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Research Article

Approaching Critical Social Media Literacy Within the Framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics: The Example of "Social Media Oratory"

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Abstract

This paper proposes an initial appraisal of social media video content, with the aim to foster critical literacy skills, revisited here within the context of "critical social media literacy". Literacy, critical media literacy, and multimodal literacy have all been foregrounded within Systemic Functional Linguistics, following notably in the important body of work devoted to multimodal studies. However, to date, impetus on critical literacy in the classroom has not been explicitly taken up within the field of linguistics in relation to social media. This study focuses on a specific type of social media video content, "social media oratory", whereby a speaker appears in front of the camera and defends a cause over an expanse of monologic speech. After introducing the fields of social media literacy, media literacy and multimodal literacy, as well as defining social media oratory, the paper provides a qualitative analysis of specific examples, examining for instance technological affordances and cases of intersemiotic concurrence which combine linguistic, visual and aural resources. These resources participate notably in the synthetic personalisation that is a feature of technologised discourses. The study therefore provides some concrete examples of the types of phenomena that can be analysed within a classroom situation in order to foster an awareness of how meaning is construed within social media video, and how such meaning informs social purpose in the specific case of social media oratory.

Keywords: Intersemiotic Concurrence; Multimodality, Selfie Video; Spoken Communication; Synthetic Personalisation.

1. Introduction: Towards "Critical Social Media Literacy"

Let us imagine that the following authentic texts, or instances of language functioning in context, which have all been produced within the same communication format, are presented to a classroom of students:

1. *I said that we would get two million extra appointments in the NHS to get our waiting lists down in the first year of this government. And I'm really pleased that we've managed it seven months early. Now obviously there's a lot more to do, huge amounts of work, this is only the beginning. But it is a really important step in the right direction. And this shows my Plan for Change in action.*
2. *You know, growing up, my dad used to tell me and my brother, Craig, "No one can make you feel bad if you feel good about yourself". And let me tell you, it's a lesson I've carried with me every single day. Because no matter where you are on your journey, there are going to be folks out there who want to make you feel small and "othered". But let me remind you that so often what you perceive as your differences are actually your strengths, and in many ways, they are the source code to your successes. (…)*
3. *The Danish animal agriculture industry is a catastrophe for the climate and biodiversity. The coming six weeks will define Denmark's ecological policies for the coming three decades. Starting on September 15th, the Danish parliament will negotiate the controversial "Grøn Trepart". This is an opportunity to agree to the most significant agricultural and environmental policies in history, rather than making the same mistakes over and over. (…)*

4. *Hi everyone, it's Millie. I want to take a moment to address something that I think is bigger than just me, something that affects every young woman who grows up under public scrutiny. I think this is very necessary to talk about. I started in the industry when I was 10 years old. I grew up in front of the world, and for some reason, people can't seem to grow up with me. Instead, they act like I'm supposed to stay frozen in time, like I should still look the way I did on Stranger Things Season 1. And because I don't, I'm now a target. I want to talk about some of the articles that have recently been released while I'm on my press tour and some of the writers who are so desperate to tear young women down. (…)*

In a classroom situation, these examples could first be presented without giving any details of the contexts in which they were produced, which therefore require identification. In the fourth example, the speaker introduces herself by her first name, so students may be able to guess who this public figure is, but otherwise no indications need be given of the identity of the speakers. In addition, it need not be mentioned whether the communication was originally written or spoken. Students can be encouraged to play a type of guessing game, becoming "linguistic detectives", and formulate hypotheses about the communication format, as well as other aspects of the context(s) in which these examples were produced.

An activity of this type provides an innovative way to impress upon language learners a vision of the text "as instrument", whereby it is related "to the linguistic system as a whole" (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 3), and hence the systemic dimension of meaning-making resources - that is, the fact that lexico-grammatical resources are context-dependent. Learners will be tempted to posit a specific context based on resources that, generally, they most probably identify subconsciously, and that they can be encouraged here to identify explicitly.

Of course, this exercise can be conducted on numerous types of authentic texts. However, these four examples represent one of the new discursive practices enabled by the digital interface. Here, we are dealing with a technologically-mediated format. Each is a transcript of speech performed by a speaker within an online video format that has been posted to social media. However, in terms of the goal-oriented, social dimension that informs for instance (traditional) genre theory, based on the alignment between form and function, we start to run into questions. What is being accomplished in each of these texts? Another issue relates to the concept of discourse community. To whom is each of these texts addressed? And, in terms of lexico-grammatical choices, how can these be located with respect to the (traditional) dichotomy drawn between spoken and written forms of language, which the various forms of communication engendered by the digital interface have thrown into question?

Young student populations are of course generally familiar with social media content: they both consume it and, due to the participative, user-generated content model of Web 2.0, often partake in producing it themselves. For many of them, such content has overtaken other forms of communication as a type of benchmark of contemporary communication practice and language usage, according to the move from "the dominance of the medium of the book" to that of the screen, predicted and analysed notably by Kress (2003, p. 1). With some prompting, students may therefore be able to determine that the four examples belong to the context of social media. And, like most social media practices, they involve different types of social actors, who are speaking with various purposes in mind.

Each of these examples corresponds to content that was posted to the personal Instagram account of a public figure. The first example is the full transcript of spoken communication pronounced by British prime minister Keir Starmer in which he aims to promote the action of his government. The second example is an extract of a video by former US First Lady Michelle Obama - the political figure with the most subscribers on Instagram up until quite recently.[1] Here, Michelle Obama relates a personal narrative that subsequently serves to introduce her new book, in a video which, like the first example, fulfils a promotional purpose. The third example is an extract from a video of the climate activist Greta Thunberg in which she calls for action in response to Denmark's new agricultural policy. And the fourth example is an extract of a video posted by the actress Millie Bobby Brown who, like Michelle Obama, uses personal narrative, but with a purpose close to that of social activism.[2] Quantitatively, these four videos qualify as products of mass communication, as attested by the number of views they have received, which is automatically calculated and displayed as part of the technical affordances of the platforms, with Millie Bobby Brown's video having received a striking 92 million views.[3] These four examples correspond to a specific sub-group of social media video content, to be defined further below, "social media oratory" (Rossette-Crake, 2022), one of the subtypes of digital forms of spoken communication that have renewed public speaking practice in the contemporary context.

