



Adab Al-Rafidayn Journal

**A refereed quarterly scientific journal
Issued by the College of Arts - University of Mosul**

Vol. Eighty-third / year fifty

Rabi al-Thani - 1442 AH / December 2020 AD

**The journal's deposit number in the National
Library in Baghdad: 14 of 1992**

ISSN 0378- 2867

E ISSN 2664-2506

P ISSN 1813-0526

To communicate:

radab.mosuljournals@gmail.com

URL: <https://radab.mosuljournals.com>

Adab Al-Rafidayn Journal

**A refereed journal concerned with the publishing of scientific researches
in the field of arts and humanities both in Arabic and English**

Vol. Eighty-third / year fifty / Rabi al-Thani - 1442 AH / December 2020 AD

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Editor-in-chief

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A Socio-linguistic Study on the Relevance of Convergence and Divergence to In-group Identity on Twitter

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Dalal Abd Al-Ameer Mohammed*

تأريخ القبول: ٢٠٢٠/٢/٩

تأريخ التقديم: ٢٠١٩/١١/٢٦

Abstract

SNSs provide a medium for millions of users and inhabitants of the virtual world to communicate, play different roles and negotiate identities. Inhabitants of the virtual world tend to gather around common goal or interest, by doing so they are forming online communities that are boundless by time and space. To join these communities, members need to establish an identity in accordance with the requirements of the target community. Manchester United Football club fans community is an example of a community of practice that is formed on Twitter where fans from all over the globe cheer for and support one club. Within this community, there are certain linguistic norms and behaviours that are followed in order for a user on Twitter to be recognized, and acknowledged as a fan of Manchester United Football club. The first step is identification through self-presentation (Schwämmlein and Wodzicki, 2013). A user is required to reflect their interest in belonging to the group by tweeting about it or choosing a group-related username. The group the fan belongs to is the in-group and the fan categorizes themselves as part of the “us” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). After being accepted in the group, the fan starts *acting* in a way similar to how other *real* fans act. This can be reflected clearly in the way the fans converge towards the “us” and diverge away from the “them”. A corpus of (648125) words, representing (25757) tweets of Manchester United Football Club fans, was built and analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. *Lancsbox* (Brezina

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and McEnery, 2018) was used to examine the frequencies, concordances and collocations of the selected lexical items, logically guiding the researcher to a qualitative discussion of examples. It is through following these linguistic norms of indexing self and other, and linguistically accommodating, that a fan identity is constructed and reflected at the same time.

Keywords:(Team / Cheer / Community / Membership).

1. Introduction

A conversation may take place between a bilingual African American fifty year old man who is originally from Uganda currently living in the United States, a female artist from Canada taking art classes at the University of New-York, and southern American farmer at a mutual friend's wedding. One cannot simply ignore the diversity of the social dimensions of the interlocutors in terms of gender, culture and educational background. Considering all these differences many questions are raised, how can the interlocutors negotiate their very different social and personal identities during the interaction? Which identity/identities will be reflected for a lucid communication? What are the consequences of accommodating? Who will change their style, all of them or none? The explanation will be provided by introducing *communication accommodation theory* (CAT henceforth).

CAT had aspired to provide explanations as well as speculations for possible amendments interlocutors apply to their speech when engaging in a conversation similar to the above example. It investigates the strategies by which we *accommodate* our communication, and if so, what are the motivations, and the results of that particular accommodation. CAT addresses interpersonal, as well as intergroup communication issues that are how we accommodate as individuals may affect our communication with the groups we belong to. Sometimes our communication can be identity-driven either by our personal or social identity. For example, we can apply this to the group under investigation, the interlocutors seems to have nothing in common aside from the fact they are all fans of the same Club which makes them fall under the

category of informal, primary groups i.e. Manchester United Football Club fan group. Therefore and in order to have a common topic of interest and a fluid interaction, the interlocutors will probably not talk about their different educational backgrounds, geographic areas, nationalities, or even ethnicity. They will be directing their communication at something more common and familiar which is their beloved club, a topic that is common and interesting enough for all to interact.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The central research question of this study is how fan in-group identity is established and projected on Twitter through the use of accommodative strategies, convergence and divergence.

1.3 Aims of the Research

This study aims at the investigation of the following:

1. The relevance of Communication Accommodation Theory to in-group identity on Titter.
2. The role of convergence in creating supportive atmosphere among the members to achieve solidarity.
3. Convergence as a tactic signifying the differences between real and *plastic* fans.
4. How these strategies construct and project in-group identity.

1.4 Hypotheses

In the light of the central research problem, the following tentative answers are suggested:

1. Manchester United fans use divergence to express differences and maintain distance.
2. Members stress similarity and sameness when they converge.
3. Divergence and convergence play an essential role in reflecting and constructing in-group identity.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Twitter

One of the most developing and popular social network sites (SNSs henceforth) nowadays is Twitter. Twitter was “created in 2006, it is a micro-blogging platform that permits users to send and receive text-based posts (tweets) of up to 140 characters” (Crystal 2011, p:36). However, in 2017, the limit of the letters used in one tweet has been doubled to (280) characters since many users expressed their frustration. The number of the characters allowed in a tweet has surely affected the content of the tweet. Users are not free to write as much as they please but as much as they are allowed to therefore there are certain changes that affect the language used.

Twitter is public which means that whatever a user tweets is accessible to everyone scrolling down your profile, unless you wish to create a secret or a private list which you can add friends or certain “followers” to it. Creating a profile on Twitter is a less complicated process than on other SNSs. All a user needs is three steps, a user name, phone or email, and a password. Twitter does not need any personal information from the users such as birthdate, and gender. However a user can see what is going on Twitter without creating an account by just going to *twitter.com* and the latest trends in your area and numerous categories will be viewed for those who do not want to be involved despite the freedom of access there is a limitation in tweeting and re-tweeting which is only possible for users with an account.

