the computer medium through which hyperbole may be expressed through orthography or emojis, and the role of ELF in illustrating that there might be more to what we know and consider idiomatic, metaphoric, and even hyperbolic. The use of terms in relation to hyperbole is illustrated in Figure 1.

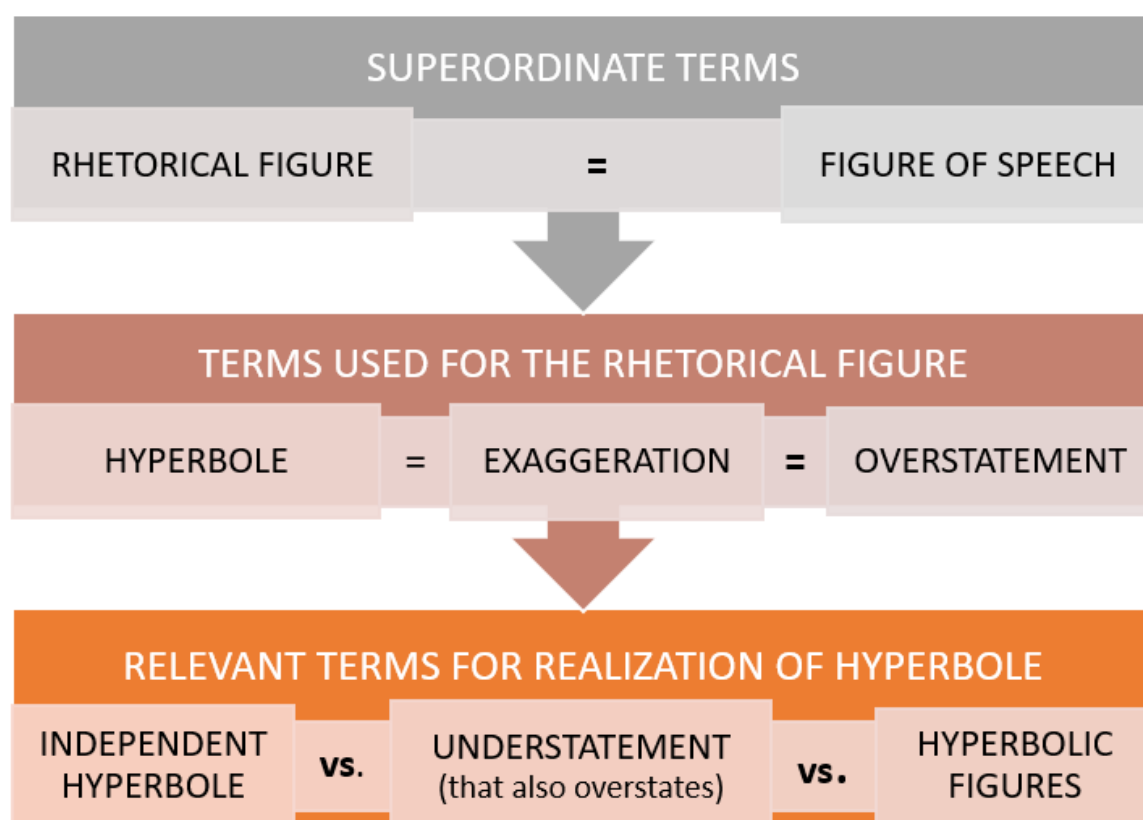


Fig. 1: The use of terms in relation to hyperbole in the present thesis

Shifting from the theoretical into the empirical part of the paper, the next section discusses the nature of the present dataset and engages with and operationalizes the

TIGs framework on a practical level. Also, the next chapter outlines the methodological procedure and digital tools used for the identification and classification of hyperbole in the present study.

4. Towards the micro-diachronic analysis of hyperbole in online ELF interactions

This chapter is dedicated to an overview of the dataset used in the present thesis and the methodology of the analysis. As mentioned before, the study is qualitative in nature; it seeks to explore the use of hyperbole in online ELF chats on the basis of WhatsApp messages exchanged between the members of two groups of students. This is done by relying on the analytical tools developed for the TIGs framework (see Pitzl 2018c, 2019, 2020), which will be elaborated on and applied in the following.

Before engaging with the method of analysis, I will briefly share the process of data collection. In Section 4.2., the group profiles of the two TIGs are presented and discussed, followed by a subchapter devoted to the micro-diachronic approach. The last part of the chapter is devoted to the methodological principles related to the identification and classification of hyperboles in this study.

4.1. The process of data collection

In order to explore how the use of hyperbole develops among ELF speakers over time, the aim was to collect data from groups with either minimal or no familiarity, whose members are getting to know each other throughout the course of the communication. This would enable insights into how hyperbole evolves over time, when it is used, and possibly why it is used at specific times.

The result of the data collection process are online chats between two groups of master students, both of whom study at the University of Vienna. The two groups, referred to as *the Linguists* and *the Economists* after their respective fields of study, used English as a lingua franca to communicate via WhatsApp while working on their group projects for the university. All participants agreed to share their chat interactions by signing

consent sheets. The consent sheets as well as the speaker information sheets were used from Pitzl's "ELF in TIGs" project and adapted to the needs of the present project. It should be noted that the design of the speaker information sheets used enabled insights into linguistic repertoires of the participants. The insights were used to create the visual representation of the participants' linguistic repertoires (see Tables 2 and 3 below).

The chats were anonymized so that any personal information, such as participant names, nicknames, addresses, names of other mentioned individuals and companies, are protected. Thus, the names of the group members used in this paper are pseudonyms, whereas other names or titles are substituted with labels such as *prof1* or *company1*.

Both groups were formed around the beginning of a semester and actively communicated and worked on their projects for approximately four months resulting in a dataset of nearly 18.000 words. With the help of the MaxQDA software, the coded segments (i.e. messages) for each individual participant were exported as a text file, excluding the participant ID. The number of words that the messages contained were automatically indicated in the text file ¹². This includes all items (lexical, but also emojis), as well as the items produced by WhatsApp (such as *message deleted*). The participant IDs are not included in the word count. The following table provides the total number of messages and words produced in the Linguists and the Economists TIGs.

¹² Considering that the number of words was indicated in the text file automatically, the number of words stands for the number of items (lexical items, emojis) separated by a space. Thus, for instance, a single emoji as well as a cluster of emojis not separated by a space, were counted as one word.

Table 1: Number of participants and size of the dataset

TIGs	Number of participants	Number of messages	Number of words
Linguists	4	667	9260
Economists	7	687	8867

The Linguists are four students who communicated during the summer term of 2019, whereas the Economists consist of seven students who worked on their project and communicated online during the winter semester of 2019/2020. Considering that the Economists number three members more in comparison to the Linguists, one would expect the discrepancy between the exchanged messages or words to be greater. Yet, as shown in Table 1, the numbers indicating the total of exchanged messages and words are rather close, resulting in a lower communication rate between the Economists. It is however essential to consider that the groups differ in many aspects, which could have affected why the groups communicated as much as they did and in the manner in which they did. The characteristics of the groups are addressed in greater detail in the following subsection.

It is further important to note that I am one of the students in the Linguists group. However, our communication ended with the submission of the shared project at the end of the summer semester of 2019, whereas my decision to use the data for the thesis was made in 2020. Also, when it comes to the Economists, the idea to use their online conversations for the present thesis was communicated to the group towards the end of their collaboration, and the chat log was acquired after the groups stopped communicating. Considering that the participants of both groups were unaware that their chat conversations would ever be used for linguistic analysis, the conversations qualify as naturally-occurring.

Finally, it should be mentioned that both groups also communicated offline and met in person to discuss and work on their projects. The transcripts of the groups' spoken face-to-face communication were not obtained and are thus not included in the present thesis.

4.2. Establishing group parameters

This subsection takes a closer look at the Linguists and the Economists and explores several characteristics of the two groups. Thus, in the following, it will become clear in how far the two TIGs differ in terms of linguistic diversity, levels of familiarity between the members, and the nature of communication.

4.2.1. Linguistic diversity and shared resources

As noted in the chapter devoted to Transient International Groups (cf. Section 2.3.3.), a profile of any ELF constellation can be established on the basis of various parameters. Thus, a group can be positioned on a scale from symmetrically/asymmetrically bilateral to different degrees of diverse (Pitzl 2019: 10) concerning, for instance, levels of familiarity, location of the interaction, and linguistic and cultural factors. In the present thesis, on the grounds of the members' entire linguistic reservoirs, the Linguists are an asymmetrically bilateral, and the Economists a highly diverse TIG in Pitzl's (2018c; 2019, 2020) terminology. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the Linguists' and the Economists' Individual Multilingual Repertoires (IMRs) and Multilingual Resource Pools (MRPs) (cf. Pitzl 2018c).

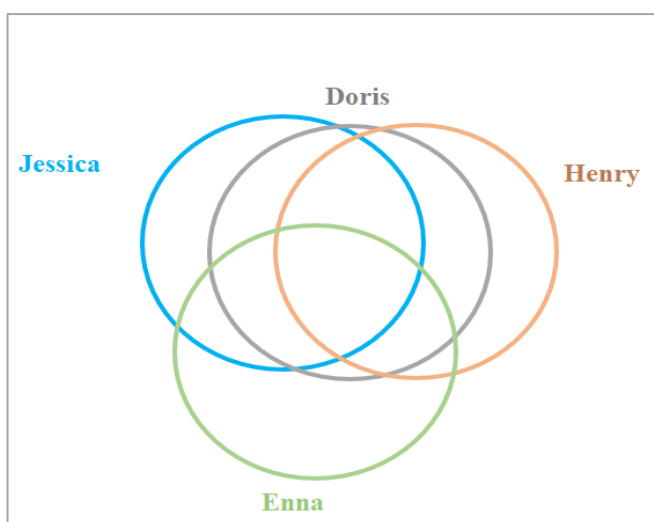


Fig 2: Linguists –Shared multilingual resource pool

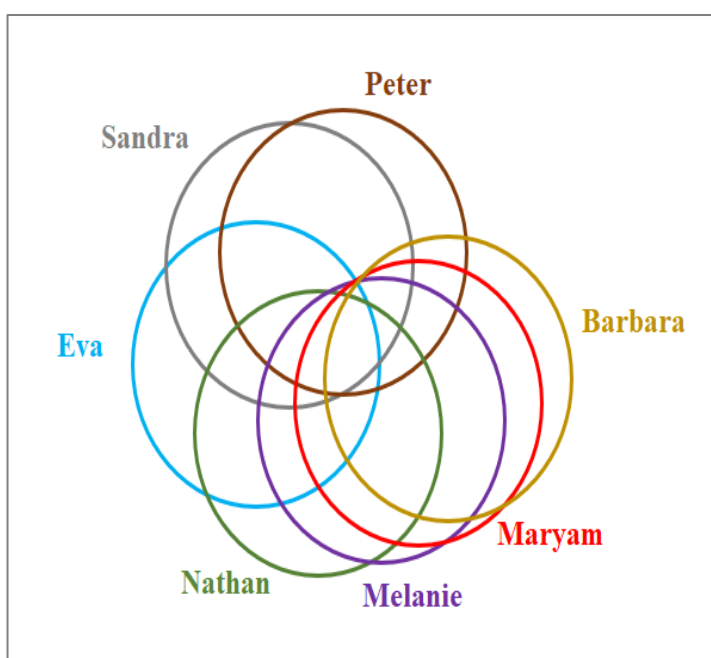


Fig. 3: Economists – Shared multilingual resource pool

Based on Pitzl's schematic representations of the participants' individual and shared linguistic resources (see Pitzl 2018c: 35; 2020: 107), the two figures illustrate the linguistic character of the two groups analyzed in the present thesis at the initial stage of their communication. As indicated in Figure 2, the asymmetric bilateral nature of the Linguists comes from the fact that three of its members, Jessica, Henry, and Doris, linguistically share more with one another than they do with Enna. On the other hand, Figure 3 illustrates the high degree of linguistic diversity that exists among the

members of the Economists. Namely, having the same mother tongues, Peter and Sandra, as well as Maryam, Melanie, and Barbara, are positioned closer to one another. Nathan and Eva are the only representatives of their mother tongues in the group; however, their linguistic repertoires overlap to different degrees with other teammates. The entire record of the languages listed by the participants and thus brought into the interactions is provided in the Tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2: Linguistic repertoires of the Linguists

	EN	GE	B/C/S	SP	IT	FR	HU	RU	PO
Henry		L1							
Doris		L1							
Jessica		L1							
Enna			L1						

Table 3: Linguistic repertoires of the Economists

	EN	GE	B/C/S	DU	FR	SP	SL	IT	JA	RU	CH	FA	LA
Barbara		L1											
Maryam		L1											
Melanie		L1											
Nathan	L1												
Eva				L1									
Sandra		L1											
Peter		L1											

Tables 2 and 3 show all the languages ¹³ listed by the participants. The tables are designed in such a manner that they clearly indicate the overlapping linguistic resources between all group members, as well languages that only two or three members share. It should be noted that the participants rated their languages according to the frequency of usage and the age of acquisition; however, this is not shown in the tables above. The point of the illustration is merely to consider all linguistic resources available to all, some, and only individual participants that may or may not play a role in the way they communicate.

4.2.2. Levels of familiarity

Another variable of importance in establishing the Linguists' and the Economists' group profiles is the level of familiarity between the group members. To begin with the Linguists, even though as a group they do not have a shared history and have never communicated as a group before embarking on the group project, this TIG features two pairs whose relationships predate the formation of the group. Enna and Doris, as well as Jessica and Henry, already had established relationships when the group was created. As such, they are a symmetrically-bilateral TIG concerning the factor of familiarity (see Figure 4). On the other hand, the Economists were all completely unacquainted and therefore a highly diverse TIG in this respect as well (see Figure 5).

¹³ In the present thesis, Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian count as one language (see also Figure 2).