In the setting of English language education, it is not only pertinent, but also certainly more engaging when catering to young learners, to showcase some of the new digital communication formats, including those engendered by social media. These formats, which have become a staple and a reference for many young people, present new challenges when it comes to literacy and general linguistic and communicational competence. Because of this, it can be argued that language teaching gains from incorporating the analysis of social media content, such as the video content cited here. The purpose of this contribution is to illustrate some of the types of analysis that can be developed within the classroom situation, in order to promote "critical media literacy", both in order to respond to the context of social and technological change (Traxler et al., 2023), and also for instance as a means of developing critical thinking skills in EFL courses (Murtazina et al., 2023). These analyses can be carried out in the language classroom at multiple levels (secondary, tertiary), and can be pertinent for both native and non-native speakers of English, in order to foster an awareness of how various resources are being (re)configured to construe meaning in the digital context.

The study presented here builds on existing research and attempts to link more explicitly the fields of literacy, social media content, and analytical frameworks developed within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). To date, there has been little impetus on critical literacy in the classroom in relation to social media that has explicitly adopted linguistic theory. However, SFL offers numerous pathways into such an approach. The social semiotic approach developed within SFL highlights the distribution of meaning-making resources which is informed by the social processes at play, as well as the wider social context. In addition, thanks to its extensive analytical model of multimodality (e.g. Kress & van Leeuwen, 2004), which has foregrounded specific work on multimodal literacy, it caters to the inherently multimodal dimension of social media content. And finally, the critical approach is enriched by SFL-inspired work in critical discourse analysis which relates directly to digital content (Fairclough, 1993, 1994).

This paper uses as a case study a specific category of social media video content, that of social media oratory, illustrated by the four examples presented above. It builds on previous investigations of oratory within a SFL framework (Rossette-Crake, 2023), including pedagogical applications (Rossette-Crake, 2019). While specific aspects of this category will be addressed, the study highlights phenomena common to much social media video content. In what follows, I first review the fields of literacy, multimodal literacy and critical media literacy from the standpoint of SFL. I then define the sub-category of social media video content that is the focus of the case study presented here, social media oratory. After outlining the research questions and methodology, a qualitative analysis of the four examples presented above highlights the following phenomena: the technological affordances common to social media generally; specific affordances of social media oratory; cases of intersemiotic concurrence in the construal of interpersonal and textual meanings respectively; and variations in the use of resources which can be correlated with variations in social purpose. It is argued that analysis of this type is one means to pave the way towards critical social media literacy.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. "Critical Social Media Literacy"

The term "critical social media literacy" has already been used in the fields of child psychology and education (e.g. Keum, 2024). Other terms have also been adopted in the disciplines of education theory, communication and the digital sciences. The quasi synonym "social media literacy" has been used for over a decade (e.g. Livingstone, 2014), just like that of "critical literacy" specifically in relation to social media (e.g. Burnett & Merchant, 2011), or "critical digital literacies" (Ávila & Pandya, 2012; Ávila, 2021). The latter is defined as "skills and practices that lead to the creation of digital texts that interrogate the world" and "allow and foster the interrogation of digital, multimodal texts" (Ávila & Pandya, 2012, p. 3). According to the critical dimension, analysis takes into account both the point of view of the producer and that of the consumer of digital content. More recently, special focus on "social media literacy" (Cho et al., 2024; Valle et al., 2024) has coincided with growing concern about exposure of children and teenagers to social media.[4] To date, it does not appear that the association between literacy and social media has been fully appropriated by scholars of (applied) linguistics. However, the concept of social media literacy can be brought into the sphere of the heavy body of literacy scholarship that has been conducted within the framework of SFL.

2.2. Taking up Critical Social Media Literacy Within an SFL Framework

Since Halliday and Hasan's pioneering work in literacy and language education, we have notably seen the development of genre-based literacy pedagogy (Rose & Martin, 2012; Rose, 2020), media literacy (e.g. Iedema et al., 1994), critical media literacy (Fairclough, 1995), and multimodal literacy. The latter combines both an "active" and a "critical" approach where "the learner not only needs to be able to understand and produce meanings but also how to think about meaning making in particular contexts at a "meta" level as a complex system of interrelated options" (Unsworth, 2008, p. 387, referring to Gee, 2003). This dual purpose has been integrated into English-language teaching (e.g. Unsworth 2023), including the teaching of English for special purposes (e.g. Dressen-Hammouda & Wigham, 2022; Diamantopoulou and Ørevik 2022). Critical multimodal literacy requires new forms of metalanguage, such as those reviewed by Unsworth (2008), including that developed within the "New London Group" (2000).

In his seminal – and visionary - work *Literacy in the New Media Age*, published in 2003, Gunther Kress addresses the way digitalised forms of communication are/would be transformative in multiple ways. He distinguishes four levels: the social level (e.g. social relations), the economic level (e.g. the "changing communicational demands of the economies of knowledge and information"), the communicational level ("uses and arrangements of modes of representation"), and the technological level ("the shape of the facilities of the new media") (Kress, 2003, p.10). Kress insists on the redistribution that is occurring with respect to the different modes of communication: not only is the book being taken over by screen-mediated communication, but, importantly for the present study, speech continues to play a prominent role in communication - unlike writing, which is being increasingly sidelined by image-based communication:

One might say the following with some confidence. Language-as-speech will remain the major mode of communication; language-as-writing will increasingly be displaced by image in many domains of public communication, though writing will remain the preferred mode of the political and cultural elites (Kress, 2003, p. 1)

Indeed, the "new media" incorporate a "multiplicity of modes", particularly image, both still and moving (ibid. p. 5). According to what Unsworth (2008) describes as a "hothouse effect", the Internet has accelerated the development of multimodal texts, and these are produced within the globalised community of the worldwide web. In this, social media are indicative of the trends of 21st-century new media - as predicted by Kress (2003) -, and arguably take them to new levels. The inherently multimodal dimension of social media has been underlined by numerous authors (e.g. Zappavigna, 2018; Burger et al., 2017), and by the concept of "interactive multimodal platforms", which are "both less than and more than face-to-face communication" (Herring, 2015). These platforms host "complex multimodal events", based on the platform's technological affordances, which are "constantly evolving and co-evolving with user practices" (Zhao & Zappavigna, 2018, p. 667). Social media content is conditioned by this "semiotic technology", and hence provides instances of "new writing" (van Leeuwen, 2008). Such content begs a critical appraisal in terms of what remains the object of real choice on the part of the sender/speaker (Djonov & van Leeuwen, 2018). This appraisal of the choices that are available constitutes a key component of critical multimodal literacy when applied to these platforms. As explained by Zhao (in press):

The semiotic choices made by app developers are comparable to language choices made by language users. These design choices, on the one hand, encode the technological affordances, and on the other, constrain and facilitate the meaning-making practices of the users. (Zhao, in press)

Finally, social media content is emblematic of the redistribution of power discussed by Kress in relation to issues of authorship, authority and knowledge, and this redistribution also needs to be targeted when approaching social media literacy. Even though he was writing at a time when, purportedly, the "potency" of the screen "may still be more mythical than real", he notes that "(a)uthorship is no longer rare. Of course the change to the power of the author brings with it a consequent lessening in the author's or the text's authority" (Kress, 2003, p. 6). Indeed, we can wonder what weight is potentially carried by the new digital discourses. Do they really empower individual speakers? Or do they simply constitute a cacophony of voices which occupy the public space, leading for instance to information overload? This question is particularly relevant when it comes to digital oratory which, as will be highlighted below, has led to the "democratisation" of public address.