On Twitter there are two major processes users can do (Crystal 2010) those are tweeting and re-tweeting. It is true that Twitter is public by default. This does not mean that users cannot make their tweets private because they easily can by simply going to “account and privacy” and select protect your tweets and choose the followers they would like to share their tweets with.

According to (Crystal 2010:37) “a search of the Twitter database generates tweets displaying a two-part structure. The first element contains the author’s identity and the message sent. The second part

contains data about the tweet – its temporal source (related in real time to the moment of enquiry) and Internet origin – and response options.” As it is the norm in SNSs, Twitter users also look for other users who share similar interests, and common goals with them. Not only that but users search for a space to discuss what they may not be able to discuss either in their real life or by posting it on their profiles probably because they cannot reach enough people and to avoid judgment therefore they resort to groups and since all members are familiar with the topic discussed, they`ll avoid having members who do not understand what is being talked about in other words “individuals who have specialized or unusual interests may find it difficult to find groups corresponding to their interests in their everyday social environments. For instance, someone who lives in rural Nebraska and who is passionate about Indian cooking may find it difficult to find others who share that interest” (McKenna and Green, 2002:117).

2.3 Hash-tags and Group Construction on Twitter

Hash-tag use is a user originated norm on Twitter, acknowledged by their help page on www.Twitter.com. This means that there are different perceptions and functions of *hash-tagging* since there are different types of users. The first time Hash-tags was used in a tweet (2007) by Chris Messina, who is considered the inventor of the hash-tag. He proposed that the use of hash-tags will serve users in terms of content search and management, in different words, easiness of accessibility to specific content. What is being talked about can be readily viewed by clicking on the hash-tag.

Creating a hash-tag is a basic process. What is needed is the symbol of the pound (#), followed by letters or also called characters combined with numbers under the condition that it does not start with it, or alone a user would like to highlight. This why, the tweet or the post is labelled and “linked to a search for those characters” (Sagolla 2009: 167), allowing the classification and retrieval of similar tweets. Twitter imposes some restrictions on the creation process, one of which is that a hash-tag cannot be made up wholly of digits (e.g. #789). The insertion of special characters within or to start a tweet with not permissible as well such as (!, \$, *, %,) except

for the underscore (_) which helps separate words but keep them highlighted and included within the hash-tag (e.g. #Love_Wins).

Scholars have examined hash-tags linguistically each based on their Functions (Papacharissi 2015, Zappavigna 2015). However, examining the hash-tags generated by a particular group of people, a community, would provide insights into the texture of that group. Manchester United fans, the subject of this study, use different hash-tags to achieve numerous functions. They use hash-tags for expressive purposes whether opinions about players, managers, and even the owners of the club are not immune to tagging, feelings of anger, love, support all can be reflected through hash-tag use. They also use hash-tags to propose a public demand.

Group creation mechanisms on Twitter are unique simply because Twitter is different in terms of accessibility from other SNSs. The most common method for creating a group on Twitter is by using hash-tags. Being the trend of most of social network sites Saxon et al (2015) dealt with hash-tags as one of the “most innovative tools Since Twitter employee Chris Messina sent the first ever tweet containing a hash-tag in 2007” which later on became common not only on Twitter but also extended to other SNSs. The importance of hash-tags lies in its function, in this respect, as an indicator for a group not as a highlighter of the words or phrases that follow it. The main reason hash-tags are treated as group indicators is because users interact using the same hash- tag in addition to that “hashtags indicate topics or themes, and they represent an important innovation in social media communication. First, the use of hashtags is powerful because it is participatory” (Saxton et al 2015:156). A hash sign or the pound sign (#) is embedded within the tweet it could be at the beginning, middle, or the end. Users do not agree upon a particular hash-tag in advance but it is a voluntary process. There are many purposes a hash-tag may serve for example “the hashtag classifies messages, improves searchability, and allows the organization to link messages to existing knowledge and action communities. It is this community element that undergirds the power of hashtags” Saxton et al (2015:156).

There are two main methods of group creation on Twitter in terms of privacy and who can be a member of that group and who cannot. The first one is public groups which are groups formed by hash-tags. Anyone can join these communities by simply interacting and embedding the hash-tag within their tweet.

The second type of groups is “private lists” in which a user can control the members who can be a part of this group who are normally the users` followers. No one out of this group will be able to see the tweets or join the conversation without a prior add from the list creator themselves.

In conclusion, hash-tag communities on twitter are gaining more and more popularity. They are easily founded and accessed. A user may be a part of many groups in one community by inserting different hash-tags in their tweet.

2.4 In-group Identity

Being a part of any sort of online assembly helps users maintain a certain representation that differentiates them from other similar gatherings. The “common in-group identity theory” is one of the theoretical models proposed by Gaertner and Dovidio (1993) that deals with group bias that is we prefer in-group members over out-group members and how that bias can be reduced. The model is derived from Tajfel and Turner(1979) social categorization therefore the identity of the user becomes one with the group`s identity they belong to and they start seeing themselves through the lens of that group, in-groupers will reflect a collective identity rather than individual identity to distinguish them from out-groupers hence they start behaving in a way similar to that of the group and since “the "essence," of a group lies in the interaction of its members-the behaving together” (McGrath, 1984:12) members start using the same language of their groups that is certain words and phrases that only this group uses and have certain attitudes towards other groups who do not share the same interests, goals or beliefs which all aid to project their group identity and One can create group identity merely by defining a collection of people as members of the same social category (Turner 1985; Turner et al. 1987).