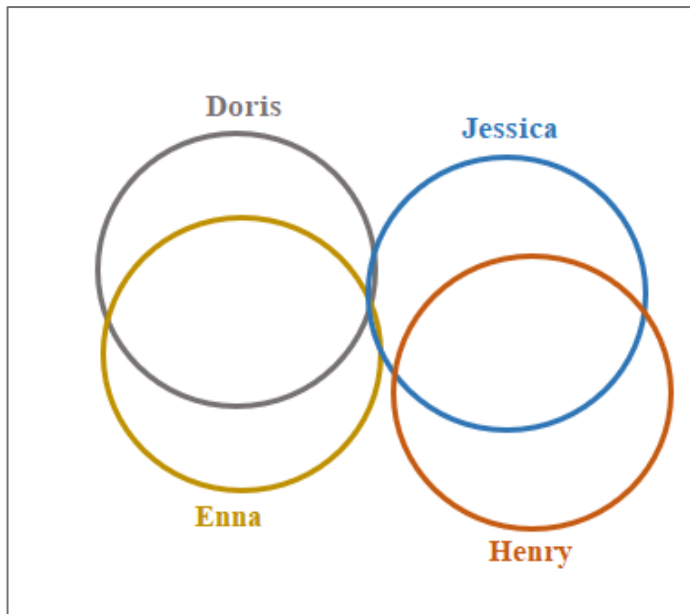


Fig. 4: Linguists – Schematic representation of the level of familiarity

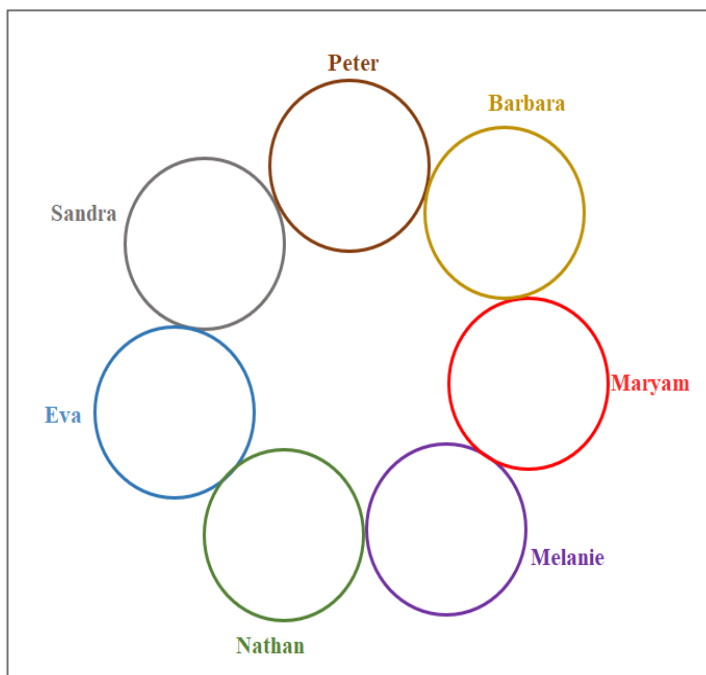


Fig. 5: Economists – Schematic representation of the level of familiarity

What the following two figures demonstrate is that even though the groups were formed with the same objective from an academic perspective, the communicative tasks they are faced with appear rather different. Thus, the sense of *us and them* that the Linguists start with is here in stark contrast with the Economists constellation in which all seven members share the task of establishing an understanding with people

they have never met before. The ways this might have been mirrored in the groups' interactions are addressed in the following subsection.

4.2.3. Interaction management and individual contributions

Following Pitzl's work on TIGs (cf. 2018c; 2019; 2020), this section focuses on interaction management and the individual contributions of the participants. As Pitzl (2019: 11) argues, "interaction and participation profiles provide concrete empirical information on the interaction as such". Thus, in the following, individual production of messages and words by each participant in the two TIGs is presented with the aim of gaining an insight into how much each participant contributed to communication.

To return briefly to the results presented in Table 1, the Linguists communicated online for nearly four months producing 667 messages which total to 9260 words. In the same amount of time, the Economists produced 687 messages, which contained 8867 words. Considering that the two TIGs differ in size (i.e. four vs. seven participants) one might expect the results to differ to a greater extent as well. The manner in which the interactions of the two groups were organized and how the individual participants contributed to the communication is discussed in the following.

Given the nature of the dataset, individual contributions of the participants can be determined on the basis of the number of messages and the number of words. Considering that an accurate image of how prominent and active each participant was in the interactions may be relevant for analyzing the distribution of hyperboles, in the following both will be considered.

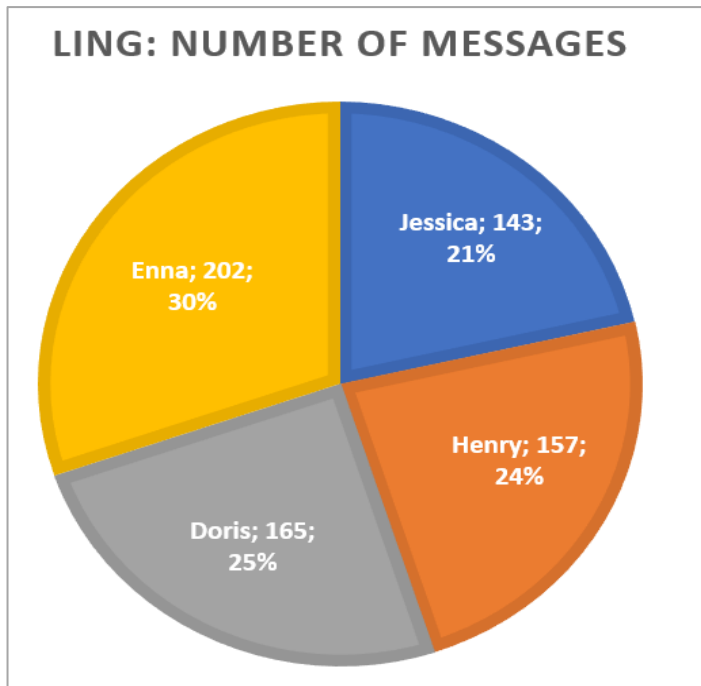


Fig. 6: Linguists: Distribution of messages

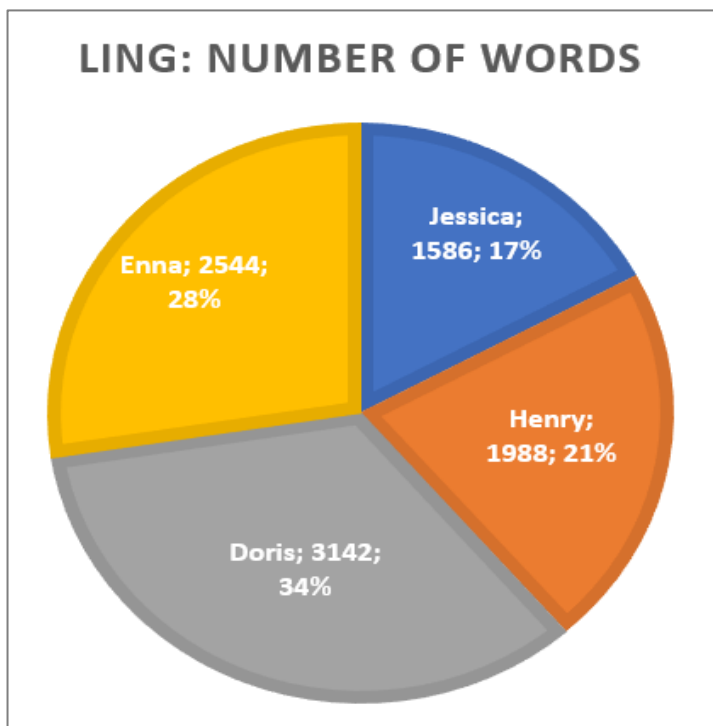


Fig. 7: Linguists: Distribution of words

As can be seen in Figure 6, according to the number of messages, Enna is the student who contributed the most to the interaction. The remaining messages are almost evenly distributed among the other three students. However, as illustrated in Figure 7, Doris is the participant who communicated the most in terms of the number of

words. Thus, the importance of considering both in establishing individual contributions lies in the fact that some participants deliver long messages as “complete idea[s]” (Markman 2013: 542), while others are keen on communicating their thoughts through “sequential transmissions that are grammatically part of the same [thought]” (Baron 2013: 145).

With this in mind, even though the differences between Figure 6 and Figure 7 are not drastic, they do reveal that Doris communicated considerably more (i.e. higher number of words), but in fewer and longer messages. On the other hand, Jessica contributed fewer words than might be expected on the basis of Figure 6 but broke up her contributions in a larger number of (shorter) messages. Consider the individual contributions for the Economists below.

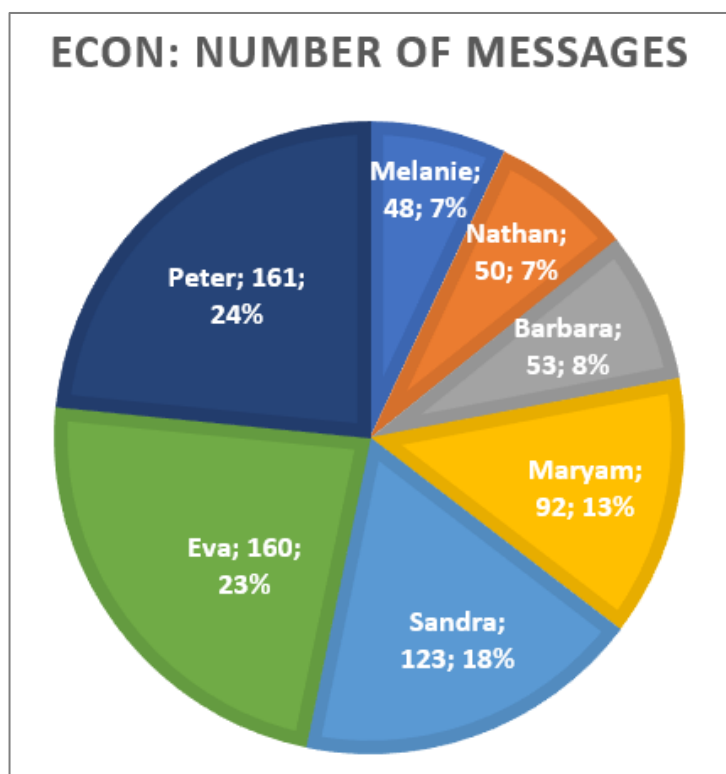


Fig. 8: Economists: Distribution of messages

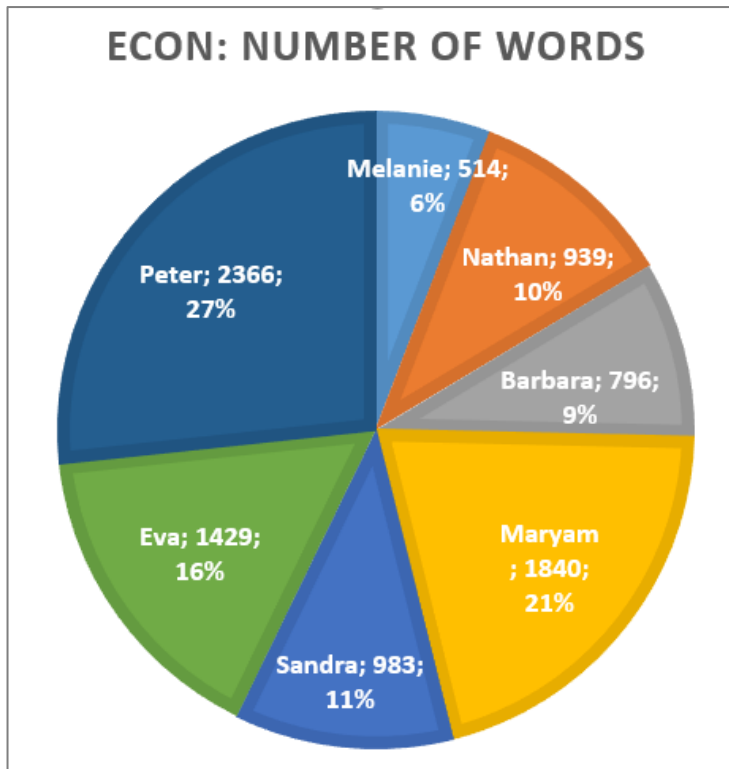


Fig. 9: Economists: Distribution of words

As displayed in Figure 8, when it comes to the number of messages, Eva and Peter produced nearly half of the total number of messages in this group, whereas the other half is unevenly distributed between the remaining four students. Compared to the Linguists, the differences between the production of messages and the production of words in the Economists' chat are substantial. Comparing Figures 8 and 9, the situation is not much different for Peter, who is still the most prominent (i.e. verbally active) member in terms of words and messages. However, there is a striking difference for Eva and Sandra, who seem to have communicated fewer words, and for Maryam, who is, according to Figure 9, a notably more prominent member of the group.

Insights into individual contributions of the participants bear significance for an understanding of how the overall number of produced hyperbolic expressions was distributed among the students (cf. Pitzl 2018c, 2019, 2020). Nevertheless, in order to

monitor the development of hyperbole micro-diachronically throughout the interactions, it is necessary to segment the transcripts into measurable units of time. The strategy for applying the micro-diachronic analysis is the focus of the following pages.

4.3. Methodology: The coding strategies

4.3.1. The micro-diachronic approach

With the aim of investigating the development of hyperbole in ELF students' chat interactions, the present thesis relies on the micro-diachronic approach to data analysis (Pitzl 2018c; 2019; 2020). By merging qualitative analysis of the phenomenon in question “with the close-meshed structural annotation of time segments and/or utterance sequences” (Pitzl 2019: 11)”, this approach provides a window into how the use of hyperbole, including its forms and functions, changes and develops throughout the semester that the groups spend communicating. As such, it is also a fitting choice for a study of hyperbole, seeing as its usage has been described as group characteristic (Claridge 2011: 72, 88), correlative with the levels of familiarity (Claridge 2011: 12), the nature of relationships (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 160), and shared lingua-cultural norms (Beare & Meade 2015: 72) between the communication partners.