A critical approach to social media literacy is also enlightened by early work in critical discourse analysis, and its appraisal of the "technologisation of discourse" (Fairclough, 1993; 1994). Indicative of late capitalism, technologically

mediated discourses (both electronic and digital) reflect the redesigning of discourse practices according to efficiency. They mark the move towards discourse which manipulates the component of interpersonal meaning as part of a vehicle for selling (Fairclough, 1993). They also reflect the decline of relationships based on authority and the rise of more horizontal relations, instantiated by a move towards more informality, for example in terms of language choices, resulting in synthetic personalisation (Fairclough 1993) whereby face-to-face, private discourse is simulated in settings of public discourse. The speaker adopts a more personal voice – as observed in social media oratory. Importantly, outside SFL, recent work on social media literacy has placed emphasis on relation to "the self": Cho et al. (2024, p. 945) argue that "one cannot analyse the content of social media without an understanding of the self". Social media literacy therefore needs to account for "(the) blurred boundary and increased intimacy between the media and user" (ibid.), as well as "the motivations of self-expression" and "social belonging, social learning, and social management of impression and relationships through selective self-presentation" (Cho et al., 2024, p. 944). Such stakes relating to the self are taken up here via the interpersonal metafunction within the framework provided by SFL.

2.3. "Social Media Oratory"

Social media oratory is one type of digital oratory (for a discussion of other forms of digital oratory, including formats which developed prior to social media oratory, such as TED talks, see Rossette-Crake, 2022). Like all forms of digital oratory, it fulfils a similar purpose to that of more traditional, (pre-digital) oratory performed on a podium in that it involves a speaker who speaks to a wide audience and addresses serious content, most generally with some intention to persuade and/or defend a cause. However, it contrasts with traditional oratory in that it is mediated digitally, and deploys a different repertoire of linguistic and multimodal resources. If it corresponds to a fairly homogenous category at these levels, it is, as illustrated by the examples presented above, a heterogeneous category in terms of the identity of the social actors who are adopting the format. Unlike traditional forms of public speaking, digital oratory is no longer restricted to public figures. It provides a means for individuals to claim a public voice, including members of social groups who had been relatively marginalised up until now on the public stage, such as women, or members of the younger generations. It thus needs to be grasped with respect to the contemporary social context, which has evolved since that described in Humphrey's (2013) study of activist blogs, when, for instance, adolescent activists, because of their age, were "marginalised from institutional power".

Like social media content generally, social media oratory can allow individuals to become public figures, as exemplified by social media influencers.[5] While content produced by influencers is often considered rather frivolous, more and more individuals who qualify as such are using the alternative space provided by social media to address serious societal issues. As one influencer puts it in an article from *The Guardian* in 2021 entitled "The 'green influencers' targeting the TikTok generation": "[s]ocial media platforms are no longer just for selfies and blogs but a place 'to organise and educate' people about the climate crisis".[6]

The "digital orators" of the four examples of social media oratory quoted in the introduction are all public figures whose following has been established outside social media. British prime minister Keir Starmer is an elected leader and his discourse is first legitimated via a process of "authorisation" (van Leeuwen, 2007) as he benefits from this institutional, extra-discursive authority. Michelle Obama was a national and global figure well before she began to post to social media, although it is now particularly thanks to her social media account that she connects directly with people and extends her following. Similar status and communicational purpose on social media are shared both by climate activist Greta Thunberg, who first made headlines when she led the campaign for the school strike for climate as of 2018, and the actress and UN youth ambassador Millie Bobby Brown. It can be argued that the three latter speakers qualify as "social media influencers" according to the wide-reaching use of this term, in that they all use social media to influence public opinion and extend their following. In all four examples, the speakers have posted their videos to their personal social media account. For instance, in the case of Keir Starmer, his video has not been posted to the official account ascribed to the British prime minister ("10downingstreet"). The speakers each post to their own social media "community", a dynamic and constantly evolving body of social media users that brings together many types of social actors thanks to various processed of "affiliation" (Zappavigna, 2011).

Like all oratory (Rossette-Crake, 2023), social media oratory is enacted by the "spoken and monologic" semiotic, located in SFL within the component of mode (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), and hence constitutes a hybrid with respect to the traditional dichotomy of (typically dialogic) spoken language and (typically monologic) written language. Digital

oratory allows for various types of participant frameworks: in certain contexts, for instance TED talks, there is not only an online audience but also a live, face-to-face audience – when, for instance, the live delivery is filmed and the video is uploaded to the internet. However, social media orators speak uniquely to an online audience. They adopt the "reel" format of social media: typically, they film the video as a selfie video (or "velfie").

The selfie video can be likened to its sister format, the selfie photograph. Selfie photographs have been analysed according to the SFL metafunctional framework (Zhao & Zappavigna, 2017, 2018; Zhao, in press), where

meanings are organised along three lines of meaning:

- representational: the representation of the subject/photographer-self;
- interactional: the enactment of intersubjective relation between the photographer-self and the viewer;
- compositional: the organization of visual elements in the image (Zhao, in press)

and where, following Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), representational meanings correspond to the ideational metafunction, interactional meanings to the interpersonal, and compositional to the textual (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

It is important to underline that not all social media video content constitutes social media oratory.[7] The videos we are interested in here play on the embodied dimension of spoken communication and correspond to what can be labelled "embodied reels". These are characterised by the following criteria (Rossette-Crake, 2022):

(i) they fulfil a similar social role to that of traditional oratory, in that they present serious discussion and/or debate, where language constitutes the main (if not the unique) social process, and informs "language as reflection" (Eggins, 2004) – in contrast, for instance, to other types of social media content such as tutorials, unboxing etc., where the speaker is engaged in some other major physical and social activity;

(ii) the speaker speaks directly to the viewer; we can hear the speaker's own voice (in contrast to the lip-syncing that has developed on TikTok) for the entire length of the video, and we can physically see the speaker, either during all the video, or for the greater part of the video or at critical moments (i.e., beginning and end); in this sense, we can talk about an embodied performance by the speaker;

(iii) these videos are relatively unedited: they cannot be compared with the "edits" or the "multimodal collages" identified for instance by Han and Zappavigna (2024) which, again, particularly abound on TikTok.