According to (Ren, et al. 2007: 390) “anonymity fosters common identity and strong group norms”. For example, looking at groups formed on SNSs such as Twitter which has many groups and communities with different purposes and interests. The groups that this study is concerned with are Manchester United fans groups. Users may join more than one group dedicated for supporting the team; many of those users choose to have anonymous accounts for whatever the reason they have. This is why they reflect the in-group identity freely and without any boundaries. Since they are there not to be X or Y but as MUFC fans, however a person’s feelings of common identity, and the role of the group in his or her life, changes with the situation (Brewer and Gardner 1996). For example X and Y will not behave as fans all the time because they have other different social roles they play in other groups they belong such as their children school group, in which they will be parents rather than fans but still will reflect the group identity.

2.5 Inception and Historical Background of CAT

CAT has been recognized as one of the most powerful theories in communication. Founded by Howard Giles in the early 1970s, CAT has undergone many phases of refinements. Historically speaking, the basis for the original theory have been laid by social psychologists (Giles, 1973, Giles, Taylor, & Bourhis, 1972), the motivation of the original theory, called speech accommodation theory (SAT henceforth) back then, was the lack of explanation provided by sociolinguistics for linguistic variation in social context (Beebe & Giles, 1984). The basic tenets of SAT were providing an elaboration for what motivates individuals to switch their speech style in interaction and the outcomes that may arise from them. More accurately, it was concerned with finding clarifications with regards to the cognitive process underlying speech *convergence* and *divergence* (Thakerar et al., 1982:207).

Central to SAT is the notion that communication is not merely an exchange of random information but interpersonal and intergroup relations are maintained through communication. This notion remained intact after the development of SAT into CAT. On the

contrary, it was further enhanced. SAT has relied on a number of theories before its development into CAT, most recognizably Attraction Theory (Byrne, 1971) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Attraction theory is built on the assumption that individuals are attracted to similar others. At the same time, they distance themselves from different others. For example this similarity can be of different types such similar gender, religion, ethnicity, language. This way there will an attraction of some kind that will possibly lead to communication, and when communication occurs certain shifts will be present. Unlike when, for instance, two very dissimilar individuals meet for the first time they will not have the same level of attraction as the previous ones. Therefore the chances for communication will be less than the first case. That does not mean it won't take place at all but not as simply as it would be with a ready-made commonalities.

The second important theory which both SAT and CAT draw on is social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979). This theory deals with how individuals identify and categorise themselves as members of different groups and how that identification provide them with a sense of belonging and pride. Once again the emphasis is placed on similarities and differences. Similar others will be included within 'us' and different others will be included within 'the'. Individuals will accommodate to enhance the similarity within the 'us' group and to emphasise the differences toward the 'them' group.

2.4 The Application of CAT Online

Communication online is no less complicated and investigation-worthy than real life face to face communication. The internet offers new patterns of communication in terms of availability of users at the time of the interaction and the type of communication which varies depending on the nature of the SNS as well as the preference and easiness for users. It might be video chat, voice message, or instant text messages depending on the SNSs. Unlike real life communication those users reply to the messages sent whenever

they get the chance to do so, it might be an instant reply or it may take hours, days or even weeks depending on many factors, one of which is internet connection accessibility and whom to reply to. Priorities of interaction play an important role in the period of time a user takes to reply to another, in this sense we can say that even the time taken when replying to a message can be considered *accommodative*.

The internet is an open source for many communities to form and interact. Imagine having a community of teachers who are interested in teaching English as a second or foreign language who are debating the best methods and practices of language teaching/learning to be followed in the class. Most of the members will be, logically speaking, English teachers from all around the globe. Despite having the same topic of interest and a common ground, there will always be similarities as well as differences in terms of choosing a method or a theory over another. Debates will take the form of either converging toward the members whom you agree with, and at the same time converging from the members whom you disagree with in both cases this will be done online through exchanging messages in whatever forum this debate is taking a place. The point is that despite being similar on the surface communicative behaviour will change when there is a need to voice different ideas and expressing different opinions, one of the ways to accomplish this is through using accommodative strategies, namely, convergence and divergence. In the same vein, group affiliation is facilitated through the accommodative strategies dichotomy. For example, the group under investigation, MUFC fans, employ these strategies when they interact with both other fans of other teams as well as with whet they may identify as '*plastics*'. Similarities and differences are emphasised. Depending on how others are identified whether one of 'us' or one of 'them' one can easily judge by examining the content of the social encounter. The major motivation for adjusting their communicative behaviour is their identification with the group. If a fan is an in-grouper, as identified by other groups, then by definition they will try to be closer to other alleged out-groupers. Oppositely, if a fan identifies him/ herself as an in-grouper they will more likely try to steer away from out groupers

and toward in-groupers. The researcher will apply CAT on the virtual group under investigation to pertain certain patters about the nature of the communication, as the researcher believes that communication is more than stating facts, information and emotions. The meanings communicated through interaction, identities negotiated, groups joined to and the signalling of that affiliation. The application of those tenets will reveal the relationship between in-group identity construction, negotiation, and reflection among MUFC fans. Providing further insights on the nature of the relationship maintained, and group dynamics practiced among the group members under investigation.

3. Data Collection and Methodology

The data for the study is elicited from the SNS known as Twitter. A corpus of (648125) words, representing (25757) tweets of Manchester United Football Club fans, is built and analysed qualitatively. The data collection process was divided into two main sections: *timeline data*, and *hash-tag searches data*. The procedure of data collection is copy-pasting relevant tweets from both sections following a chronological order. Collecting data from a SNS such as Twitter is not an easy process, especially at times of big matches, hundreds of tweets stream in a very short time and also because communication via Twitter is usually rapid. Therefore, these divisions are necessary to give a structure to the process as a whole.