Following Pitzl (2018c; 2020), the annotation of hyperbolic content is supplemented by manually assigned structural codes in order to observe the phenomenon and the interaction micro-diachronically. In Pitzl's (2018c; 2020) studies, this is done through annotation of equally long time segments (see Pitzl 2020: 108), which are used to observe “the chronology of how an interaction develops in real time” (Pitzl 2020: 108). However, the data analyzed in the present thesis is of a different nature and the dimension of time has a different function in computer-mediated communication. To

elaborate, on the one hand, both chats can be described as a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous communication (see Section 2.2.2.), meaning that both groups engage in highly interactive episodes and communicate in real time, but also contribute at different times, minutes, hours or days later (i.e. asynchronously). Also, considering that the students *met* on different dates and often marked the interactions with exchanges of opening and closing greetings, the dates are here regarded as separate communicative episodes and are used as segments for sequential coding.

Thus, structural coding in the present thesis consists of (a) creating a code for every date that the groups communicated and (b) manually annotating all the exchanged messages with the corresponding date. For this purpose, the MaxQDA software¹⁴ was used. This provided episodes by which gradual development of the interactions can be measured, as well as insights into how many messages were exchanged on each given day. The results of sequential coding are 34 different dates for the Linguists and 56 for the Economists, which in both groups span over the period of approximately four months. The chronology of the interactions is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, where the micro-diachronic perspective of the groups' entire communication is used "as a backdrop against which [hyperbole]" (Pitzl 2020: 109) is analyzed. In addition to segments based on the dates of communication, the analysis is supplemented by additional micro-segments (see Sections 5.2. and 5.3.1.).

4.3.2. Identification and classification of hyperbolic items

It has already been established that hyperbole appears in many different forms, which has resulted in a large number of documented realization of the phenomenon. However, attempts of categorization on the basis of its realizations have so far proven

¹⁴ Figures 6 - 9 in Chapter 4, as well as Figures 11 - 13; 15 - 17 in Chapter 5 were created on the basis of the results obtained from the MaxQDA codings.

to be challenging, seeing as the borders between categories are not easily determined. In the present thesis, the focus of the identification process is to yield “hyperbolic items” (Cano Mora 2009: 28), which Cano Mora (2009: 28) defines as follows:

hyperbolic item [is] the minimal unit of sense or meaning, whether a word, phrase, or expression, which per se, given the appropriate context, conveys an idea of excess or extremity.

It is important to note that exaggerated items “may consist of several exaggerated elements” (Cano Mora 2009: 28), which means that a hyperbolic phrase, for instance, is coded as a single hyperbolic item even though it may contain more than one hyperbolic element. Consider the following example from the chat between the Economists:

1) 180 Peter: @Maryam i am in a **huge chaos** until thursday [...] (ECON)

Even though both the adjective *huge* and the noun *chaos* are hyperbolic, they are used in combination to describe a single referent and thus constitute a single hyperbolic item.

In addition, following Ferré (2014), I focus not only on verbal realizations of hyperbole but also on non-verbal. In Ferré’s study, non-verbal forms include gestural and prosodic hyperbole (Ferré 2014: 26). However, even though my dataset does not feature an audio-visual component, the participants’ gestures and prosody are communicated in CMC-specific ways – through emoticons and typographic features (see Section 2.1.2.). Hyperbolic items in this sense refer to non-verbal hyperbolic items that serve as the main carriers of hyperbolic meaning that is not already conveyed through a lexical element. As mentioned in Ferré (2014: 26), prosody and gestures are frequently used to strengthen already existing hyperbolic elements, in which case emoticons, punctuation, or spelling would not be included as hyperbolic items in the

present study. To identify verbal and non-verbal hyperbole, the method of identification consists of three steps outlined below.

The first round of coding focuses on verbal hyperbole. In order to identify verbal hyperbolic items, I rely on examples provided in the literature and all the realizations mentioned in Section 3.2.2. To reiterate, these include extreme, absolute, universal words, phrases, clauses, and sentences (see Section 3.2.2 for more detail) but also less extreme items that “upscale and magnify reality to varying degrees” (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 161), yet still express “more than necessary or justified” (Norrick 1982: 169). Thus, the first round of coding includes a close reading of the chats and coding all items that fit the description listed above.

In the second round of coding, the focus is on CMC-specific hyperbole, i.e. gestural and prosodic hyperbole expressed through capitalization, punctuation, spelling, or emoticons. As previously noted, these are only coded if they carry hyperbolic meaning on their own, i.e. if what they communicate appears exaggerated and hardly possible in the given context. Consider an example in which the non-verbal element clearly only strengthens an already existing hyperbolic element (2) and (3) in which it serves as exaggerations itself.

2) 439 Sandra: awesomeeee (ECON)

3) 129 Eva: You had to ditch organization and HR? 😱 (ECON)

130 Peter: Nono no

In Example (2), Sandra reacts to the news that significant progress had been made on the group project. The word *awesome* is an instance of verbal conventional hyperbole and already carries hyperbolic meaning in that the student is hardly in awe of the good news she had just received. Thus, the repetition of the final character only contributes to emphasize the meaning of *awesome*. However, in Example (3), there are no

exaggerated lexical forms; exaggeration here stems solely from the emoticon in line 129 that implies that the participant is in a state of utter shock and disbelief, which hardly represents the reality.

The final step of annotation of hyperbolic realizations consists of their classification. The following figure illustrates the coding scheme used for classification of hyperbolic items.

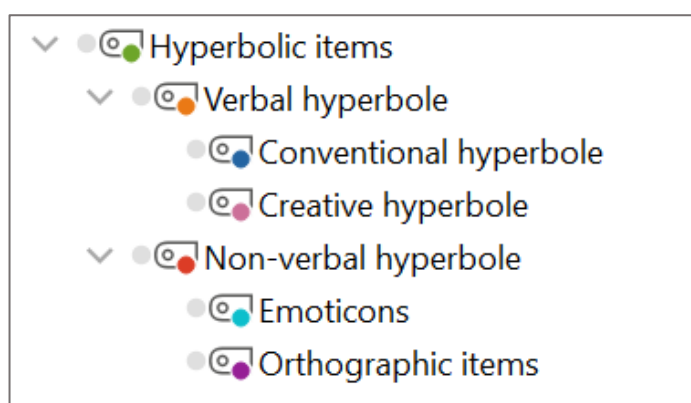


Fig. 10: The coding scheme for the classification of hyperbolic items¹⁵

Following Claridge (2011: 100), verbal hyperbole in the present thesis is classified into conventional and creative. Under the label *conventional* “are well-established, repeatedly used expressions” (Claridge 2011: 100) that tend to require “less inferencing” (Claridge 2011: 131) and are often “neglected [...] and taken for granted” (Claridge 2011: 93). On the other hand, creative hyperboles “are nonce usages and formal and semantic neologisms” (Claridge 2011: 99), which “fill a specific speaker’s expressive need at a given point in time [...] [and] usually only occur once” (Claridge 2011: 98). This category is meant for, for instance, hyperbole mixed with another rhetorical device. The second group, non-verbal hyperboles, is divided into emoticons and orthographic elements (such as punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and acronyms).

¹⁵ Figure 10 comes from the MaxQDA software.

5. Hyperbole in computer-mediated ELF chats

Before diving into the micro-diachronic analysis of hyperbole, this section provides a brief overview of the overall usage of hyperbolic items in the present dataset (i.e. the Economists and the Linguists TIGs), as well as the most commonly used types of hyperbole. As noted in the previous chapter, hyperbolic items in the present thesis are categorized into verbal hyperbole, which can be conventional or creative, and non-verbal, which is further classified into emoticons and orthographic items. Even though the analysis in the thesis is primarily qualitative, the quantification of hyperbolic items presented here is meant to shed light on the most prominent realizations of hyperbole and will aid the micro-diachronic analysis in the subsections that follow.

5.1. Frequencies and forms of hyperbolic items

As discussed before, even though the two TIGs differ in the size, degree of linguistic diversity, and level of familiarity between the members (see Section 4.2.), the communicative outcomes are rather similar concerning the number of exchanged messages and words. As will be shown below, the same applies to their production of hyperbolic items. The process of annotation yielded a total of 154 hyperbolic items in the chats between the Linguists dataset and a total of 170 hyperboles in the Economists' chats. Interestingly, similarities between the two TIGs are also apparent in their choices of specific types of hyperboles that are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Distribution of verbal and non-verbal hyperbole in the Linguists' and the Economists' chats

Hyperbolic items	Linguists	Economists
Verbal hyperbole	69	88
Conventional	49	79
Creative	20	9
Non-verbal hyperbole	85	82
Emoticons	65	66
Orthographic items	20	16
Σ TOTAL	154	170

Table 4 illustrates the total number of hyperbolic items produced by the two TIGs. The main categories (verbal and non-verbal hyperbole) and their totals are highlighted in blue, whereas the distribution of the total per subtype is indicated below each main category. Whereas the difference in the distribution of verbal and non-verbal is minimal in the Economists data (i.e. 88 verbal vs. 82 non-verbal hyperboles), in the Linguists' chat communication, the non-verbal hyperboles are the clearly preferred type (i.e. 69 verbal vs. 85 non-verbal hyperboles). Concerning the subtypes, under the category of verbal hyperbole, conventional items outnumbered instances of creative hyperboles, whereas in the non-verbal category emoticons outnumbered hyperboles expressed through orthographic elements in both chats.

Conventional hyperbolic items were in both chats most commonly expressed through intensification (*awesome, perfect, great, amazing, brilliant*) and through expressions of “universality and non-exceptionality” (Cano Mora 2009: 30), including items such as *anything, everything, all, any, whatever, everything*. It should be noted that such items were not coded as hyperbolic if there was evidence that suggested that the items were used literally (e.g. a participant in the Economists chat communicating that they did not manage to contact *anyone* that would help with the project). Both groups also

produced expressions that read as both understatements and overstatements (*there is just one thing, in a sec, in a minute, a few mins late, immediately*). Less frequent were conventional expressions of emotion (*love* and *hate*) which were only produced by the Linguists, and expressions of “absolute necessity” (Beare & Meade 2015: 77), such as (*we/ I have to, we will have to*) and expressions of “non-existence” (Cano Mora 2009: 30) and impossibility (*nothing, there is no time/ date*).

Creative verbal hyperboles, as can be seen in Table 4, are especially rare in the chat between the Economists, who only produced nine creative hyperbolic items. The Linguists seem to have been more playful in their production of hyperboles, resulting in twenty creative hyperbolic items. With regard to the range of creative hyperboles, most commonly creativity was achieved through combining hyperbole with other rhetorical devices, such as idioms, metaphors, and rhetorical questions.

Non-verbal hyperbolic items were in both groups most frequently realized through emoticons. It is important to note that not all emoticons used throughout the chats signaled hyperbolic meaning; numerous emoticons seemed to have been used with the aim of brightening up the message, signaling the intent of the communicative act, or simply as a visualization of an existing hyperbolic item. Nonetheless, emoticons in general are a convenient and economic means of expressing emotions, attitudes, or reactions, and the same applies to the hyperbolic ones. In both chats the students used emojis to communicate that their interlocutors’ or their own message was extremely funny, resulting in emojis of a face crying with laughter, which were often also delivered in series, rendering them even more emphatic and hyperbolic. In addition, extremely negative emotions were also expressed via emoticons, including extreme shock, fear, and sadness.

When it comes to elements of orthography, the hyperbolic meaning was achieved through capitalization, punctuation, and spelling in both datasets. The most prominent type of orthographically expressed hyperboles was in both TIGs spelling. For instance, the exaggerated meaning was achieved through acronyms (*lol*, *omg*, *asap*), representation of laughter through characters *hahahahahahhha* or *bahaha*, and capitalization (*WHAT*). Both chats also revealed examples in which several orthographic elements in combination delivered a message that against the context denoted an extreme or excessive notion.

Having outlined the total frequencies of hyperbolic expressions in the dataset, in the following subsections I focus on each TIG individually and apply the micro-diachronic analysis in the attempt to understand the development of hyperbole in the chats, as well as why certain forms might have been preferred by certain participants at certain times throughout the semester.

5.2. Hyperbole in the Linguists' chat

As already stated, the four students that form the TIG referred to as the Linguists produced 667 messages in the course of their teamwork and a total of 154 instances of hyperbole. The total number of messages and hyperbolic instances was distributed between 34 communicative episodes, i.e. different dates on which they communicated online (cf. Section 4.3.1.). The distribution of the total number of messages between Doris, Enna, Henry, and Jessica will be displayed and discussed in detail in the following (see Figure 11).

5.2.1. The Linguists' chats and hyperboles through a micro-diachronic lens

Figure 11 (see below) illustrates the evolution of the Linguists' chat communication across the 34 days on which the group communicated. In addition, it indicates how many messages were produced by each participant on a given day.