3. Research Questions and Method

The current study attempts to provide some preliminary insights with regard to the following questions: (i) how is meaning construed via the multiple resources made available by social media video? (ii) what are some of the ways that these resources combine to construe coherent networks of meaning – or "intersemiotic concurrence" (Unsworth, 2008)? (iii) how do the choices made in regard to such resources correlate with social purpose, notably in the case of these examples of social media oratory? Additionally, in order to address the issue of social purpose, resources specific to social media oratory are also discussed.

Like other investigative multimodal studies, particularly those that attempt to examine the multiple, simultaneous resources of the moving image within the constantly changing affordances of social media content, making it difficult to apply quantitative analysis (e.g. Bateman, 2022), this study is exploratory and is necessarily qualitative. It draws on a wider investigation of social media oratory produced by different types of social actors: political leaders, content creators/influencers, including social activists, and individual social media users. The "speeches" pronounced within each video were transcribed and analysed. Trends identified in the wider corpus will be illustrated in the four examples which have been selected for this paper and which were introduced above. The full texts of the transcriptions and the links to the videos appear in the appendix.[8] The content of these videos can be considered to belong to the domain of "public" communication in that they are not reserved to account subscribers and can be viewed by any user of social media.

4. Discussion of Examples

This section addresses the following phenomena which provide answers to the research questions: (i) the technological affordances which inform the construal of meaning and are common to social media video generally; (ii) some specificities of the sub-category of social media video under study, social media oratory; (iii) typical examples of intersemiotic concurrence which combine to construe coherent networks of interpersonal meaning; (iv) typical examples of intersemiotic concurrence which combine to construe coherent networks of textual meaning; (v) variations in the use of these resources which can be correlated with specific social purpose.

4.1. Social Media Video and its Technological Affordances

The examples studied here share the technological affordances of the reel. The most striking of these affordances is the possibility, provided by the hardware of the smartphone filming device, for speakers to film themselves within the "selfie" video format. Inherent in the visual structure of the selfie video, like the selfie photograph, is the potential for empowerment (Zhao & Zappavigna, 2017). Selfies generate an intersubjective relation between the photographer, the represented self and the viewer, according to a self-reflexive process whereby the roles of sender and represented participant coincide (Zhao & Zappavigna, 2018). The selfie video has an essentially phatic function, and serves to engage directly with the audience.

Another affordance of the hardware is the adoption of the vertical frame which, unlike the horizontal, "widescreen" frame, better accommodates filming and viewing on smartphones. This is illustrated by all four examples examined here (see screenshots reproduced in the figures below). The vertical frame, also called the "portrait" frame, is a first resource that construes an interpersonal relation that focuses on the speaker. This is particularly powerful in the case of oratory.

Typically, selfie videos are filmed with a device that is hand-held – exemplified by President Zelenskyy's iconic videos filmed in the streets of Kiev on the first days of the Ukraine war in February 2022. In the fourth example reviewed here, the speaker (M. B. Brown), may well have held the filming device as she speaks. This is not the case of the three other videos, where speakers appear making free use of their hands. This said, all four videos play on the modalities of the selfie video which, like the selfie photograph, represent "the semiotic manifestation of the mediatory relationship between the self, technology, and others" (Zhao, in press). The first three videos are still informed by the self-reflexive process whereby sender and represented participant coincide: the speaker was most likely part of the decision-making process as regards the multimodal choices pertaining to the filming of the video and concurrent to the moment of delivery.

These choices contrast with the use of the in-built affordances of the reel format during subsequent editing of the video, which can be analysed as forms of resemiotisation (Iedema, 2001). Two such resources are exploited in examples 1 to 3. The first involves the addition of music that plays throughout the video, in the "background" as it were as the speaker speaks. Additional sound such as music can be considered "divergent" (Unsworth, 2008) with respect to the verbal message, not because it contradicts the verbal message but because it can distract from it. Alternatively, this background music can be analysed as introducing a light, sometimes fun ambience which, on the interpersonal level, attenuates the very direct appeal to the audience realised both by visual resources and language, including, in some cases, assertive forms of language; in this way, the musical accompaniment enters into an intersemiotic relation of "complementarity" with respect to these visual and linguistic resources.

The second affordance built into the reel is the possibility to generate "captions", whereby the words of the verbal mode are reproduced visually in text form on the screen. This function was created in response to the behaviour of users, many of whom watch reels with the sound turned off. The captions operate a transfer from "language for hearing" to "language for seeing" which detracts from the voice and therefore the person of the speaker. And, if the sound of the video is turned on, captions can be considered to create intersemiotic "redundancy" (information is repeated via two different modes) (Mayer, 2014 – quoted in Dressen-Hamouda & Wigham, 2022). Moreover, as we will see below (cf. section 4.4), variation can be introduced in the font style of captions over the video, and other types of intersemiotic concurrence can be observed.

4.2. Some Specificities of Social Media Oratory

If the videos examined here exploit the prominent features outlined above which are common to many reels, they are also characterised by some specific features which they share with other types of oratory (e.g. non-digital forms) and hence justify the category of social media oratory. For instance, in these examples, the main social process that occurs is the "speech" or discourse that the speaker addresses to the viewer. In fact, it is the only activity in which speakers engage. They are not portrayed accomplishing some other task as they talk to the viewer – unlike much other reel content, where speakers are at the same time cooking, putting on makeup, building something, taking a product out of its packaging ("unboxing" videos), switching to views of scenery (in the case of travel vlogs), etc.

Because of this, what is being said takes as it were "centre stage", together with paralinguistic features such as body language, facial expressions, etc. Indeed, like traditional oratory where the speaker appears on stage in full view of the audience, social media oratory is an instance of embodied discourse, where the viewer sees the speaker, who takes up most of the frame, and who speaks for the full length of the video (in contrast, for instance, to reels where the speaker does not appear at all in front of the camera and whose voice is recorded using the voice-over function). Hence also the prevalence, in three of these reels, of body language, an integral part of the performance of oratory on the stage. Hand movements regularly punctuate the performances of K. Starmer and G. Thunberg throughout their respective videos (Starmer's hands are wide apart, Thunberg's are clasped together), while M. Obama makes various hand gestures at selective moments of her performance. These resources can be analysed as multimodal realisations of "synthetic personalisation" (Fairclough, 1993, cited supra), construed by further semiotic means discussed below.