The actual data collection date started on the 23rd of October 2018 and the final date of data collection was on the 9th of February 2019. The examples are coded in a manner that guarantees the privacy of the tweeters, in terms of user name, gender, and location, only dates and name of files have been given in order to provide some context for the tweets. Since the time of the tweet and the hash-tag/hash-tags can explain a great deal of the content.

4. Discussion and Analysis: Accommodation Dichotomy and Its relevance to In-group Identity

Accommodation theory cab be applied to groups not only individuals. The following sections will illustrate the implications

accommodative strategies have with regard to in-group identity construction and reflection.

4.1 Convergence

The social distance between two or more individuals can be measured by how willingly they adjust their behaviour throughout the interaction. It is a matter of being either closer to your addressee/addressees or the opposite. The first to be considered is the decrease of social distance between interlocutors, hence convergence. The most researched and studied principle of CAT (Giles, 1973). At the very beginning convergence was studied in relation to the linguistic change of style, in other words how interlocutors apply changed to their speech to become more similar, likeable, and acceptable by others. Convergence is of two main types:

1. Upward Convergence
2. Downward Convergence

The first type of convergence is upward convergence. As its name suggests upward convergence takes place when the interviewee converges their speech style to a higher level, particularly to that of his/her interviewer. For example, a local TV channel decides to make a report on the prices of meat in the city of Mosul. The reporter will take a random tour in a local market or bazar and start asking customers and butchers alike about their opinion on the matter. A change of style on the part of the interviewees will be noticed. They will no longer speak as informally as they do with their peers but their speech will converge to a more elevated style, similar to that of their interviewer. It can be seen as an attempt that interviewees make to appear more educated, serious, and also to gain approval from the audience who is watching at home and the approval of the interviewer himself. Adopting an elevated speech style may also contribute to the speaker's need to feel confident. On the contrary, the second type of convergence is downward convergence. Azuma (1997) stated an example of downward convergence represented by the speech of the Japanese emperor, Hirohito. The emperor has never addressed his nation before the end of the pacific war, however, after the need for a speech had arisen,

especially after the defeat, the emperor found himself in a position where he needs to connect with his people. Therefore, he adopted a very informal, almost everyday conversation like style which is extremely different from the traditional, high style of speech of the ruling family to address his nation for years. The outcome of the downward convergence was remarkable. The bond was restored between the two parties, and the people felt that the emperor is one of them unlike the *godly* persona they expected him to be, they felt how genuinely concerned he is about his people that he needed to share this with them, resulting in mutually endured loss. The distinction between upward and downward convergence is essential with regards to its implications for *societal valence* (Giles & Powseland, 1975).

The application on CAT to group membership and dynamics is no less important than its application to interpersonal relations. Groups such as MUFC fans employ different types of strategies at times when they are close to one another and when they would like to distinct themselves from others. One of those strategies is that of convergence. The application of this tactic to the interaction between the members carries many meanings that reflect the manner the group members handle their communication as a unit and the strategies followed and employed to reinforce this unity. The focus will be placed on the tweets exchanged between group members. This communication is necessary for the continuity of the group especially that the group is formed on a virtual arena such as Twitter. There will be innovation in terms of bringing together the members, which will be dealt with first, however, the relevance of convergence and divergence will be looked at through the positive and the negative aspect that is from the prospect of in-groupers and out-groupers. How they accommodate? Why do they accommodate? and when?. The answer to the previous questions will set the distinction between real versus plastic fans very clearly and will further provide insights on how do members detect true fans based on the content of their tweets. Therefore it is fans judging fans, hence intergroup communication behaviour display.

4.2 Convergence tactics used by MUFC fans

Fans often find themselves in a situation where they have to signal their in-group identity in order not to be accused as being an out-grouper. One of the ways by which a fan chooses to do that is convergence. The alternations made on the communication behaviour will certainly have an effect on how a member is perceived by the group. Communication on Twitter is unique. Therefore the members will make use of this uniqueness and innovate ways of adjusting of their communicative behaviour. One of these ways is the multiple use of hash-tags.

1. <14th December, 2018. F: #Davesaves>
brillant !!! Hey @caroline lovely [#Topredsister](#) thanks so much for the tag my friend much appreciated as always good Evening to you and all reds out there [#MUFC FAMILY](#) #Davesaves #OneLove

The user above started by praising a *save*, to provide some context, David De Gea did an amazing job in that match and much appraisal has been directed to him that day. To follow the stream of what other fans are tweeting about on this day, the user decided to first focus on the performance of the goal keeper and then thanking the person who tagged him in their tweet calling her a friend, Caroline in this case, and finally ending the tweet with multiple hash-tags. The manner in which the user is interacting with others represents a typical communicative behavior followed by MUFC fans on Twitter the most recognizable part of it is that of using hash-tags to signal that he/she is following a similar pattern as other fans in their tweets, sometimes the most important part of the tweet is the hash-tag/hash-tags it contains because it reveals the type of vents, characters, shared reaction toward them. The hash-tags used in the tweet are what is normally used in other tweets by other members of the community so similarity is emphasized, a behavior is followed hence convergence. Following norms is an admission of acceptance of these norms. To blend in a community, accepting the norms is the first step on the ladder. Now, if you look at the tweet, you will without a speck of doubt identify the user as a MUFC fan. There are

many ways of expressing convergence, these ways will be discussed below.

4.2.1 Hash-tags

Hash-tags can also be used solely for the purpose of moving toward a person and reflecting that attitude through the use of certain hash-tags.