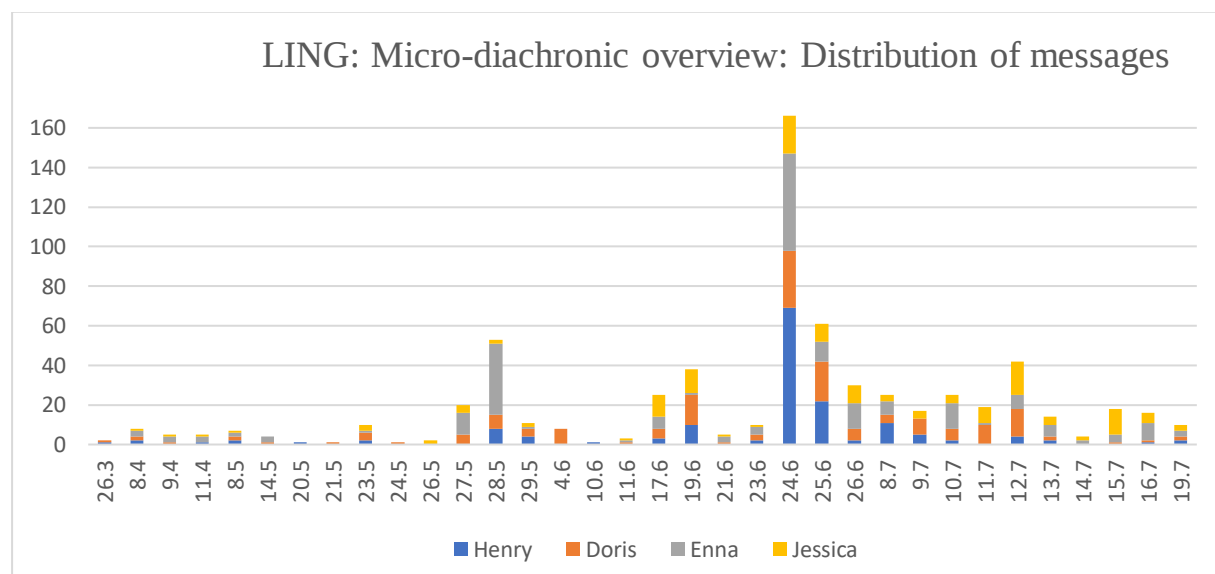


Fig. 11: Micro-diachronic overview of the Linguists' exchanged messages

Looking at the dates, it becomes apparent that the frequency of the group's chat interactions increased as the semester progressed. Starting with one communicative episode in March when the group chat was created, and only three events in April, the frequency of chat interactions changed in May when the group used the chat on ten different dates. The same trend continued in the remaining two months, which also feature 10 communicative episodes each.

However, as reflected in the figure, the number of messages did not increase consistently over the course of the semester. Instead, already at the first glance, one can isolate peaks in the figure that represent the most communicatively productive days. The majority of such days is concentrated in the period between the end of June and the first half of July, which is the final phase of the semester. The most active

communicative episode in the Linguists' chat communication and the most intriguing result presented in Figure 11, is June 24th. On this day, a quarter of the group's entire communicative WhatsApp output was produced, resulting in 166 exchanged messages. Also, seeing as in the majority of communicative episodes the Linguists exchanged less than 20 messages, the events that stand out by the widest margin are May 28th, June 19th, June 25th, and July 12th which range from 30 to 60 exchanged messages.

Shifting the focus to the distribution of hyperbole, in the following figure the same visualization method is used to display how hyperbolic items were used throughout the semester.

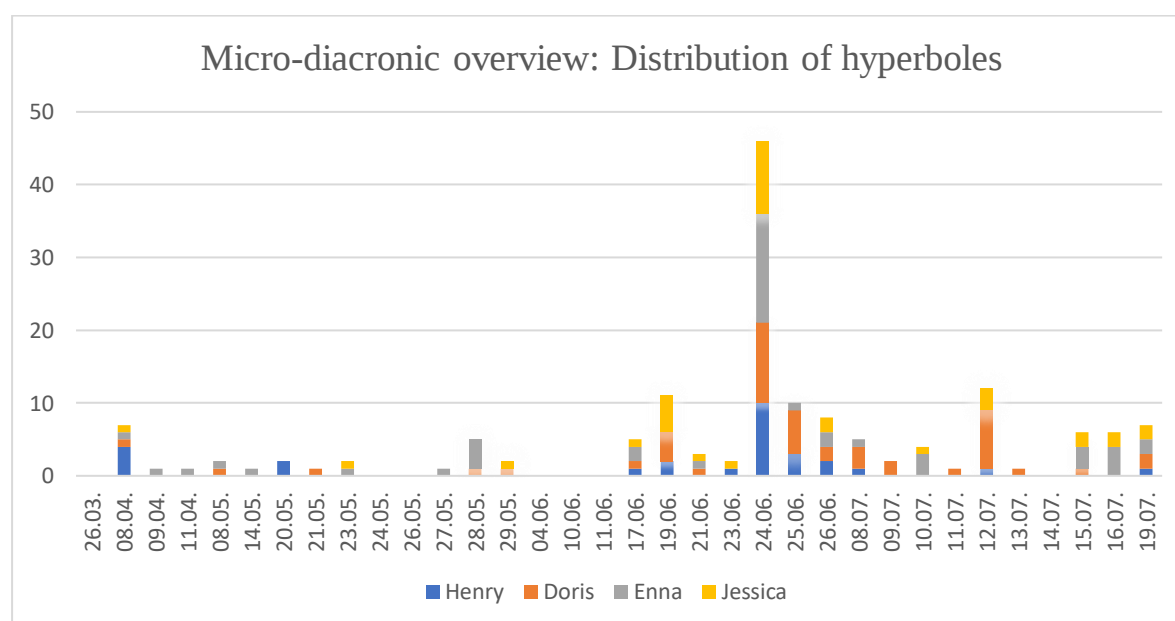


Fig. 12: Micro-diacronic overview of the Linguists' hyperbolic items

The figure illustrates the overall production of hyperbolic items throughout the semester, as well as the individual contributions of all four participants. As can be seen in the figure, hyperbole was not used evenly and consistently by the group members. Rather, clusters of hyperbolic items are observable around specific events during the semester. As was already presented in Figure 11, the group communicated significantly

more towards the end of the semester (e.g. June and July), than they did at the beginning. One interpretation of this development may be that it is a direct reflection of the growth in their levels of familiarity and interpersonal relationships, as it is quite natural to assume that the students were more at ease to communicate with each other as the group became more established. However, it is also the case that the second half of the semester contains the deadlines for the group's task submissions, and thus more obligations, responsibilities, and likely, more to communicate about. In the following figure, the Linguists' entire communication is observed on a weekly basis and compared to the weekly distribution of hyperbolic items.

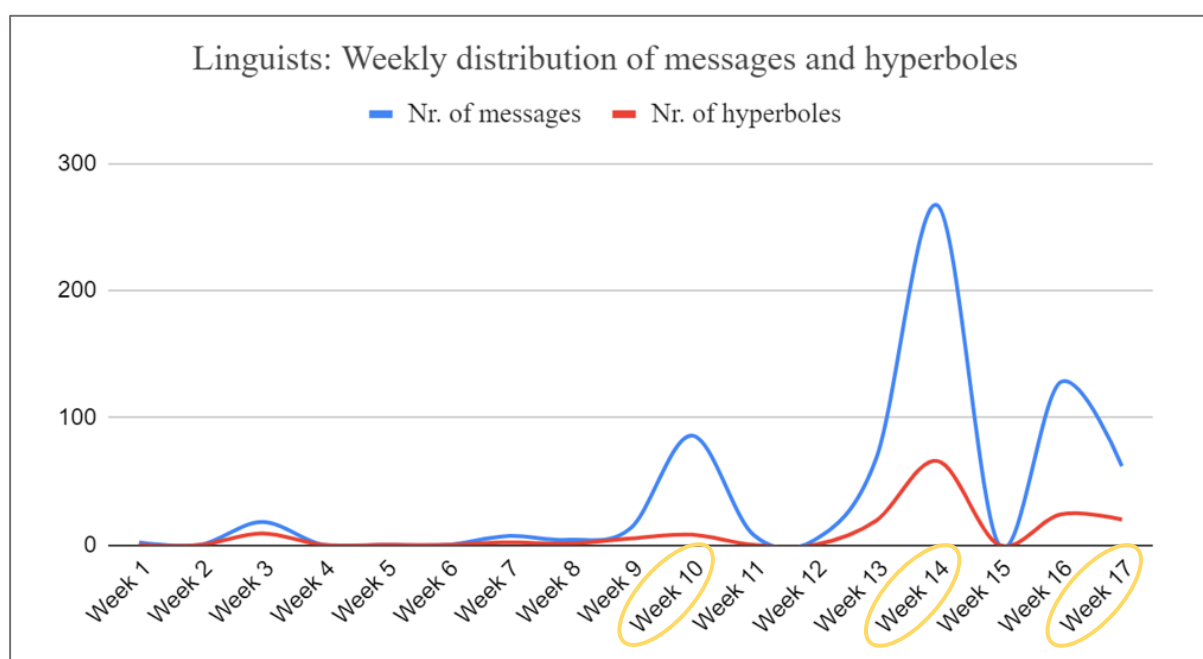


Fig. 13: Linguists - Weekly distribution of messages and hyperbolic items

Indicated in blue is the frequency of messages, whereas the number of hyperbolic items is represented by the red curve. Also, the weeks that contain the deadlines for the submissions of group tasks are highlighted in yellow circles. What the figure clearly shows is that the frequency of messages tends to increase near the deadlines. However, despite the obvious similarity between the paths of the blue and the red curve in Figure

13, the same direct correlation can hardly be assumed for hyperbolic items. This is because the ratio of hyperboles is always proportional to the communication ratio, meaning that the increase in hyperbolic items displayed in Figure 13 is likely just the result of the increase in the communication rate. Bearing this in mind, any type of quantification-based conclusions would be questionable in describing the development of hyperbolic items in this group chat. The same applies to specific types of hyperbole on a formal level. However, the effects of the deadlines on the production of hyperboles can be observed on a semantic level in the occurrence of specific functions or themes of hyperbolic items, as will be discussed in the following subsections.

With the aim of studying the usage of hyperbole throughout the period that the group has spent communicating, in the following, I will focus on several phases of the Linguists' chat communication and investigate the specific types, functions, or semantic fields used during the phase. Considering that different stages of the Linguists' teamwork represent different circumstances under which hyperbole was used, looking into the contextual and circumstantial factors that may have influenced the choices is meant to shed light on this group's use of exaggeration.

5.2.2. The initial stage of communication: getting acquainted through humor and hyperbole

The period between the creation of the group chat (March 26th) and May 14th marks the beginning of the semester and the phase in which the group members were getting acquainted with each other and exchanging opinions on the possible project topics. As has already been mentioned (see Section 4.2.2.), even though each member of the Linguists joined the team with already knowing one other member, the group of four is a newly established one and familiarity is yet to be established. The following

example illustrates how hyperbole is used in this initial phase in a self-oriented humorous remark that contributes to the establishment of solidarity.

Extract 1 – April 8th

- 3 Enna: Hey guys, if I remember correctly for tomorrow we are supposed
to come to class with two topics we would like to work on, so what
would be your preferences? [...]
[...]
- 8 Henry: **Well, I for once actually read the articles** 😊

On a formal level, the message in Line 8 is an example of hyperbole expressed on the sentential level, meaning that no single lexical item can be isolated as an instance of exaggeration, but “the hyperbole is created only by the combined effect of items in two or more clausal constituents” (Claridge 2011: 55). In this case, it is the sentence adverb *well*, which seems to function as “a shift in footing” (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 162) and marks the exaggeration ahead, and the combination of *for once* and *actually* that contribute to the hyperbolic meaning of the message. As a result, the message suggests that Henry *never* reads the required readings. Even though, in theory, the statement could be true, it was here interpreted as hyperbolic on the basis of my background knowledge as one of the members of the Linguists team. In addition, an interesting aspect of the above-cited hyperbole is that it reads both as an understatement and an overstatement. That is, by claiming to normally never read the articles, Henry is both understating the actual number of times he has read them and overstating the times he has not.

On a functional level, several purposes could be attached to this hyperbole. A very important factor in its interpretation is the context. As indicated by the line numbers, the cited example captures the earliest phase of the chat communication when the members were still getting acquainted with each other. Thus, a humorous remark, in

this case through hyperbole, could be seen as an icebreaker, aimed to induce laughter and lighten the mood, as also suggested by the laughing emoji in Henry's message. Also, by expressing his usual lack of engagement with course material nonchalantly and entertainingly, Henry reduces the risk of losing face for any other students who have not read the articles. In this case, both Jessica and Doris communicate that they have not yet read the articles in the messages that follow.

It is interesting to note that humor played a significant role throughout the Linguists' entire chat communication. Aside from exaggeration in the function of humor, the students frequently engaged in non-hyperbolic banter, sarcastic exchanges, co-constructed puns, and laughed at their own and their colleagues' expense. What likely contributed to this is the familiarity that the members shared with one other student in the group. In the extract that follows, it is illustrated how emoticons are used as hyperboles to represent an extremely positive and an extremely negative emotional state.

Extract 2 – May 8th

- 24 Doris: Hey! Hope you're doing well too! :) And I think it's a good idea to come up with some stuff on our own and to discuss the ideas after *ass* next week 😊
- 25 Doris: Class. Not ass 🙈🙈
- 26 Henry: sweet 👍
- 27 Enna: 😂😂😂

The main targets of this extract are the typo (italicized in line 24) and the non-verbal hyperboles in lines 25 and 27 (highlighted in gray). The extract begins with Doris replying to a previously made suggestion that the team meets next week and discusses the strategy for the realization of their project. Her message in line 24 is thus a continuation of an ongoing work-focused talk and itself contains elements of

seriousness and formality (e.g. consistent capitalization and punctuation, a polite and semi-formal greeting). However, the course of the talk changes when Doris unintentionally produces a typo (italicized in line 24).

Immediately after becoming aware of the typo, Doris produces another message within the same minute and corrects the target item followed by two emojis that seem to visualize the notion of hiding one's face in shame (line 25). The fact that Doris is still getting to know the majority of her team at this stage and that her aim was to contribute to the discussion about the group project, speaks in favor of the interpretation of the emojis as indicators of embarrassment. However, what makes the use of emojis hyperbolic is that they, even more so in repetition, imply an unrealistic degree of embarrassment by suggesting that the sender is absolutely humiliated and cannot face the other group members. The fact that Doris's team members did not react to the implication of the emojis suggests that they are aware that the non-verbal hyperbole was not meant to be taken literally.