The fact that the speaker remains stationary in all four examples (they are either standing still or sitting) increases the focus on the speaker and the speech, just like the fact that the speaker takes up most of the frame. In the video of M. Obama, there is no room in the frame for anything else; in that of M.B. Brown, she appears in an uncluttered, neutral setting, with only a monochrome curtain behind her (cf. Figure 1). In cases where a slightly wider frame is adopted, it is to portray a specific setting that is clearly linked to the topic of the speech. This is the case in the two other videos (an office setting for K. Starmer, who talks about additional NHS office jobs; an outdoor setting for G. Thunberg, who talks about the environment against a polarised background where elements of nature (trees) contrast with a busy road with cars and trucks constantly passing by). In the case of these examples, the visual element of setting foregrounds the ideational meaning of the verbal mode, and hence participates in a relation of intersemiotic concurrence, where the meaning of one resource is reinforced by that of another. Compared to oratory performed indoors on a stage, speakers can now, thanks to mobile technology, place their performance in a setting that is invested semantically.



Figure 1. Close Shot, Neutral Setting

Like other forms of oratory, the main social process enacted here by language takes the form of a monologic, synoptic text, a text-as-object artefact with a beginning-middle-end structure that is foregrounded within the textual metafunction. In the examples, this is made manifest by explicit signals which announce that the video is coming to an end. Both M. Obama and M. B. Brown conclude by thanking their viewer. As in many speech formats, there is a rhetorical

move structure concluding with a call to action (M. Obama: "So pick it (my new book) up and let me know what you think"; G. Thunberg: "I urge the Danish government to implement (…) And for everyone to follow and support Den Grønne Ungdomsbevaegels's and fight for a green and just future"; M. B. Brown: "Let's do better. Not just for me, but for every young girl who deserves to grow up without the fear of being torn apart for simply existing"). K. Starmer concludes with an utterance that serves to recap/summarise: "And this shows my Plan for Change in action". These elements via which the speaker as it were "signs off" his/her video also indicate a mode of verbal production that involves some degree of preplanning.

Indeed, these videos are not the products of improvised speech. Another indication of this is their potential to host rhetorical figures, which introduce, at specific moments of the video, an "oratorical" flavour akin to that of traditional oratory. For instance, two examples of repetition appear close together in M. B. Brown's video: anaphora (repetition in initial position) features at the beginning of an utterance and at the beginning of successive, embedded complement clauses:

I refuse to apologise for growing up. *I refuse to* make myself smaller to fit the unrealistic expectations of people who can't handle seeing a girl become a woman. I will not be shamed for *how I* look, *how I* dress*, or how I* present myself.

The same video exploits another figure, accumulation ("listings" or "heapings-up" – synathroesmus – Cockroft & Cockroft, 2005, p. 181), for instance a ternary structure which combines three noun groups in complement position ("The fact that adult writers are spending their time dissecting *my face, my body, my choices*, is disturbing"), as well as the "pairing" of the participle clauses ("We always talk about *supporting and uplifting* young women"). Two examples of accumulation appear in G. Thunberg's final utterance which respectively combines two verbs and two adjectives ("*follow and support* Den Grønne Ungdomsbevaegels's and fight for a *green and just* future"). These rhetorical figures, a staple of traditional (podium, pre-digital) oratory, introduce a higher rate of lexical density compared to that of improvised speech typical of conversation; they also give rhythmic weight to a text designed to be performed within the spoken and monologic mode.[9]

4.3. Intersemiotic Concurrence: Interpersonal Meanings

Let us now turn to specific networks of intersemiotic concurrence where the meaning of one resource is reinforced by that of another. In the videos, these networks combine visual and verbal resources. The first network that we can identify serves to foreground interpersonal meanings, specifically meanings that instantiate the "synthetic personalisation" of a speaker who, within a context of mass/public communication, adopts a personal voice to simulate face-to-face, private discourse.

As already noted, these videos place impetus on the person of the speaker, who appears in full view and embodies his/her discourse (cf. body language). These visual resources announce the synthetic personalisation that is also realised via verbal resources. For instance, speakers speak in their own name. Interestingly, even though K. Starmer reports on the actions of his government, he speaks in his own name ("*I* said that (…) And this shows *my Plan* for Change in action") and expresses his own feelings via inscribed appraisal ("And *I'm really pleased* that (…)"). Personal synthetisation informs the macrostructure of M. B. Brown's discourse, like that of M. Obama, via personal storytelling in the first part of each video. Focus on the point of view of the speaker is also realised via personal pronouns. This is particularly striking in M. B. Brown's opening lines, which contain 12 instances of the first-person pronoun "I" over 8 utterances, several of which appear in subject position as sensor of a mental process ("I think": 2 instances; "I want": 2 instances).

Speakers speak in their own name in order to create a direct intersubjective relation, address the viewer directly, and simulate a face-to-face exchange. This is conferred visually by choices relating to camera angle and framing. Drawing on the framework of analysis developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 116-149), we can first identify the way the speaker is positioned with respect to the camera. In all four videos, speakers look straight at the camera (and hence the viewer): this construes a "demand", or a direct appeal to the viewer. In addition, the speaker's body is frontal to the camera, which reinforces the sense of speaker involvement.

As mentioned in subsection 4.1, the figure of the speaker takes up most of the frame, leaving room for not much else. This confers a social distance that is quite different from the traditional face-to-face oratory that takes place on a stage, where the speaker occupies a space that is set apart and is distanced from the audience. Examples 2 to 4 of the

social media videos are filmed at a close (head and shoulders of the figure) or very close angle (the head takes up most of the frame). Based on Kress and van Leeuwen's system of analysis, these close or very close shots confer an "intimate", "personal" social distance. If we refer back to E. Hall's analysis of proxemics referenced within Kress and van Leeuwen's work, we can say that these close shots perform a contraction of social space: there is no respect of either participant's "personal" space, each participant symbolically enters that of the other. While these videos do indeed address multiple viewers and hence enact the one-to-many participant framework that defines public address, they accomplish this via the filter of a one-to-one exchange that is simulated with the viewer.