2. <22nd December, 2018. F:Mourinhoin>
As much as I dislike Mourinho as a person, I would like to congratulate him on the job he's done at Man United ruining the lives of glory supporters for the past few years has been special for me #MourinhoIn

The Mourinho issue strikes again, but on a different cord this time. The user is a part of the “Mourinho-in’ers” group. To manifest his desire of keeping him as a manager, he/she started to use the hash-tag other members of this group use when they tweet about this particular issue that has been considered as one of the most debated issues among MUFC fans. Through the use of this hash-tag, the user is explicitly stating that he/she is accepting Mourinho as a part of the group. Support mixed with converging toward a person who is considered to one of the most controversial managers of MUFC is not very welcomed in this community. However, the focus is not placed upon support, it is placed upon the strategy of convergence this fan has followed to reflect his attitude toward the issue.

4.2.2 Tagging

Another way of convergence can be seen when members of the group tag each other either to congratulate one another on a win or to merely connect and say hello.

3. <17th January, 2019. F: #MUFC_Family>
*Tuesday is win day #MUFC_FAMILY @assotmufc
 @AnnetteH0526 @simongillen @Barry61099209
 @BirgitKreusel @refc160 @craighgilmore
 @dhruv123tupac*

The example above is one of many similar others scattered over Twitter. Tagging other members of the group is yet another communicative norm. This norm allows members to communicate with one another and further brings together the members for a possible interaction. The tagged members will re-tag all the users mentioned in the tweet fostering a feeling of solidarity and support. The significance of this tagging process is far more important than a simple gathering of members, it means that we are going to follow the same behavior other senior members do to reflect our agreement to the process and our practice of it, showing attachment to other members through mentioning them in the tweet. A sense of sharing good moments, such as this, of celebrating a win with others, the user started by tagging the big group, then followed that by tagging members of that whom he views as members of the MUFC family. Getting closer and minimizing the social distance is what is expressed by this act of tagging. Converging toward other members of the group takes the form of mentioning them and sharing particular feelings with them to revise a sense of community. MUFC family hash-tag is used to facilitate the meanings of tagging, and once one is comfortable calling other as if they are members of their family, a decrease in social distance will be noticed and felt by tagged others. This tactic of convergence is similar to the previous one concerning the use of multiple hash-tags, since both can be seen as community building, interaction inviting, and convergence tactics.

4.2.3 Ways of Addressing

The linguistic forms which we use to address one another imply many dimensions of the relationship between the addresser and the addressee. Traditionally speaking, people use different ways of address when they interact with those who are older, younger, have more power than they do, hold a higher social status in the community. All these interpersonal differences will ultimately result in the varying forms used to address each person. The social and cultural consequences of this variation will differ from a community to another, bearing in mind that each community has its own rules and regulations with regards to interaction. However, the nature of

the community affects these regulations, the relationship between the members and the attitudes they have toward one another. To refer to your friend by his/her first name, is unlikely to be followed with your manager or even your parents. Therefore closeness not always defined by kinship relation, but by other factors. MUFC fans have their own ways of addressing each other, the players, and managers.

4. <29th December, 2018. F:# Davesaves>
Your December 2018 Player of the Month! #DaveSaves
5. <27th January, 2019. F: Oleball>
Three weeks ago. United was 11 points off the top 4, now we are 10 points off 2nd thanks to Ole. Let`s keep going reds, plenty of football left to play. #Oleball is in full show, Lads.#MUFC #Oleball
6. <6th February, 2018. F: 3Busbybabes>
It makes me so proud to be a part of such a beautiful football club.I hope all the players feel the same coming to United. It is not only winning trophies, it is how the legacy was built. 60 yrs ago lives lost and the history was made. We will never forget #BusbyBabes #Flowers of Manchester
7. <10th January, 2019. F: #MUFC>
I tweet related to football , Manchester United , Red Devil`s, follow me if u Manchester United backup account @strettford #MUFC #GGMU
8. <20th January, 2019. F: #MUFC_Family>
The spirit within our great club seems absolutely epic right now, love you red brothers and sisters #MUFC_FAMILY

As seen above in the examples, MUFC fans have used various terms of address to refer to the players (dead and alive), managers, and lastly to themselves and other group members. The fans are the change bringer here, they set the rules of address based on how they perceive themselves and others as being one family, a group. To start with, fans call each other red(s), red devils, brothers, sisters,

top red brother, and top red sister. Red refers to the official colour of the club, the fans are very attached to all of the details of the team that they even use the colour of the club as an address term to not only refer to themselves and other fans but also sometimes to the team players as a unified term of address, to once again, include themselves and the bigger group in the referent. Therefore without a context 'red' may refer to a player or to a fan. Red devil, on the other hand, is a combination of both the colour and the logo of the team. It is not any devil, it is *the red devil*. The pride they take into being called and calling other members as red devils is a way of establishing the territory of the group as seen in example (7). Only red devils are allowed in it. Family like relationships among the group members are reflected through the way they address one another (example 8). Brother/sister and its variations are used heavily among the fans. This shows how closely related they are. Accepting one as if he/she is one of your family members is the highest degree of acceptance.

As far as the players are concerned, the fans use no less interesting address forms from the ones they use to refer to themselves and other fans. David De Gea, the goal keeper is the most pampered players in the team. He has been called many names such as Dave, our wall, my goal keeper, and most interestingly *El capitan*, which is Spanish for the captain, this is purely linguistic convergence to use his native tongue is truly emotional and effective way of showing closeness and acceptance. Other players are called by their first name, however not as much as by their last name not because they are restraining from calling them by their first name but because it is the name that appears at the back of their jerseys, so they are used to seeing it more than the first name. As for the dead ones they are also considered as members of the group. Busby babes are those players who lost their lives in the Munich air crash. They are membered by the fans by their manager at that time, Sir Matt Busby. He was looked at as a father not as an ordinary manager, that's why the players are called the Busby Babes. After the crash, a more tender, soulful term was used the flowers of Manchester. The connotations of the word flower make it clear for others how highly