That Doris's hyperbole was not interpreted literally is particularly obvious in line 27, when Enna produces another instance of non-verbal hyperbole. It is important to note here that, unlike Jessica and Henry, Enna is Doris's friend. As a reaction to Doris's typo, Enna produces a cluster emoji of a face crying with laughter, thus implying that she not only finds Doris's slip extremely hilarious but is crying tears of laughter. Taking the friendship factor into consideration, it is highly unlikely that Enna would have produced the hyperbole in line 27 and implied that she is *laughing as loudly* had she interpreted the meaning of her friend's emoji literally. Also, the high degree of familiarity between the two is likely what made Enna at liberty to not only express but exaggerate the amusement she finds in Doris's slip. This is even more evident by comparing Enna's to Henry's much more restrained and careful reaction, which

nevertheless is appropriate for the low degree of familiarity he shares with Doris at that stage.

The following subsections focus on the later stages of the group's chat communication and investigate creativity in the production of hyperbole.

5.2.3. Dealing with time pressure and *syntactic nightmares*: Creative hyperboles

During the later stages of the Linguists' communication, aside from expressing hyperbole conventionally and non-verbally, the students engaged in producing creative verbal hyperboles. Of course, the second half of the term also features significantly longer communicative episodes than the first (e.g. June 19th, June 24th, June 25th, and July 12th). The imbalance between the first and the second half of the term would, of course, play a role in quantification, seeing as the increase in lexical creativity that can be observed in the second half of the term could lead to the interpretation that the creativity is a result of the increase in group affiliation. However, this is hardly the case if considering that the second half of the term features a higher number of hyperboles in general. Still, it is also not the case that instances of lexical creativity are a random occurrence without a common thread. Deeper scrutiny of the events and circumstances around, and especially preceding an instance of creative hyperbole, reveals a link between extreme emotional states and unconventional hyperboles.

Creative hyperbolic items are defined as "formal and semantic neologisms" (Claridge 2011: 94), thus including unconventionality on the level of structure, meaning, but also novel functions of already established forms. In the present dataset, hyperbolic items were coded as creative if they fit the description of creative hyperboles provided in the literature (cf. Claridge 2011: Chapter 4). What tends to distinguish creative from

conventional verbal hyperboles is that creative exaggeration is more frequently found in the form of a phrase or clause (Claridge 2011: 94). In addition, they tend to occur only once in a dataset to “fil a specific speaker’s expressive need at a given point in time and in a given context that cannot be as adequately catered for by a conventional item” (Claridge 2011: 98).

As already mentioned, creative hyperboles were predominantly produced throughout the second half of the term. In terms of the exact communicative episodes, the second half of the term here refers to the period from May 26th to the last day on which the group communicated, July 19th. Out of the total number of 20 creative hyperboles in the Linguists’ chat communication, 18 were produced in the second half of the semester. In order to understand and contextualize the occurrences of lexical creativity, the communicative events that feature such examples were subjected to closer inspection. What emerges from both the examination of the events leading up to a creative instance and the content of the creative hyperboles, is that in this dataset creative hyperboles tend to emerge to express intense emotions.

It should be mentioned that creative hyperboles were most frequently employed to express extremely negative emotions, whereas exaggerating positive emotions was most commonly done through emoticons and much less through lexical creativity. In the following, several extracts from the Linguists’ chat are analyzed that illustrate how the Linguists used creative hyperboles to express both extremely positive and negative emotions throughout the most stressful periods of their teamwork.

Extract 3 – July 15th

637 Doris: Hey!

Sorry only had internet access now, but thank you for doing the editing!! The tables look a **TON** better than the ones I

made :)
And the pie charts as well!
Hope you can all enjoy your summer break now!

The focus here is the specific usage of the word *TON* in Doris's message. The reasons for analyzing this example as creative hyperbole are twofold. First of all, had the word *ton* been used to exaggerate how heavy an object is, it would have been classified as a conventional verbal hyperbole. What makes it the usage of the noun creative in Doris's message is that she is describing the new look of their tables and graphs. This makes the usage rather unusual and, arguably, makes the hyperbole even more persuasive. In addition, even though the word *ton* is in itself hyperbolic (when not referring to an object that literally weighs a ton), it is here even further amplified through capitalization. In fact, one cannot help but be convinced that *the tables [that] look a ton better* are still hardly as good as *the tables that look a TON better*.

The result of the creative combination between the unit of measurement and a description of physical appearance on the one hand, and the usage of all capital letters on the other, is a hyperbole positioned particularly high on the intensity scale. What boosts the praise even further is that Doris is not only complimenting Jessica's tables but also criticizing the tables she (i.e. Doris) had previously spent a considerable amount of time creating. In order to understand Doris's motivation of complimenting her colleague's work so strongly, communicative episodes preceding this exchange were examined.

The above-cited extract was taken from July 16th. However, for understanding the intention and the interpersonal function of the analyzed hyperbole, portions of conversation from July 8th and July 12th are of relevance. Already on July 8th, Doris had announced her plans of having her part finished by July 12th at the latest, because

after that she is packing for her vacation and cannot contribute to the project anymore. Already in the process of communicating that, Doris had produced several hyperboles that emphasize her time constraints (*afterwards I'm super super stressed; it'll really really be difficult for me to do anything else; out of time for everything basically*). However, on July 12th, after Doris shared her part of the paper with the group, Jessica (and later also Henry) ask that she changes her tables completely so that all the tables in the paper look the same. This results in a difference of opinions between, primarily, Jessica, who hedged her request and arguments with emoticons and humor, and Doris, who was obviously agitated and slightly less concerned with embellishing her messages with smiley faces. The disagreement finishes when Doris produces new tables and Jessica offers to edit and unify all tables at the end. Returning now to Extract 3 with this knowledge, one can consider the possibility that, aside from just complimenting the new look of the tables and expressing her gratitude, Doris was aiming to conclude this matter on a positive note, and perhaps even go the extra mile in praising her colleague to make sure that no hard feelings remain from their previous discussions on this topic.

Moreover, in addition to expressing positive emotions, creative hyperboles were also used in the Linguists' chats to express negative emotions. The following example illustrates the efficiency of creative hyperbole to express a negative emotion; more precisely, to emphasize the degree of antipathy towards the cumbersome tasks.

Extract 4 – June 24th

304 Doris: That's a good idea :) I'll just have to find one or two examples
 that aren't just **syntactic nightmares** but actual
 ambiguous examples 😊

In itself, the extract does not evoke the image of a highly intense emotional state. The message features two smiley faces and overall reads with a positive, humorous tone.

However, what stands out is the underlined creative hyperbole that exaggerates the subjectively evaluated negative features of difficult examples that the students had to analyze. The example was taken from June 24th, which is the day before the group's final presentation and the communicative episode that numbers 166 messages. On this day, the group started chatting around 7 o'clock in the morning, and prior to Doris's message, which was sent around 8 o'clock in the evening, had already exchanged 81 messages. However, the group had been working on their analysis for the presentation for approximately two weeks before this communicative episode. Thus, the phrase *syntactic nightmares* is the culmination of hours and days of coping with difficult examples and a convenient means of expressing an assortment of emotions in a single phrase.

Linguistically, the hyperbole *syntactic nightmares* is interesting in many ways. First of all, it is an example of what Popa-Wyatt (2020: 91) calls "hyperbolic figures", in that it is both hyperbole and a metaphor. As was also illustrated by the use of examples from literature (see Section 3.1.3.), in this hyperbolic metaphor, the metaphor is observable on the lexical level and serves as a lexical realization of the exaggerated thought. More precisely, by creating the mental image of an extremely unpleasant dream and not referring to an actual dream, the noun *nightmares* serves as a metaphor that amplifies the degree of discomfort and unpleasantness that Doris associates with solving the highly problematic cases. As such, this instance is an example of creative verbal hyperbole. What further adds to the degree of creativity and memorability of the phrase *syntactic nightmares* is that it combines two words that do not naturally collocate.

Given the high level of creativity of the hyperbolic figure, it is important to consider the characterizations of creative hyperboles in literature as realizations that are more

strenuous to interpret and more likely to cause misunderstanding (Claridge 2011: 99). However, this particular creative phrase effectively conveyed Doris's antipathy with minimal risk of causing misunderstanding. This is because this phrase originated out of the group's shared experience of dealing with *syntactic nightmares*, meaning that, if anyone, it is Doris's teammates who will understand what she meant. Thus, aside from being effective in expressing Doris's attitude, the creative hyperbole alludes to the bond between the members that resulted from sharing the experience.

Extract 5 – July 16th

648 Enna: Shit i hate this
 649 Enna: **Who has time for this crap mid july?** 🤬
 650 Henry: I am on the way to hand it in but I only have one copy 🙋

Before diving into the analysis of the creative hyperbole in Extract 5, it should be pointed out that the above-cited extract features two other instances of hyperbole: the conventional verb *hate* and the graphic (Line 649) of a red, angry face exploding with expletives. However, the focus was here meant to be drawn to the instance most relevant for the current chapter – the creative hyperbole underlined in line 649. This instance of creative verbal hyperbole is another example of a hyperbolic figure. In this case, it is a combination of a rhetorical question and hyperbole, produced only once in the Linguists' chats.

The extract is taken from the penultimate communicative episode the Linguists had shared, July 16th. However, the conversation on the matters that prompted the sequence of hyperboles started the day before, after the students had just submitted their final research paper. After exchanging celebratory remarks, comments on regaining their freedom, and enjoying the summer break, the students realize that they still need to deliver a hard copy of their final paper to one of their professors. Extract

5 was produced after Enna had realized that she would have to be the one to hand in the hard copy.

As was the case with the hyperbolic metaphor in the previous extract, the hyperbole in line 649 is not to be seen on a lexical level. What one sees is the rhetorical question. However, it is the rhetorical question that implies the exaggeration. By asking *who has time for this crap mid-July*, Enna implies the impossibility of anyone having time for handing in the copy of the research project. Of course, Enna is emotionally biased and the emotion that she is conveying is anger. Thus, adhering to the nature of rhetorical questions, Enna's is not meant to elicit an answer. Interestingly however and despite her emotional state, she still follows the convention of signaling a question with a question mark.

This subsection aimed to investigate the circumstances around the communicative episodes and phases that most frequently yielded creative verbal hyperboles. The students in this group appear to be aware of the ability of unconventional hyperboles to not only claim extra attention from the readers but also to communicate the subjectively evaluated degree of the experienced emotion in a much more effective manner. The following subsection remains in the second half of the semester; however, explores the co-construction of a particular semantic field throughout the Linguists' chats.

5.2.4. Hyperboles and the common theme of exhaustion

As was shown in the previous chapter, the deadline phases prompted a variety of intense emotions, which, in turn, often resulted in creative hyperboles. During the same phase, several hyperboles belonging to the semantic field of extreme mental exhaustion were identified, which suggests the presence of accommodative behavior

in the group's communication. Of course, one could argue that the re-occurring theme of exhaustion and overwhelm is simply circumstantial, seeing as it is not unusual for students to feel overworked and fatigued in the most stressful phases of the semester. However, the decision to communicate, and especially exaggerate, those feelings during a work-focused interaction is a matter of pragmatics, not circumstance.

Accommodation, especially convergence, has been identified as a core feature of ELF spoken interactions (see Section 2.2.1.). The phenomenon was also documented in literature focused on synchronous computer-mediated communication as one of the features that render online chats akin to both spoken and written communication (Crystal 2006: 152; cf. Section 2.1.2.). The examples discussed in the following reveal how convergence to hyperboles from the same semantic field is used in ELF online chats by the Linguists to facilitate the interpersonal dimension of the interaction.

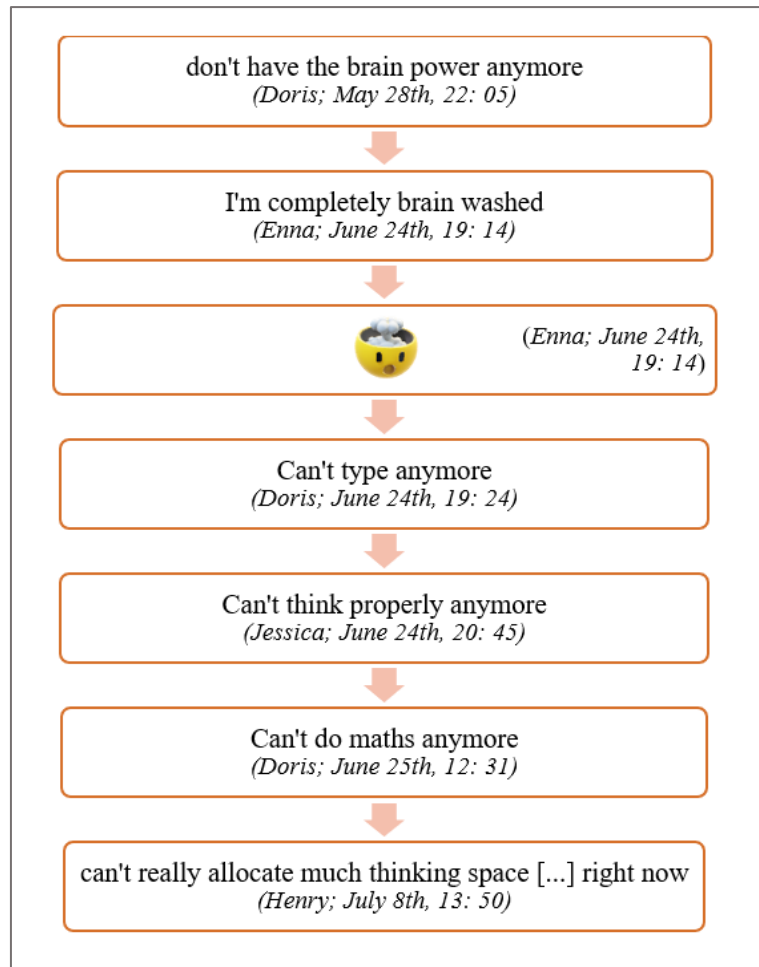


Fig. 14: Linguists – Hyperbolic co-construction of the semantic field of exhaustion

As displayed in Figure 14, the Linguists' data yielded seven semantically related elements. The semantic field of extreme exhaustion and inability to think/ perform was referenced at least once by each participant. What becomes clear from the outline in Figure 14 is that some of the elements also share a lexical similarity, as certain lexical components are used in more than one instance of hyperbole ¹⁶.