Moreover, the videos introduce variation by combining shots from different angles. A reinforcement of meaning at the interpersonal level can be identified in K. Starmer's video, which alternates between a medium shot (the figure is cut off just above the knees) and a slightly closer shot (the figure is cut off closer to the waist) (see Figures 2 and 3, where a closer shot precedes the medium shot). The closer shot articulates a move towards a more personal, intimate distance. Importantly, these moments of the video (reproduced below in italics) coincide with all the first-person references, including the instance of inscribed appraisal identified earlier. In this way, the change of angle can be analysed as part of the intersemiotic network that participates in synthetic personalisation:

I said that we would get two million extra appointments in the NHS to get our waiting lists down in the first year of this government. *And I'm really pleased that we've managed it seven months early.* Now obviously there's a lot more to do, huge amounts of work, this is only the beginning. *But it is a really important step in the right direction. And this shows my Plan for Change in action.*





Figures 2 & 3. Closer Shot and Medium Shot

Another choice made in relation to camera angle and framing is that all the videos are filmed at eye level, an angle that constructs a relation of "equality" between the speaker and the viewer. This contrasts with face-to-face oratory and the vertical relation synonymous with speaker power constructed when a speaker speaks from the (physically and symbolically) higher position on the stage. Social media oratory is informed by a horizontal, informal and sometimes intimate speaker-viewer relation which potentially empowers both speaker and viewer. Like the other filming choices discussed here, it also construes the "authenticity" that is characteristic of influencer discourse (Hund, 2023). And intersemiotic concurrence can be identified with respect to other resources - for instance, an informal dress code (K. Starmer is wearing a white shirt but no tie or jacket, G. Thunberg a t-shirt, M. B. Brown a tracksuit top) - and, importantly, lexico-grammatical resources.

If the verbal mode sometimes reveals a textuality that incorporates an elaborate, rhetorical flavour (cf. 4.2), it also includes elements typical of the spoken language of conversation. Fairclough identifies "conversationalisation", or the use of forms of language of conversation within formal contexts, as an element of the synthetic personalisation of technologised discourses. In the videos, we observe for instance the use of discourse markers which typically serve at the beginning of turn-taking in conversation: "And", "But" and "So" are present in all the videos, as well as "You know" in M. Obama's. The latter video concentrates many direct references to the addressee: "you" or "your" appears 19 times

within 10 utterances, including in direct appeals such as "And let me tell you", "But let me remind you", and imperative clauses ("So love who you are, embrace it"; "So pick it up and let me know what you think"). These forms engender an interactive tone. Direct interrogatives also appeal directly to the addressee and simulate the interaction of conversation, exemplified towards the end of M. B. Brown's video, where two interrogatives combine with the personal pronoun "you" and the direct appeal which is inclusive of both speaker and addressee "Let's do better":

Why is it the knee-jerk reaction to say something horrible rather than to say something nice? If *you* have a problem with that, I have to wonder, *what is it that actually makes you so uncomfortable? Let's do better.*

And an intimate, direct relation with the addressee is announced as of the beginning of the video, when the speaker introduces herself on first-name terms with the addressee: "Hi everyone, it's Millie".

Importantly, these simulated interactions take place within the spoken *and monologic* semiotic. The simulated interaction and appeal to the addressee combine with the "demand" construed by the speaker who looks directly at the camera (cf. supra) to engender a "reinforcement of address" (Royce, 1998, quoted in Unsworth, 2008). Further reinforcement can be created via body language – for instance, in M. Obama's video (cf. figure 4), at a moment when she makes a direct appeal to the addressee (cf. "But let me remind you…"), at the end of which she repeatedly points at the camera (over the segment reproduced in italics):

But let me remind you that so often what you perceive as your differences are actually your strengths, *and in many ways, they are the source code to your successes*.

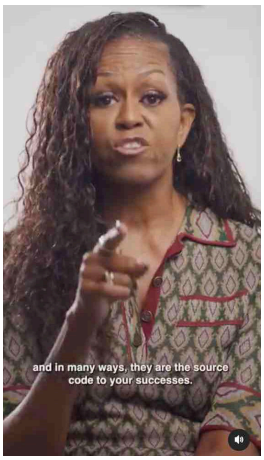


Figure 4. Reinforcement of Address

Synthetic personalisation and conversationalisation construed by intersemiotic concurrence distinguish social media oratory from traditional, non-digital (podium) oratory. Within the realm of social media, they are not specific to social media oratory, and, as characteristics of technologised discourses, are a common feature of much social media video content.

4.4. Intersemiotic Concurrence: Textual Meanings

Other networks of intersemiotic concurrence foreground meanings at the textual level. Two specific phenomena can be observed. Variation in camera angle, like that identified in Keir Starmer's video, can be interpreted in G. Thunberg's video as the instantiation of textual meaning. At several moments, the camera moves in slightly and adopts a closer angle. This is particularly striking when it occurs for a short duration and coincides with a short segment of text. For example, the first half of the first utterance coincides with the close angle adopted for most of the video (cf. Figure 5), but for the second part of the utterance, the camera moves in (cf. Figure 6), before moving back out as the second utterance begins. Interestingly, the closer angle coincides with the most "newsworthy" part of the utterance, or the "new" information (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 115), as represented in Table 2. Variation in camera angle therefore appears to work to reinforce information focus and the textual organization of the verbal message.





Figures 5 & 6. Close Shot and Closer Shot

Table 2. *Intersemiotic Concurrence Involving Textual Meaning: 1st Utterance of G. Thunberg Video*

The Danish animal agriculture industry is	a catastrophe for the climate and biodiversity.
Given	New
	> closer camera angle

Similarly, the camera adopts the same closer angle for two respective utterances of which the concision confers information focus ("There is still time to save it"; "Our future depends on it"). Finally, the camera moves in at two other moments of the video, coinciding with a longer segment which corresponds in each instance to two relatively long utterances. Each segment contains key ideas at a higher, macro, level of textual organization; they can be likened to "topic sentences" which hence fall under the scope of information focus. This is the case of the 3rd and 4th utterances ("This is an opportunity to agree to the most significant agricultural and environmental policies in history, rather than making the same mistakes over and over. And this cannot be done without a reduction and complete transformation of the catastrophic Danish animal agriculture"), as well as the two final utterances ("I urge the Danish government to implement a higher carbon tax on agriculture than what is being proposed. And for everyone to follow and support Den Grønne Ungdomsbevaegels's and fight for a green and just future").