they thought of the players back at the time. The Last part to deal with is the way of addressing managers. Managers have been and they will always be one of the most important units in the club. Hated or adored, they will never be ignored. The fans will make it clear how they deal with the manger`s vision for the team. One of the ways to express it is how they address him. First names are as much common as last names, the term ‘Boss’ is also used by the fans to refer to the mangers sometimes. Although he is not the boss of any fan but as inclusion goes they consider him to be their boss as well. They listen to what he comments after each match. They wait for justifications in the case of a loss and for suitable choices. Therefore, there is an indirect relationship between the fans and the manger which may be considered as an in-grouper sometimes or an out-grouper other times. In example (5) the beloved manager, who is a former player of MUFC, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is referred to by his first name, as to express the familiarity with a former player being a manger now, things seem to get better since he knows the club very well in terms of tactics and legacy. He is an in-grouper, and his membership has been restored after he became the manager, multiple consecutive wins earned him a solid reputation in the community. The fans feel very comfortable to call him by his first name since he is one of their own and will seek no distance with the new manger as a result. It is true that using first names is one of the most common ways of address (Wardhaugh, 2006) but that does not mean that it does not carry further implications. So far, we have been examining the different strategies or tactics that MUFC fans employ in the process of convergence. These strategies are inspired by the boundless community they have formed on Twitter. It was connected the very core of this innovation delivered by MUFC fans, the nature of the internet and its limitless possibilities for uniqueness and creativity. There are many tweets that reflect the ordinary ways of convergence which have been discussed in the previous chapters, even group oriented self-presentation and the use of the pronoun we to refer include both speaker and addressee can be regarded as means of converging. Therefore it is not how group members in general converge toward their groups but how MUFC fans on Twitter come together in particular. The principles of CAT have all been used in a way or another proving that the theory is

efficient on virtual arenas as much as it is in real life. The group under investigation have established certain communicative behaviours to be followed by new members and seniors alike. These communicative strategies were in alliance with the tenets of CAT. First the need for adaptation in a new environment was met by following what has been regarded as a communicative norm in the group. These norms can be represented by the below table.

Hash-tags	Player hash-tags, manager hash-tags
Tagging	Members tagging other members and expecting to be tagged.
Ways of addressing	Self/Other (fans, players, managers)

Table 1: Twitter tactics of Convergence

This is a widely spread behaviour in the group. Therefore as a form of acknowledgement, and consent these patterns are followed. The decrease in social distance and the emphasis placed on similarities rather than differences were all present in the context of accommodation. The need to be welcomed and belonged was also reflected through convergence. When a fan is being tagged or tags other fans it shows that there is approval on both parties. Social approval is not gained by convergence alone but it is an accumulation of many things, one of which is convergence. We have so far noticed that the style of communication among the group members can be safely termed as informal. Especially, when the way of addressing. Informality is emphasized, friendly and family like atmosphere is encouraged. The use of these particular terms casts a great importance on the nature of the relationship group members have (or imagine to have) with each other and with the players and managers. This positivity directed toward the group is crowned with convergence.

4.3 Divergence

The new technologies offer possibilities for a boundless communication. It does not matter where you are from as long as you have internet connection and a device to utilize, distance becomes meaningless. Despite the disappearance of geographic distance, social distance did not. It can still be expressed in many

ways whether blocking unwanted users, ignoring their comments or even briefly replying to them, not liking what they posts are all messages of one meaning that is I do not want to be close to you. These messages can be looked at as strategies of avoidance of communication or distancing self from others in general or particular others. This strategy represents an accentuation in the communicative behaviour of one or more interlocutor marking social distance and other dimensions. This strategy is termed divergence. To diverge is to maintain distance, to exclude others, or to emphasise differences. For example, in a conversation between three parties two know each other for quite some time and the third party has just been introduced by one of them to the other. The style of the newly introduced person will be somehow formal, and less familiar than the other two, taking into consideration the nature of the relationship between them. This distance maintained by the new person does not imply that he/she is not interested in the conversation as much as it means that there is a certain normative communicative behaviour followed by people in similar contexts. This is one way to look at it, another example is when an interlocutor purposely accentuate their style, accent, dialect to sound different from others within the same context of interaction to signal social status, level of education, ethnic, gender, or linguistic identity. Divergence can be perceived as rudeness in some contexts when the differences among the interlocutors are emphasised to a level where others feel disrespected or underappreciated. For instance, a young person helping an elderly person with creating an account on a SNS, be it Twitter for instance, The young person will use some terms that are new for the old person and without even trying to simplify the process for them, they will do the opposite. This will reflect on the way divergence is perceived, it is used to mark distinctiveness but this type of distinctiveness is understood as disrespectful. The old person will feel that they are being treated as ignorant of technology and they may also understand it as the other party's unwillingness to help them. Meanings behind the use of an accommodative strategy over another are communicated in interaction and people will always interpret what is intended based on how they find logical for them. In this particular example

divergence was considered to be rude for yet another reason, which is the expectancy of convergence.

Regardless of the strategies followed in a conversation whether convergence or divergence there are always more to the intended messages communicated by adapting one or both of these strategies. Depending on the motivation and intentions behind any communicative strategy, divergence and convergence can be either interpersonally oriented or intergroup oriented. They are not exclusive. An individual may or may not use both or one of them depending on the topic discussed or the context need for the reflection of either personal or group identity. Therefore some individuals may use convergence to signal their linguistic identity as a French or Spanish speaker, they can for example use a word or two in their native tongue to do so, the same person will not need to focus on their linguistic identity when they are fans of a certain football club such MUFC, when they are in an interaction with other group members they will most likely converge, however, when they are interacting with members of a different group, it will be necessary to project their group identity through seeking distinctiveness and further express by intergroup based divergence.