Extract 6 – May 28th

118 Doris: I think the paragraphs look fine as they are :)
 And I'll read through it tmrw morning, and in case i find a

¹⁶ See also Seidlhofer (2009b: 204-205) and Pitzl (2018a: 173-180) for insights on the use of *brain* and *mind* in spoken ELF interactions.

mistake or sth I'll correct it :) **just don't have the brain power anymore** to do this tonight ;)

119 Enna: hahaha okay

120 Jessica: I'll look at it in the morning as well 😊

The exchange in Extract 6 followed after Enna had finished a portion of the assignment and asked for colleagues' input on several task-related matters. As a response to the request, Doris produces the statement *just don't have the brain power anymore*, thus politely but convincingly persuading her teammate that she has exhausted all her mental capacity and is unable to work any longer. As such, the primary function of her hyperbole is persuasion. The success of the target hyperbolic item is observable in Enna's message in the next line, which communicates that she understood Doris's message.

The next example of hyperbole linked to the theme of mental exhaustion is produced by Enna on June 24th (Extract 7).

Extract 7 – June 24th

266 Henry: np

267 Enna: **Im completely brain washed**, i see this and i think noun phrase instead of no problem

268 Enna: 🤪

269 Doris: Oh geez 😂 you need a break

270 Enna: We all do hahaha

271 Henry: ^^

273 Henry: thought the same while typing

In line 266 Henry replies to a previously sent message with *np* (as in *no problem*). Enna, having spent the majority of the day analyzing noun phrases, reads *np* as *noun phrase* instead of *no problem*. When she shares that with her teammates, she exaggerates in saying that she is *completely brain washed*. In addition, she produces

a non-verbal hyperbole, again related to the semantic field of absolute mental overwhelm, in the form of an emoji that suggests that her head is exploding from the tension of working so intensely on the analysis (Line 268).

Since this is only the second time the semantic field of exhaustion was referenced in a hyperbole, it cannot be said with certainty whether the similarity is coincidental or an attempt of converging to a communicative move of a conversation partner. It should be borne in mind that Enna and Doris are not just teammates, but also friends who have spent a considerable amount of time communicating with each other, both online and offline. Thus, a possibility that this example is a product of an already established convention shared by Doris and Enna should not be excluded. Nevertheless, despite the lexical and semantic similarity, Enna's hyperbole appears to be pragmatically different than Doris's. In this case, there is no indication that the function of the hyperbole is meant to be persuasion. Rather, it appears that Enna used the hyperbole as a humorous commentary on her previous exhaustion-induced error in interpretation. In addition to, or behind the humor of the anecdote, is also the sense of sharing a personal experience with a group that will likely understand it and find it relatable (see lines 269-273 in Extract 7).

In the same communicative event, shortly after Enna's hyperboles (Extract 7), two more hyperboles from the same semantic field are produced, one by Doris (Extract 8) and one by Jessica (Extract 9). The two hyperboles are strikingly similar to Doris's overstatement produced the next day (Extract 10) and Henry's, produced two weeks later (Extract 11).

Extract 8 – June 24th

274	Doris:	[...] Looks super neat and 'übersichtlich' now 😊👍
275	Doris:	Übersichtlich... <u>Can't type anymore</u> sorry

276 Henry: 😊👍

Extract 9 – June 24th

316 Enna: But i am not sure it could be qualifying
317 Jessica: **God I can't think properly anymore**

Extract 10 – June 25th

404 Doris: Ah no 24 per decade
405 Doris: **Can't do maths anymore** sorry 🙄

Extract 11 – July 8th

482 Henry: Might be sensible to do a plan of who has to write what –
but I have to finish a paper until 11th so **I am cant really
allocate much thinking space for the NP right
now** 😊

That the trend of producing hyperboles with the same meaning of “*I am so exhausted that I am no longer able to...*” became a temporary part of this group’s communication is indicated by the presence of semantically similar examples of hyperbole. Not only does the emerging practice of sharing how one feels imply higher levels of understanding and rapport between the members, but also, given the convergence to semantically and lexically similar hyperboles, indicates the common aim to promote group identity and membership.

Having investigated the use of hyperbole in the Linguists’ chats, the following section focuses on the Economists, observes the use of hyperbole in their chats micro-diachronically, and discusses the prominent forms and functions identified in their chat communication.

5.3. The Economists and the micro-diachronic analysis of hyperbolic items

In this chapter, the focus is on the Economists and the micro-diachronic analysis of their communication and hyperbole production. As was already established in Section 4.2., the Linguists and the Economists differ considerably on various levels, including the size of the constellation, levels of familiarity, and lingua-cultural diversity between the group members. In light of this, it is quite natural that the groups also exhibit different communicative behaviors, including the overall production and the distribution of messages, as well as the behaviors concerning the use of hyperbole.

As mentioned before, the Economists produced a total number of 687 messages and 170 instances of hyperbole. The two figures provide a micro-diachronic overview of the Economists' communication and hyperbole usage across 56 different communicative events. In Figure 15, the communication rate is quantified by the number of exchanged messages whereas Figure 16 shows the distribution of hyperbolic items. In addition, the figures demonstrate the individual contributions of each participant per communicative episode.

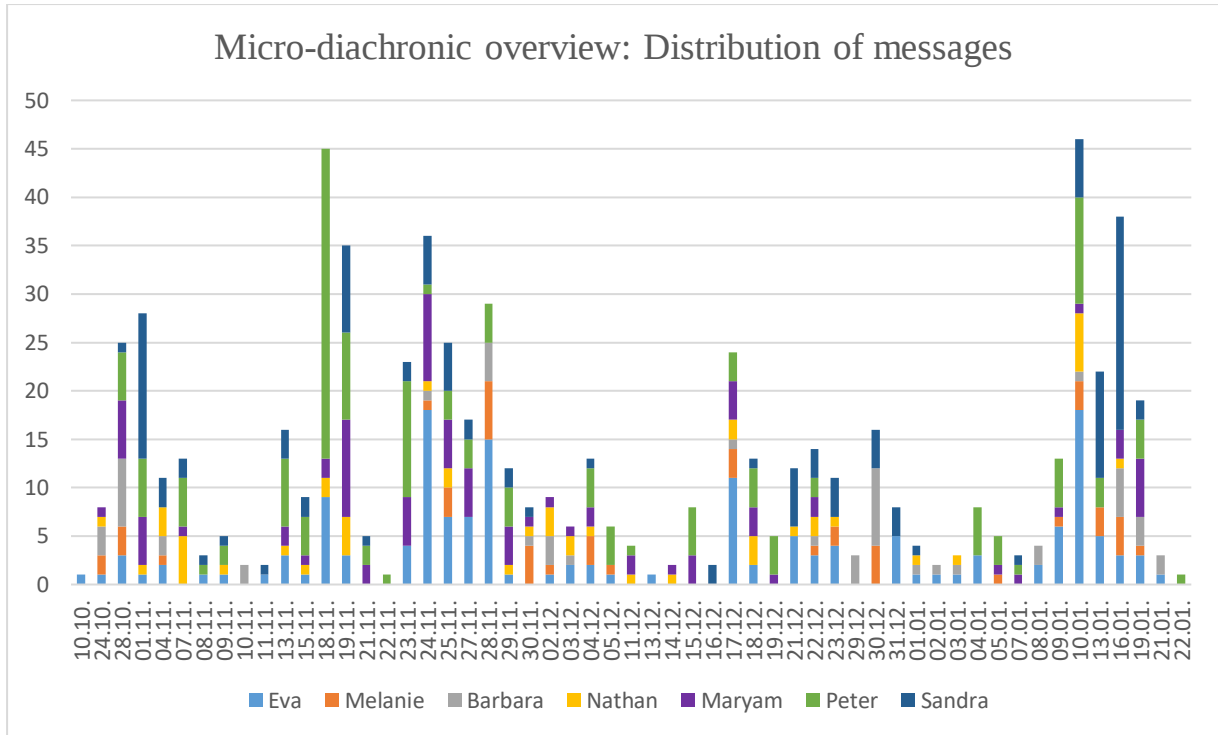


Fig. 15: Micro-diachronic overview of the Economists' exchanged messages

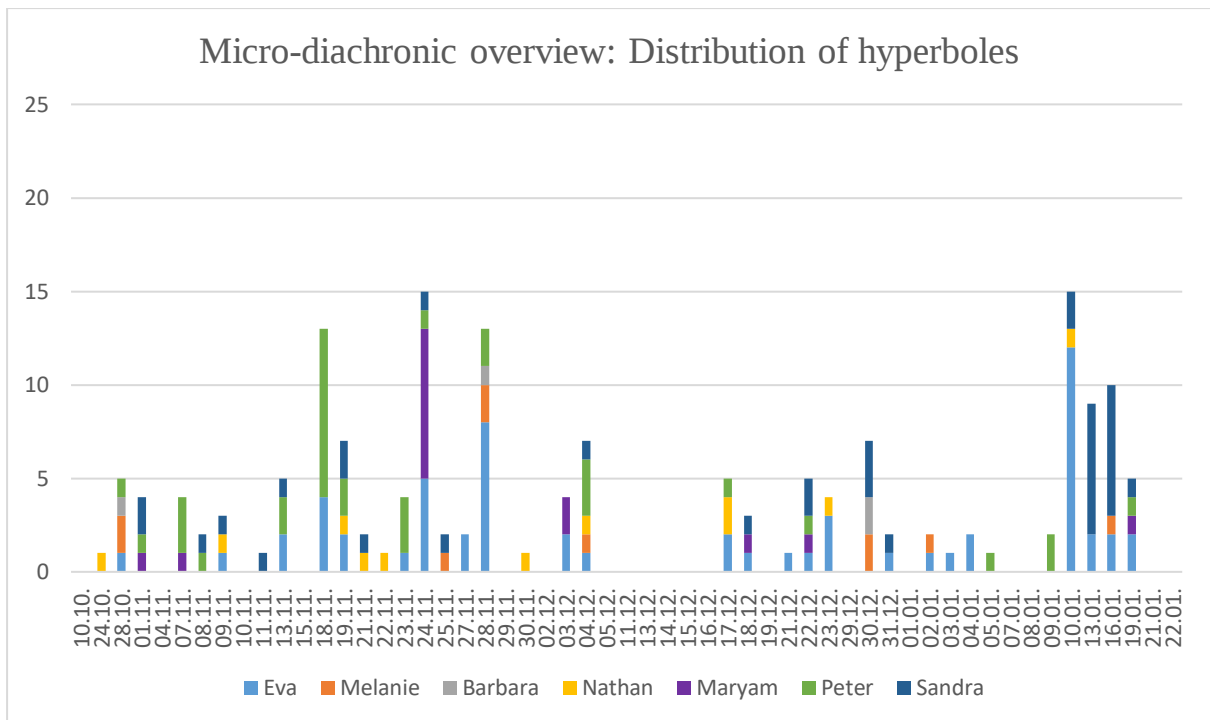


Figure 16: Micro-diachronic overview of the Economists' hyperbolic items

Compared to the four Linguists, who exchanged 667 messages on 34 different occasions, the overall communication rate between the seven students of the

Economists team is considerably lower. However, despite the overall lower rate of communication, the Economists' chat communication contains a higher number of communicative episodes, which are often short exchanges. A communicative episode would often start with one of the students posing a course/project-related question, and the interaction would not develop further once an answer was provided. Interestingly, however, as can be obtained from Figure 15, the Economists communicated more in the first half of the semester, than in the second. Especially productive is the month of November which, with 20 separate communicative episodes, 325 messages, and a total number of 78 hyperboles, outnumbers the following two months, which show a decrease in the frequency of online gatherings, exchanged messages, and hyperbole production. In addition, the features of hyperbole usage during this month also differ qualitatively, as the majority of creative hyperboles are concentrated in November (see Section 5.3.2.). Another discovery that can be made on the basis of Figures 15 and 16, is the effect of the deadlines on the overall communication rate, and hyperbole usage.

The Economists' most productive days in terms of communication rate feature between 35 and 46 messages (see November 18th, 19th, and 24th, and January 10th and 16th). As expected, these communicative episodes coincide with the group's deadlines (November 25th, November 28th, December 5th, December 22nd, and January 10th). With the exception of December 5th and 22nd, the communicative episodes preceding a deadline show an increase in the communication rate and the usage of hyperbole.

For the purposes of the interpretation of the aforementioned observations, it is important to return briefly to the previously established group parameters (see Section 4.2.). Unlike the Linguists, who started their group project already familiar with one other teammate, the Economists TIG was formed with no familiarity between the

members. Thus, aside from managing course work, each of the students in the Economists team was also faced with the challenge of communicating, collaborating, and sharing responsibilities with six other students they have not met before. In addition, the Economists qualify as a highly diverse TIG, as the group members have considerably less common ground linguistically, compared to the Linguists (see Section 4.2.). Bearing this in mind, it is rather unsurprising that the larger and more linguistically diverse group consisting of unacquainted members would communicate and exaggerate less. Differences in linguistic behavior can also be observed in the distribution of specific types of hyperboles between the seven students, which will be discussed in the following subsection.