Another resource can be analysed as conferring similar information focus. This resource involves the use of captions (cf. 4.1) in K. Starmer's video, where variation in font style is introduced. For most of the video, the captions appear in lower case, in a small font size. However, at two specific moments, two short textual segments (4 and 3 words each) appear in capital letters, in a much larger font size, highlighted in blue. In addition, unlike elsewhere, the words appear one-by-one on the screen as the speaker pronounces them. Figure 7 presents a screenshot of the first example, which coincides with the middle part of the first utterance of the video ("I said that we would get *two million extra appointments* in the NHS to get our waiting lists down in the first year of this government"). The segment of text corresponds to the most newsworthy part of the utterance and, as such, the bigger, bolder caption confers information focus. Importantly, the text consists uniquely of lexical items, and includes numeric reference. This is also the case in the second example ("And I'm really pleased that we've managed it *seven months early*"). Finally, additional variation within the segment confers further emphasis – such as the lexical item "extra" in Figure 7, which is bigger than the other words on the screen.

Like the construal of specific networks of interpersonal meanings observed in the previous section, these strategies of intersemiotic concurrence in regard to textual meanings are not specific to social media oratory and are adopted in other social media video content. They attest to the new resources being adopted in the new forms of oratory being forged in the digital context.



Figure 7. Variation in Style of Captions

4.5. Variations in Social Purpose

Finally, while the four examples selected here partake in social media oratory, differences can be identified in terms of their precise social purposes, and these explain differences in the distribution of the various semiotic resources. K. Starmer and M. Obama's videos are both promotional. K. Starmer's video, which is the shortest of the four, can be analysed as a type of extended political sound bite. In contrast, G. Thunberg and M. B. Brown develop a line of reasoning over a long(er) stretch of speech in order to persuade their addressees. M. B. Brown's video is the longest. There is a correlation between the length of the videos and average rates of speech, with the most concise videos featuring the fastest speech rates (K. Starmer: 3.36 words/second; M. Obama: 3 words/second), in keeping with the fast pace associated with most social media reels, while the longer formats contain a slower speech rate (G. Thunberg: 2.84 words/sec; M. B. Brown: 2.77 words/sec), providing addressees with adequate time to process the arguments being expressed.

The two longer videos have their own specific features. G. Thunberg's contains the lowest number of examples of synthetic personalisation. Self-reference is limited - there is only one instance of the pronoun "I" ("I urge the Danish government to implement a higher carbon tax…") – and conversationalisation is absent: there are no pronominal references to the addressee (e.g. "you"), and no direct appeals in the form of interrogatives or imperative clauses. Instead, an appeal to action is expressed via an impersonal turn of phrase which realises attitudinal inscription and introduces the first-person plural pronoun ("It is essential that we are there…"). Inscribed attitude (e.g. "The Danish animal agriculture industry is *a catastrophe for* the climate and biodiversity"; "the *catastrophic* Danish animal agriculture") participates in a line of argument where inscribed forms of appraisal are absent, leaving no room for discussion and where, like much activist discourse (e.g. Humphrey, 2013), the style is predominantly "monoglossic" (Martin and White, 2005, p. 99).

In contrast, M. B. Brown's video is the example that most closely simulates a conversation and enacts synthetic personalisation. Interestingly, it does not exploit technological affordances such as background music or captions. In this, it gives the impression of being the least technically mediated of the four examples – and the least "staged" or "theatricalised". Unlike most of her other posts on her Instagram account, she is dressed casually and wears no makeup. It is as if she "lays herself bare" to address the issue at hand, that of the bullying of women, which, as she explains, concerns her personally.

5. Some Concluding Remarks

This contribution, which is necessarily exploratory and does not claim to be exhaustive, has aimed to provide an overview of the types of phenomena that can be studied in a classroom situation in order to promote critical social media literacy. Based on the specific case of social media content, this study hopes to contribute to the discussion in SFL around multimodal literacy, or the "multiliteracies" that have been identified as a necessary correlate of communication competency when dealing with the technologically-mediated discourses of the present day, where "(t)he extent of people's personal satisfaction, civic and political engagement, and professional effectiveness will be influenced by the

multiliteracies expertise they acquire" (Unsworth, 2008, p. 379). The critical dimension underlined by the concept "critical social media literacy" highlights an approach which is useful for learners as they are led to navigate between the various new digital practices.

Social media provides examples of intricate intersemiotic concurrences, where for example linguistic choices can work hand in hand with other types of resources, which can be called upon, for instance in a pedagogical context, to interrogate the former. Indeed, in the context of language teaching, the question of intersemiotic concurrence proves useful in order to justify specific lexico-grammatical choices where literacy in the contemporary environment of technologically mediated communication requires taking into consideration "multimodal competency". Another issue pertaining to linguistic choices relates to their negotiation with respect to mode, particularly in the case of oratory and social media oratory, according to the stakes of the spoken and monologic semiotic (cf. section 2.3), a "hybrid" in terms of the distinction that is traditionally drawn between spoken and written forms of language. Faced with the many linguistic hybrids that abound within the digital space, language users can foster an increased awareness of the notions of linguistic variation and speaker choice with respect to context - as instantiated in Systemic Functional theory within the components of mode and register.

This paper has singled out a specific category of social media video content, social media oratory. This was done for several reasons. It allows the focus to be placed on a specific social purpose, together with its variants, and how this informs the communication format. It is interesting to compare non-digital and digital practices which arguably share a similar social purpose. Like much public communication, public speaking practice is undergoing transformation. The new speaking formats on social media allow speakers to move off the public stage and invest new spaces, sometimes private spaces, realising forms of synthetic personalisation in what may be described as "private" speaking, which is nevertheless mediated publicly. This can be done in order to invest a very personal cause such as bullying in the case of M.B. Brown, a more general cause such as climate change, or as a form of (self-)promotion in the political arena. Moreover, digital communication is influencing communication offline, where podium oratory (in for instance the political sector) is adopting some of the new characteristics set in motion by various forms of digital oratory, including certain manifestations of synthetic personalisation (Rossette-Crake, 2022, p. 228-9) – a further example of what Kress (2003, p. 6) described when he talked about the far-reaching impacts of the technical affordances of the screen. Finally, by focusing on video content and speech, emphasis can be placing on students' own speaking competence. In the ESP environment, there is recognition of the need to develop "speaking curricula that consider sociopragmatic awareness in the learning of speech genres" (Feak & Chan, 2025) to which digital speaking practices can be integrated.

Ultimately, the types of analyses presented here, which, it is argued, pave the way to critical social media literacy, can better prepare students in the new technological context of artificial intelligence, where students are on the receiving end (as well as on the production end) of more and more instances of automatically-generated language – and now also images and video content.