Sherif stated that "Whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their group identification, we have an instance of intergroup behavior" (Sherif, 1966:12) agreeing with this assumption MUFC fans sometimes find themselves in a position where they need to differentiate themselves from other members in their group on basis of identification. By so doing, this is an act of divergence. The motivations behind following such tactics will be connected to how members view members and how members view themselves as well. The strategies will be applied to the group in this sense in order to see how the inter-group communicative behaviour changes and marks a new attitude toward other in the same group. The two groups to be considered are those who claim to be real fans or *reals*, and others who are classified as plastics or not real fans. This classification has been made after many unhappy performances, and continuous losses took place, whom to blame?

when do they blame? how do they express their unhappiness are all barometers to be considered when identifying plastics. However, plastics consider themselves as in-groupers despite their classification as being out-groupers by other members. They do not identify themselves as a separate entity from MUFC. What make them different are their opinions about certain players, their reactions to loss and above all they are accused of not being loyal to the club at all times. Therefore fans that diverge from the players, mangers, and other group members are considered plastics.

9. <2nd February, 2019. F: #ManchesterUnited>

When you ask a united fan how many times has he been to old Trafford and they say none. What a shame!
#ManchesterUnited #plastics

Ultimate support should always be granted to the club. One of the ways by which it is delivered is by attending the matches at Old Trafford. Being there for the team and cheering for the players is one of the most important features of being a real fan. Therefore the user clearly considers themselves as a real fan, and is describing the attitude of those who don't attend matches as shameful. If you do not attend matches, if you do not cheer for your team in the pitch so loud that they can hear each and every one of you reminding them of how great an honor it is to be at MUFC, then you are simply a plastic. Making clear the attitude and the feelings of this user toward users who do not follow what is considered to be a must for the reals is diverging away from those members and letting them know that this behavior is unacceptable in the group. This is a case of a real diverging from plastics.

10. <21st November, 2018. F: #Mourinhoin>

#MourinhoIn All hail the Special One, Y'all wanted to crucify him before today... These plastics never cease to amaze.

11. <6th January, 2019. F:6.1>

Can see why this is United's 2nd string of players. Pereira - sloppy McTominay - slow & backwards Lukaku - zero ball

control Sanchez - Arthritic Fred - Hasn't kicked a ball in 17 years #MUFC

Changing views and blaming the managers is a feature of a plastic fan. Real fans will always support the manager and the team. When it is a win they are happy and supportive, but when there is a loss they start attacking the players and the managers neglecting the fact they are members of their group and they should not be behaving in such a manner. The tweeter is mocking this change of behavior to differentiate themselves from the plastics. Divergence is the main tactic here since mockery is considered a way of expressing it. A dogmatic belief is shaken by the plastics and it is the ticket of entrance to the group, this belief is that of ultimate support to all other members, regardless of the results they should always be untied and regardless of the ill-performance of a player or a manager, they should always be supportive and loyal to the group and not diverge away from any member. This fan believes that he/she belongs to the real group because they support the manager, convergence all the time no matter what happens.

The tweeter seems to be very degrading towards the players. This tweet is loaded with divergence. The tweeter is disrespecting the players by using negative adjectives such as sloppy, slow and backward, zero control, arthritic are all used to describe the performance of the players. This is how a plastic fan is identified by the style they use when they talk about the players. Paradoxically enough, the user still believes that he/she is a member of the group, this is why they feel as if they have the right to criticize the performance of the players with a bit of an insult directed to their characters as individuals, such as the calling Lukaku slow and backward referring to his mental abilities, and calling Fred arthritic although he is in perfect health. Despite the fact that in a sport like football physical abilities is what makes a difference in terms of performance. Therefore a point to be made clear with regards to the criticism directed to the players, it should not be personal it means that they are not valued group members. This negative, degrading, and destructive criticism are features of the style followed by the

plastic fans. Unlike what a real fan would say about Lukaku which would be similar to the following:

12. <3rd November, 2018. F: 3.11>

Lukaku scored more goals in his first season for United than Rooney or Berbatov did in theirs and scored a personal career best last season but he's suddenly not good enough for Manchester United? Afraid I'm not understanding the hate. He's out of form. It's football. It happens. #MUFC #OneLove

The defence to tweets as seen in example (12) is not strange, it is a normal reaction for such an action within the group, real fans will always defend their players and justify their mishaps as the tweeter began by stating the achievements of Lukaku as a player and as well as his personal career achievements, the defence proceeds as the real fans begins to justify what happened in that particular match by saying that as any other human being first and a player he is out of shape, still that does not mean that he is not good enough to be at Manchester United, as real fans formerly claimed that they 'don't throw our own under the bus' attack those who disrespect them by labelling them as plastics. It is very offensive to be called a plastic, it means that you are not real not solid not strong and worthy enough of being a part of the MUFC family.

13. <22nd November, 2018. F: #MUFC>

I don't understand #pogba's attitude. Yes he is a good player but no player is bigger than the team. Need a new challenge? You might as well find another club #GGMU #MUFC

14. <24th November, 2018. F: #MUFC>

A quick reminder to some Pogba worshippers, he will still disappoint you guys by leaving in summer or next and all this good boy attitude is cos no one is able to come up with the transfer fee yet, he is a proud snake and will always be #PogbaOut anytime any day for me

The loyalty is for the club not for the players. If a member is loyal to a player or to a manager he/she is not a qualified member to be a part of MUFC group. Divergence is not always directed towards

other members sometimes it can be directed toward a certain player, as Paul Pogba in this case. The fan here is diverging by suggesting that the player leaves the club since he no longer sees the club as good enough for him to stay in and that he needs a new challenge. This act of divergence stems out of a great degree of identification with the big group, MUFC, such behaviour is unacceptable, being proud and egoistic and believing that he is better than everyone else in the team is understood by the fans as being divergent, a simple reply to a clear divergence is divergence. This time however a player is considered a plastic and a fan`s divergence away from him is considered convergence.