5.3.1. Types of hyperbolic items in the Economists' chats

Shifting the focus now onto the specific types of hyperboles used throughout the course of communication, another aspect in which the Economists differ from the Linguists can be observed. In the Linguists' dataset, all participants produced both conventional and creative verbal hyperboles, as well as the non-verbal types, hyperbolic emoticons, and orthographic items. In the Economists' dataset, however, conventional hyperboles are the only type produced by all participants, followed by hyperbolic emojis, used by six out of seven students. Orthographic items, as a form of exaggeration, were used by four students, whereas creative hyperboles were used by only three.

Table 5. Economists: Types of hyperboles produced by individual participants¹⁷

HYPERBOLES		Eva	Melanie	Barbara	Nathan	Maryam	Peter	Sandra	Σ
<i>Verbal</i>	Conventional	27	5	3	11	6	9	18	79
	Creative	2					6	1	9
<i>Non-verbal</i>	Emoticons	24	4	2		8	16	12	66
	Orthogr. items	7				1	3	5	16
Σ		60	9	5	11	15	34	36	170

As detailed in Table 5, the majority of conventional hyperboles was produced by Eva and Sandra. This was in general the most popular type of exaggeration in this group, followed by hyperbolic emojis which, however, were not produced by all members (see Nathan who only used conventional verbal hyperboles). The two less frequently used types are orthographic items and creative verbal hyperboles. Hyperboles expressed through orthography were used mostly used by Eva and Sandra, and less frequently by Peter and Maryam. Finally, the trend of using hyperbolic figures was initiated by Peter, who produced the majority of creative hyperboles, and subsequently identified in Eva's and Sandra's contributions (see Section 5.3.2.).

In order to examine if there are any observable patterns in the production of specific types of exaggeration, it is necessary to view their distribution micro-diachronically. The two figures displayed in the previous section already provided a micro-diachronic overview of the Economists' communication and hyperbole usage across 56 communicative episodes. As was indicated in the methodology section, the decision to group the transmission units into dates was made because in most cases the conversations that occurred on different dates actually resembled separate speech

¹⁷ Table 5 is based on a table generated by the MaxQDA software.

events. They frequently featured opening and/or closing remarks, such as greetings, and very often differed in character (e.g. in revolving around different subject matters). Considering that hyperbole is understood as a highly contextual phenomenon, segmentation into dates provided relevant insights into how much, how, and by whom hyperbole was used on different occasions.

Nevertheless, an observation of a gradual development requires quantitatively comparable segments. Thus, for the purpose of this subsection, which explores whether the dataset shows any patterns in the usage of specific types of hyperbole over time, the Economists' chat communication was additionally segmented into units consisting of roughly the same number of messages. In total, 7 additional micro-segments were created, which contain between 83 and 107 transmission units. It is important to note that the slight difference in the length of the segments was a conscious decision because it allowed maintaining the structure of the communicative episodes intact. What this means is that the already existing unequally long communication episodes were grouped in chronological order to produce segments of comparable length in terms of messages. Thus, the new segments may differ in the number of communicative episodes they contain but are comparable in length (i.e. the number of exchanged messages). This allows monitoring the development of specific types of hyperboles over time, without breaking up thematically related interactions (i.e. communicative episodes).

Figure 17 (see below) is a visual representation of the chronological development of specific types of hyperbole throughout the Economists' chat interaction. The superordinate classes (verbal and non-verbal hyperbole) are represented by the blue and green line, whereas the subtypes are represented by the blocks.

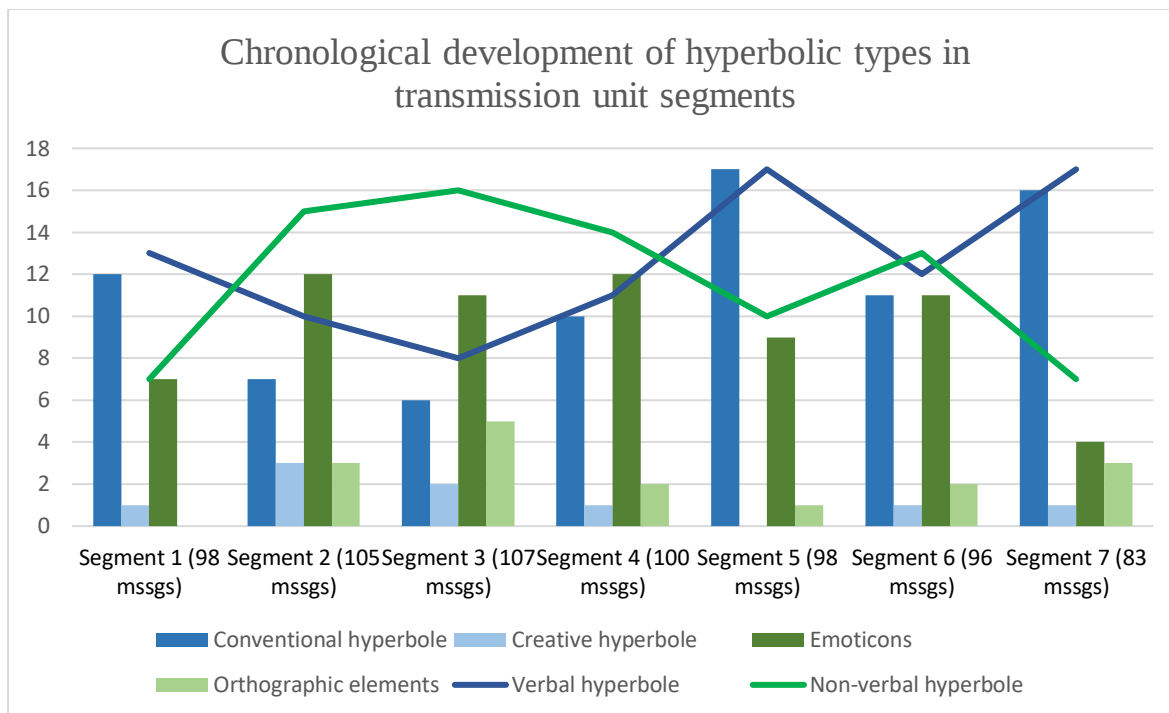


Fig. 17: Chronological development of hyperbolic types in transmission unit segments

Visualized like this, the results indicate that the use of hyperbolic items is more or less consistent throughout the chat communication. However, different preferences for verbal vs. non-verbal hyperbole can be observed in different phases of communication. While the non-verbal hyperboles are more frequently used in the first portion of communication, the total number of verbal hyperboles increases in the later stages of communication.

Shifting the focus now to the subtypes of verbal hyperboles, a glance at the blocks representing the subtypes of verbal hyperboles (conventional and creative) reveals that the increase of verbal hyperboles that started in Segment 3 is caused by a higher frequency of conventional hyperboles. Despite being consistently used across all segments, conventional hyperboles become more prominent in the later portions of the Economists' chat. In contrast, creative hyperbole can only be observed during the first three segments, and then again in Segments 6 and 7. A similar pattern can be observed in the distribution of orthographic elements, the majority of which appears

in the second, third, and seventh segment. On the other hand, exaggeration through emoticons rises in the second segment and is consistently used until Segment 7, where it decreases (possibly because of the length of the segment).

Having established how specific types of hyperbolic items are used in different stages of this TIG's communication, the following subsection will focus on conventional hyperboles. Considering that this type was consistently used throughout the entire course of communication, the aim of to investigate the most common realizations of the type, as well as the most common functions.

5.3.2. The *amazing*, *awesome*, and *brilliant* hyperboles: Creating solidarity

Throughout the course of their communication, the Economists displayed several features that can be linked to their lack of familiarity and shared history. As a group consisting of completely unacquainted members, the Economists jointly worked on establishing common ground and solidarity and employed various positive politeness strategies that enhanced the social bond and degree of rapport between them. Very frequently, this was done through hyperbolic intensifiers.

Hyperbolic modifiers and adverbs of degree are the most prominent representatives of conventional hyperboles in this dataset. In total, the group produced 60 hyperbolic intensifiers (e.g. *amazing*, *brilliant*, *top*), which represents a quarter of the total number of hyperbolic items in the dataset. An aspect that characterized the Economists' usage of hyperbole is the general tendency to produce hyperboles with a positive meaning. For instance, unlike the Linguists who, triggered by the stress of the deadlines, expressed their frustration and exhaustion through hyperbole, the

Economists' hyperboles were generally less self-oriented and tended to be less emotionally loaded.

The tendency to evoke positive notions and ideas through hyperbole is particularly noticeable in the usage of hyperbolic modifiers. Out of the total of 60 hyperbolic intensifiers, not a single instance denoted a negative idea. Rather, modifiers and adverbs denoting brilliance, greatness, and perfection were used throughout the Economists' chats as a form of team building. The total number of hyperbolic intensifiers was distributed between 7 different variants, including *perfect/perfectly*, *amazing*, *awesome*, *great/greatly*, *excellent*, *brilliant*, and *top*. Even though the analysis did not reveal convergence to a specific variant of hyperbolic intensifiers, the frequent and consistent practice of mutually supporting and encouraging each other through hyperbolic intensifiers indicates a high level of cooperative and accommodative behavior on the part of the students.

What may have contributed the most to the high frequency of hyperbolic intensifiers in this dataset is their conventionality. Considering that the Economists are a completely unacquainted group, the general tendency to use conventional hyperbole may have been a strategic decision, seeing as already established hyperboles require less processing effort and are less likely to cause miscommunication than creative ones (Claridge 2011: 99). As such, they were used a convenient and effective way of expressing positive evaluation and agreement, commending others' work, and celebrating achievements throughout the semester. The following two extracts are consecutive exchanges taken from two separate communicative events and illustrate how *awesome* and *brilliant* function as promoters of solidarity.

Extract 12 – November 8th

- 87 Eva: Whoop whoop I connected with one guy from [org1] NL, now
 see if he is willing to help us 🤝
- 88 Peter: 😊🙏
- 89 Sandra: **awesomeeee**

Extract 13 – November 9th

- 90 Peter: I contacted ladies in [country1] and [country2] and am waiting
 for response. Also I contacted my contact and waiting here for
 an answer as well
- 91 Peter: fingers crossed
- 92 Eva: **Awesome!** Well done! 🥰
- 93 Nathan: **Brilliant**, good work!
- 94 Sandra: 🥰🥰🥰🥰

The three messages shown in Extract 12 represent the communicative episode in its entirety. As can be seen, Eva initiated the short exchange by sharing the good news of making contact with a person who can help the group with their project. In the communicative episode preceding Eva's message, the Economists discussed how best to approach acquiring the necessary information for their project and emphasized the importance of finding relevant contacts. Thus, the news that progress has been made on that front causes highly positive reactions from two members of the team (see Lines 88 and 89).

The exchange immediately following Extract 12 in the chat occurs the next day (Extract 13), when Peter updates the group that he also reached out to several organizations and is expecting a response. As can be seen in the lines that follow, Peter's efforts are greeted with a sequence of complimentary remarks, applauses, and hyperbolic intensifiers. Clearly, in both instances, it is the delivery of good news that triggers the hyperboles. However, as positive as the news about the developments on the group

project is, the extreme intensifiers *awesome* and *brilliant* add more intensity than is contextually justifiable. The effects of the exaggeration here work in favor of establishing good interpersonal relationships within the group and raising the group morale.

In the following subsection, creative hyperboles produced by the Economists are analyzed. Even though they were rarely used in this group, it appears intriguing to explore how creativity was produced and received in a group of completely unacquainted students.

5.3.3. When hyperbole alone is not enough: Emergence of hyperbolic figures

In this study, the term *creative* has two usages. The first describes the subcategory of verbal hyperboles, which is characterized by unconventional and unique hyperboles that tend to be isolated cases in a dataset (Claridge 2011: 98). As has been mentioned before, a typical example of creative hyperboles in this dataset are hyperbolic figures. The second meaning of the term *creative* refers to the kind of creativity frequently found in ELF communication that results from the orientation of the language users towards successful communicative outcomes of the communicative episode they are currently engaged in, rather than on established notions of correctness (see Section 3.3.2.).

In the following, examples of creative hyperboles will be shown and analyzed that are also lexically creative, in the sense of ELF creativity. The process of annotation yielded a total number of nine hyperbolic figures. Seven of them are a combination of hyperbole and an idiomatic phrase, and one is a mixture of hyperbole and metaphor. Based on these results, it is safe to say that creative hyperboles are a rare occurrence

in this dataset, especially in comparison to the Linguists TIG, whose four members produced twenty creative hyperboles.

The first such example was produced by Peter in the group's fourth communicative episode. Before this event, the group had only used emoticons and conventional verbal hyperboles.

Extract 14 – November 1st

35 Peter: Hey guys i might be unavailable on wapp due to **hell a lot things** i have to do for school nxt week and it is rrally distracting meb 😊 so please if someone can just send me when u finalize meeting when and where eather on my phone or on email: [email1]

36 Sandra: okayy 😊

Adhering to the conventions of the genre, Peter produces a message brimming with CMC-specific features (see Section 2.1.2). In addition to the lack of punctuation and capitalization, the message features typos (*rrally* – really; *meb* – me), and abbreviated forms (*wapp* – WhatsApp; *nxt* – next). Moreover, if one tries to imagine how this message would sound if Peter had produced it in speech, what one likely gets is the idea of a fast-paced and vivid speech with changes in intonation that add emphasis to the most vital parts of the message. These features point to a lack of formality and give a feeling of a casual and nonchalant speech to Peter's written contribution to the group chat. In addition, he amplifies the volume of work he is faced with through the hyperbolic item *hell a lot* (cf. *hell of a lot*), which is here regarded as idiomatic hyperbole, as hyperbole is embedded within an established and commonly used expression.

The next instance of hyperbole mixed with an idiomatic phrase is produced by Eva, a week after.

112 Sandra: I found some people on lower positions for HR in [org1],
should I contact them as well or?

113 Eva: Yes why not **always worth a shot** 🤔

For reasons of space, the chapter will not engage with all instances of creative hyperboles. The next two extracts feature two idiomatic hyperboles that were produced in consecutive communicative episodes within a span of 26 messages, and that seem to be thematically connected.

Extract 16 – November 23rd

- 212 Peter: Please just let me know which topic we finally agreed upon?
[...]
- 218 Sandra: I think we agreed on the second one
- 219 Sandra: Raising proportion of female employees/engineers
- 220 Peter: Alright then. I am working on problem #2- raising
proportion of female....
**Who needs to object, let him speak now or be
silent forever** 🤔
- 221 Eva: **Whahahaha** 😂😂

In the time between the production of the two previously cited hyperbolic figures and Extract 16, two more hyperbolic figures were produced, both by Peter (the phrases *last resort* and *a huge chaos*). No indication of a misunderstanding caused by the hyperbolic figures was found in the chats; on the contrary, in both cases, the hyperboles helped the student express his attitude concisely and effectively. However, the example of the idiomatic hyperbole cited in Extract 16 is intriguing for numerous reasons. At the start of the interaction, Peter had communicated that he is preoccupied with other projects and courses and thus only able to finish his part of the presentation by the evening of the next day. As this would mean that other students, whose sections depend on Peter's, are left with a short amount of time to work on their parts of the presentation before the deadline (November 25th), Peter is asked to prioritize the group project.

Having agreed to start his part immediately, Peter asks the group which topic was settled for in the end (Line 212). The way he formulated the question indicates that there was a long discussion and a lack of agreement concerning the topic of the presentation, part of which may also have occurred during the group's face-to-face meetings. After Sandra informs him about the decision regarding the topic, Peter

informs the group that he is about to start working on his part but accompanies the announcement with the warning that, after he starts it will be too late for the group to change the decision about the topic. The way this is done is rather interesting. In line 220, Peter produces the expression “*Who needs to object, let him speak now or be silent forever*”, which one would normally hear in wedding ceremonies, and perhaps typically those that are performed in a church. As Peter is interacting with students who he expects will be familiar with the phrase, he draws from the pool of their shared knowledge and uses the idiom to express hyperbole.

On the level of function, it is argued that the choice of language is effective both in terms of conveying the desired message and in terms of maintaining positive interpersonal relationships. That the idiom works in the function of hyperbole becomes apparent when one considers that the intent of the message is to emphasize that this is the last chance for the group to change their minds and that after Peter starts working, it will no longer be possible to change the topic, which is an overstatement. As such, the statement is also, potentially, face-threatening, which brings us to the interpersonal level. The idiom, i.e. the playful usage of language, allows Peter to address a delicate matter in a way that reduces the level of tension and seriousness.

The final remark made on the exchange in Extract 16 is that Peter’s use of language seemed to be well-received by Eva, who, through laughter, expressed that she found the creative use of the idiom extremely amusing. In the following extract, taken from the communicative episode the day after Peter’s idiom was produced, another example of an idiom with a function of exaggeration is produced by Eva.

Extract 17 – November 24th

244 Eva: But I am working on it offline. When done I will send it in
this group (google docs shifts everything)

245 Maryam: Yes I also have some difficulties with google docs 😊

246 Eva: **It is a curse and a blessing whahahhahah** 😂😂😂

From the two lines preceding the highlighted idiom, it becomes obvious that what Eva's expression refers to is neither a curse nor a blessing. The phrase she uses is a widely used idiom that conveys that the described item is at the same time extremely positive and extremely negative. However, the items *curse* and *blessing* amplify the degree of both positive and negative aspects of the referent. The purpose here seems to bring an entertaining note to the interaction, as also indicated by Eva's own commentary on the expression (laughter and emojis). However, it is interesting that, even though it is used in different contexts than Peter's idiom, based on the words *curse* and *blessing*, that one would also associate with spiritual/ religious contexts, Eva's expression may have been inspired by the idiom that Peter had produced in the previous communicative episode. If so, this would be an example of Crystal's (2006: 152) description of the accommodation process in online contexts. As he notes, "[a] particular locution [...] may become part of the group's communal memory, being resurrected from time to time" (Crystal 2006: 152). Following this instance, one more hyperbolic figure was produced by Peter two communicative episodes later, after which creative hyperboles were not used for a rather long period of time. Towards the end of their communicative journey, Sandra produced a combination of hyperbole and an idiomatic phrase, followed by Peter, who produced one again three communicative episodes later.

Despite the scarcity of creative hyperboles, various aspects of their usage and distribution suggest that they may be more than random occurrences. One aspect that speaks in favor of this is the observation that when they occur, they tend to co-occur. It is possible that similar uses of (hyperbolic) language were produced in their offline gatherings and were adopted by more students than was observable in the chat communication. In addition, the presence of two idioms that not only coincide but also share a similar theme or context of origin indicates that this may indeed have been an instance of convergence and a part of an emerging convention in this group.

5.4. The use of hyperbole in the Linguists' and the Economists' chats: A summary

This section provides a short summary of the main findings and insights gained in Chapter 5. By applying the micro-diachronic approach, the analysis revealed that hyperbole is used in various phases of communication in both TIGs. In addition, in both TIGs the use of hyperbole showed a link to linguistic phenomena that are considered imperative in ELF research, such as accommodation and creativity. As was exemplified in the analysis of the Linguists' data, accommodation in this TIG was achieved by using hyperbole in humorous exchanges, i.e. as a means of establishing common ground, as well as by converging to a production of hyperboles that share lexical and semantic similarities. When it comes to the Economists' production of hyperbole, it was shown that the participants frequently used hyperbolic intensifiers to praise each other and establish and promote group solidarity.

In addition, various group characteristics were linked to the use of hyperbole in both group chats. Even though both groups started interacting without prior communication history, the Linguists featured two subgroups of students who were well-acquainted. In the chapter of the paper devoted to the Linguists, it was argued

that the high level of familiarity between the two pairs enhanced the process of establishing familiarity on a group level. Since the beginning of their chat communication, the Linguists co-constructed humorous remarks, employed various accommodation strategies, and adopted certain linguistic properties as a group over time. Even though this was also observable in non-hyperbolic language, the chapter devoted to the co-construction of the semantic field of exhaustion exemplified this practice. In addition, the fact that the establishment of understanding and common ground appeared rather effortless in the case of the Linguists was interpreted as a key factor in allowing this group to exhibit a considerable level of creativity in the production of hyperbole. As illustrated with the example of *syntactic nightmares*, creative hyperboles are useful not only in amplifying the emotional involvement but also as a means of alluding to the group's shared experience.

The nature of the Economists' communication and hyperbole production differed from the Linguists' in several aspects. Factors such as the size of the constellation, degree of linguistic diversity, and a complete lack of shared history between the members of the group were seen as crucial in governing how the group communicated and exaggerated. Especially in comparison to the Linguists, the Economists exhibited a higher degree of constraint in terms of the overall hyperbole production, and in particular in terms of creativity. Still, accommodation was identified in a high degree of hyperbolic intensifiers that were predominantly used to show solidarity, encouragement, and promote the group morale. In addition, concerning creativity in the production of hyperbole, it was shown that the ELF users who formed the Economists possess a high degree of knowledge and skill in producing hyperbolic figures to achieve a number of communicative and interpersonal functions.

6. Concluding remarks

6.1. Limitations of the study

The first major challenge that this project faced is the lack of comprehensive and solid criteria for defining, identifying, and classifying hyperbole. Even though, as was mentioned in the literature review, many definitions of the rhetorical device can be found in literature, the decision of what exactly should be identified as an instance of hyperbole is still largely intuitive. In addition, hyperbole has an array of formal realizations, which often do not exhibit a common feature that would allow for strictly defined categories. Thus, more work is needed on the phenomenon to fine-tune the criteria for its definition and identification in data. This becomes even more pressing when considering the numerous possibilities of expressing hyperbole in CMC. The classification used in the present thesis, despite yielding interesting results, showed its shortcomings throughout the analysis. For instance, creative hyperboles were only used for hyperboles expressed on a verbal level. However, several instances of non-verbal hyperboles in both group chats evidenced creativity in exaggeration on a non-verbal level (e.g. implying that someone is an *angel* through an emoji).

Another limitation worthy of mention is the lack of access to the groups' offline gatherings. Aside from using the WhatsApp group chats to interact, both groups spent a considerable amount of time communicating face-to-face, which means that the available data only covered a portion of the time the groups had spent communicating. Thus, patterns in communication and exaggeration that may have emerged and existed throughout the semester in the offline setting remained out of sight. The transcripts of the groups' face-to-face communication would have been of great significance for a study that explores how a phenomenon develops over time in a group, and would perhaps result in a higher frequency of hyperbolic items, which

would add the possibility of exploring the quantitative dimension of the micro-diachronic development.

6.2. Summary and conclusion

As a severely understudied rhetorical device that is yet to be explored in ELF and CMC contexts, hyperbole was placed at the center of the present thesis. The main goal was to investigate how and why hyperboles are used in groups of ELF users who communicate online.

Exaggeration plays a crucial role in everyday communication and is linked to a wealth of communicative functions in literature. It enables the language user to express his/her emotional or critical stance in an effective and often memorable manner. As such, it was seen as a fascinating object of study. Considering that hyperbole, much like any other use of figurative language, is connected to linguistic creativity, which in turn can be observed against various parameters of the context and the constellation in which it is produced, the topic showed a high degree of compatibility with the chosen research design.

With the goal of exploring the properties of the chosen phenomenon when produced in English as a lingua franca WhatsApp group chats, the database of 18.000 words almost evenly distributed between two group chats was collected. As groups of students who communicate in ELF for a limited period of time without prior communication history, the Linguists and the Economists were regarded as Transient International Groups (Pitzl 2018c, 2019, 2020) and their chat communication provided a basis for a study of hyperbole in online ELF communication. Aside from the general focus on the usage of hyperboles in ELF/CMC contexts, the study was supplemented with the micro-diachronic approach to analysis proposed in Pitzl's

studies (2018c, 2019, 2020), which seeks to answer how the interaction and the target linguistic phenomenon develop over time in a group of ELF users.

The results showed that in both groups hyperbole was successfully and strategically employed throughout the course of communication. As was also discussed, the group-specific patterns in hyperbole usage can be linked to various features of the constellation in which it is produced. Despite the differences in the use of hyperbole between the Linguists and the Economists, the thesis has supported the view that hyperbole is an extremely versatile and valuable addition to (ELF) communication, which was evidenced in the excerpts of chat communication cited in the analysis. It is hoped that the analysis highlighted the potential of hyperbole as a communicative device in aspects that are especially relevant for the study of English as a lingua franca communication. Hyperbole, both in combination with other devices and in isolation, assisted the unacquainted ELF speakers in establishing a social bond with their conversation partners, effectively and creatively communicated their attitudes and emotions while reducing the risk of conflict, and helped them to accommodate to the communicative contexts they participated in. As such, it is suggested that the rhetorical figure plays a crucial part in the process of establishing common ground and maintaining successful communication in ELF.

With this in mind, the paper concludes with the hope that hyperbole will find its place in English as a lingua franca research, as well as that it will be explored more thoroughly in the unique context that is computer-mediated English as a lingua franca communication.

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Appendix

Abstract

This thesis explores the use of hyperbole in English as a lingua franca (ELF) communication on the basis of two naturally-occurring WhatsApp group chats between unacquainted students who use ELF to communicate while working on their group projects. The thesis investigates the most frequent realizations of hyperbole in the two chats and explores the central concepts of ELF research, such as accommodation and creativity, in relation to the use of hyperbole. Considering that the ELF groups in question have no prior communicative history and constitute Transient International Groups (TIGs), the thesis uses the micro-diachronic approach and monitors the use of hyperbole throughout the entire course of communication. The findings reveal a wide range of formal realizations in different stages of communication, as well as a number of communicative functions associated with the use of hyperbole. In addition, it is observed that the use of hyperbole differs between the two TIGs, which can be related to the group characteristics (e.g. size of the group, degree of familiarity). Nevertheless, in both TIGs, hyperbole plays a significant role in establishing interpersonal relationships, as well as achieving and maintaining successful communication in ELF online group chats.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit untersucht die Verwendung von Hyperbeln in Englisch als Lingua Franca (ELF) Kommunikation, basierend auf den in zwei WhatsApp-Gruppenchats natürlich entstandenen Unterhaltungen. Die Gruppenchats wurden von sich unbekannten Studenten für den Zweck der Kommunikation während der Arbeit an Gruppenprojekten erstellt. Die Studie widmet sich den häufigsten Formen/Realisationen von Hyperbeln in den Unterhaltungen und analysiert dabei zentrale Aspekte von ELF, wie accommodation und Kreativität, im Zusammenhang mit der Verwendung von Hyperbeln. Da sich die Teilnehmer der Gruppenchats im Voraus nicht gekannt haben und Transient International Groups (TIGs) bilden, wendet die Studie eine mikro-diachronische Perspektive an und beobachtet den Einsatz von Hyperbeln durch den gesamten Verlauf der Kommunikationen. Die Ergebnisse der Analyse zeigen sowohl eine große Bandbreite an Formen/Realisationen zu unterschiedlichen Zeitpunkten der Unterhaltungen, als

auch zahlreiche kommunikative Funktionen, die mit der Verwendung von Hyperbeln in Verbindung gebracht werden. Weiters kann beobachtet werden, dass die Verwendung von Hyperbeln zwischen den beiden TIGs unterschiedlich ist, was auf die Merkmale der Gruppen (zum Beispiel Gruppengröße oder Vertrautheit zwischen den Teilnehmern) zurückzuführen sein kann. Trotzdem spielen Hyperbeln in beiden TIGs nicht nur eine signifikante Rolle im Aufbau von zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen, sondern sind auch für die Aufrechterhaltung von erfolgreichen ELF Kommunikation von großer Bedeutung.