So far, examples of divergence that takes place between real fans and plastics are considered. However, this is not always the case among plastics, there are times when they feel the need to voice their opinions about what is happening and they support each other on the expense of being called a plastic as it is expressed by the tweeter in example is talking about the same topic as the tweeter in the example before it. They both agree that Paul Pogba is not worthy of Manchester United who would take a snake in their group? Knowing that he neither has loyalty for the club nor any consideration for the feelings of the fans, hence divergence away from Pogba appears to be the logical response to his behaviour but at the same time there is convergence toward plastics in the sense that we both agree on something. In this case the similar attitude toward a player reflects similarities and agreements in opinions among the members of the plastic group.

5. Concluding Remarks

Membership pride and reflection is an important outcome of convergence. The most important consequence, however, is that of social identities reflection as the necessity for the justification of this behaviour was lingering in the folds of the context. Personal identities are no-where to be found. This is a purely group oriented accommodation, social distance is vanished among the group members, projecting positive attitude and sincere feelings of belonging. This is the case with convergence that has been investigated among group members who consider themselves as unit. Nevertheless, there is more to be uncovered when there are two

groups and the intergroup communication becomes the main source for analysis. A particular strategy is employed in this case, *divergence*, which will be the main concern of the following segment.

The strategy of divergence has been investigated with regard to the expressions of attitudinal relations among the group members, and the interpretation of these norm-deviant behaviours as divergence. The group is divided by exchanging accusations between plastics and reals. Plastics believe that they have the right to judge and criticise other group members when there is a defeat regardless of who they are, rank-wise, in the group. They are all equal. The light has been shed on the characteristics of plastics to make it easy for the reader to understand the differences between the two groups. It has been noticed that the identification of a plastic is the first step members take to cast them out of the reals group. Many cases of divergence were examined, a player diverging from the club understood by the fans as an act of withdrawing from the group and hence providing an appropriate response of the same type. Another case of divergence is seen as convergence when fans diverge from fans to converge to other fans. Therefore divergence is not always meant to detach oneself from a group, but it can be the opposite, by detaching un-loyal members from the group to maintain its strength and sustainability. The threat of having plastics is serious because they will result in divisions among the group members, and whenever the fans find a certain behaviour as threatening to the group`s unity they will highlight it and send a message to others members not to follow it or you will be categorized as a plastic. Adhering to the positive, convergent communicative behaviour is what real fans agree upon and in case of following the opposite there will be consequences. Marking distinctiveness and taking pride into being a real fan was accomplished through divergence. In addition to the fact that social distance can be maintained by declaring belonging and group affiliation online.

The links made by MUFC fans to in-group identity reflection were yet examined through a socio-linguistic approach represented by communication accommodation theory and its most important communicative strategies, convergence and divergence. This is

clearly demonstrated by the reflection of the social identity (group member identity) and the absence of personal identity in communication with the aim being distinctiveness. Social identity has been employed in both strategies whether convergence or divergence. Fans used these strategies to reflect their high group identification and membership. They used convergence to come closer to other group members and to show that they are agreeing with the norms and the communicative behaviour of the group, decreasing the social distance at the same time differences were maximized among group members to increase social distance, dissimilarity, and to make clear for others that disagreement and destructive criticism will not make a fan it will make a plastic, a cheap replica. Therefore convergence is an in-group identity projection act and divergence is an out-group identity act. Members will always converge and plastics will diverge. Divergence will be perceived as negative, but convergence will be perceived as positive. Therefore maintaining communication will be by following positive strategies rather than negative ones.

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دراسة لغوية - اجتماعية لصلة التباعد والتقارب بالهوية الضمنية للمجموعة على تويتر

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المستخلص

مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي توفر وسطاً افتراضياً لملايين المستخدمين وساكني العالم الافتراضي للتواصل، وتأدية أدوار مختلفة وتمثيل مختلف الهويات، ويميل سكان هذا العالم إلى الاجتماع حول هدف مشترك أو غاية معينة، عبر ذلك فإنهم يقومون بتكوين مجتمعات على الشبكة العنكبوتية التي لا تُقيد بوقت أو فضاء وللاضمام إلى هذه المجتمعات، يجب على الأعضاء تكوين هوية على حسب المتطلبات من المجتمع المعني .

إنَّ مجتمع مشجعي نادي مانشستر يونايتد لكرة القدم هو مثال لمجتمع مبني على أساس الأهداف المشتركة والذي مبني على التويتر؛ إذ يقوم المشجعون من كل أنحاء العالم بتشجيع نادٍ واحد و دعمه .

ضمن هذا المجتمع، توجد بعض الخصائص اللغوية والسلوكيات التي تتبع؛ لغرض تمييز المستخدم على التويتر، بحيث يُعترف به كمشجع لفريق مانشستر يونايتد لكرة القدم، والخطوة الأولى هي التعريف عن الذات كما هو موضح في (Schwämmlein and Wodzicki, 2013) بعدما يتم قبول المشجع في المجموعة، يبدأ بالتصرف بطريقة مشابهة لطريقة تصرف المشجعين الحقيقيين الآخرين، ويمكن عكس هذا عن طريق كيفية استخدام الاقتراب من "نحن" والابتعاد عن "هم"، بالنهاية، القيام بما يقوم به الأعضاء الآخرون عندما يواجه النادي صعوبات تجعله واضحاً للمشجع أنَّه في مكان يسمح له تحديد نقاط الضعف، واقتراح الحلول، والنقد البناء، أو الإشادة بالأداء .

الكلمات المفتاحية: (فريق/ تشجيع/مجتمع/عضوية) .