Notes

[1]This was the case for instance at the beginning of 2022, when Michelle Obama had 48.7 million subscribers on Instagram. At the time of the present study, the political figure with the most following is the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi (94.2 million subscribers on Instagram); Michelle Obama currently has 56.9 million.

[2]Millie Bobby Brown was nominated in 2018 at the age of 14 as a UNICEF youth "goodwill ambassador" and has since spoken on stage several times at the United Nations – including a speech in 2019 (available on United Nations YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pErOmCSx8pU [accessed 23.01.2022]), when she proclaimed that "today, young people don't want to be talked about. We want to do the talking". However, in this example, she is speaking without referencing UNICEF, in a more private capacity, on her personal social media account.

[3]At the time of writing this study, K. Starmer's video had received 192,000 views, M. Obama's 9.5 million views, G. Thunberg's 1.6 million, and M.B. Brown's 92 million. These "scores" correspond approximately to each account's average, with the exception of M.B. Brown's video, which is far higher than that of her other reels, and also well outnumbers the subscribers to her account (63.8 million).

[4]For instance, in November 2024, the Australian government passed the first bill of its kind worldwide to ban social media accounts for children under 16 years old.

[5]The category of social media influencer corresponds to a "multi-faceted notion" (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Georgakapoulou, 2024) and tends to be used to refer to anyone who uses social media to increase their influence – either for commercial purposes, or to influence political opinion or raise awareness for a cause, or promote a lifestyle and/or even a way of being. The term "influencer" overlaps with that of "content creator", a term that connotes a (more) serious, "professional" activity – for instance, influencers often prefer to call themselves "content creators".

[6]T. Conlan, June 15 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jun/15/the-green-influencers-targeting-the-tiktok-generation

[7]Social media oratory is increasing in frequency when it comes to political leaders. For instance, it is a practice in which the political leaders of numerous English-speaking countries are now engaging, and is used by politicians during election campaigns (Rossette-Crake, 2025)

[8]The speech segments have been transcribed for their lexico-grammatical features and not for paralinguistic features such as tone units, which is not the focus here. They have been transcribed as sentences for readability, but also because they presumably involved preparation and some writing in advance.

[9]For a detailed analysis of the lexico-grammatical differences between non-digital and digital forms of oratory, see Rossette-Crake (2023).

Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Examples Quoted

Example 1: Keir Starmer: post to Instagram account "keirstarmer", Feb. 17, 2025
https://www.instagram.com/reel/DGLVbfxtJ2r/
I said that we would get two million extra appointments in the NHS to get our waiting lists down in the first year of this government. And I'm really pleased that we've managed it seven months early. Now obviously there's a lot more to do, huge amounts of work, this is only the beginning. But it is a really important step in the right direction. And this shows my Plan for Change in action.

Example 2: Michele Obama, post to Instagram account "michelleobama", Dec. 20, 2025
https://www.instagram.com/reel/DD0RgWrRl1V/
You know, growing up, my dad used to tell me and my brother, Craig, "No one can make you feel bad if you feel good about yourself". And let me tell you, it's a lesson I've carried with me every single day. Because no matter where you are on your journey, there are going to be folks out there who want to make you feel small and "othered". But let me remind you that so often what you perceive as your differences are actually your strengths, and in many ways, they are the source code to your successes. So love who you are, embrace it. Your unique experiences and perspectives give you a voice that the world needs to hear. This is just one of the lessons that I share in my new workbook, Overcoming. I hope you find this workbook helpful on your journey. So pick it up and let me know what you think. Thanks a lot.

Example 3: Greta Thunberg, post to Instagram account "gretathunberg", Sept. 19, 2024
https://www.instagram.com/reel/C_sVI3RNj-E/

The Danish animal agriculture industry is a catastrophe for the climate and biodiversity. The coming six weeks will define Denmark's ecological policies for the coming three decades. Starting on September 15th, the Danish parliament will negotiate the controversial "Grøn Trepart". This is an opportunity to agree to the most significant agricultural and environmental policies in history, rather than making the same mistakes over and over. And this cannot be done without a reduction and complete transformation of the catastrophic Danish animal agriculture. The governing parties have presented their proposal on the Grøn Trepart before summer, but it has not yet been discussed in the parliament. There is still time to save it. It is essential that we are there to put massive pressure on them the next few weeks. And to insist that it is not yet a done deal. Our future depends on it. Young activists have been trying to make themselves heard throughout the negotiations. But the politicians have not listened. They leave us no other option but to escalate and show them the gravity of the emergency we are facing. I urge the Danish government to implement a higher carbon tax on agriculture than what is being proposed. And for everyone to follow and support Den Grønne Ungdomsbevaegels's and fight for a green and just future.

Example 4: Post to Instagram account "milliebobbybrown", March 4, 2024
https://www.instagram.com/reel/DGwZgLXSJuH/
Hi everyone, it's Millie. I want to take a moment to address something that I think is bigger than just me, something that affects every young woman who grows up under public scrutiny. I think this is very necessary to talk about. I started in the industry when I was 10 years old. I grew up in front of the world, and for some reason, people can't seem to grow up with me. Instead, they act like I'm supposed to stay frozen in time, like I should still look the way I did on Stranger Things Season 1. And because I don't, I'm now a target. I want to talk about some of the articles that have recently been released while I'm on my press tour and some of the writers who are so desperate to tear young women down.
One article reads "Why are Gen Zers like Millie Bobby Brown ageing so badly?", written by Lydia Hawken. "What has Millie Bobby Brown done to her face?", written by John Ely. 'Millie Bobby Brown mistaken for someone's mom as she guides younger sister Ava through LA', written by Cassie Carpenter. Another article reads "Little Britain's Matt Lucas takes savage swipe at Millie Bobby Brown's new "mommy makeover" look'—written by Bethan Edwards, amplifying an insult rather than questioning why a grown man is mocking a young woman's appearance. This isn't journalism. This is bullying. The fact that adult writers are spending their time dissecting my face, my body, my choices, is disturbing. And the fact that some of these articles are written by women makes it even worse. We always talk about supporting and uplifting young women, but when it comes down to it, it seems a lot easier just to to tear them down for clicks. Disillusioned people can't handle seeing a girl become a woman on her terms, not their own. I refuse to apologise for growing up. I refuse to make myself smaller to fit the unrealistic expectations of people who can't handle seeing a girl become a woman. I will not be shamed for how I look, how I dress, or how I present myself. We have become a society where it's so much easier to criticise than it is to pay a compliment. Why is it the knee-jerk reaction to say something horrible rather than to say something nice? If you have a problem with that, I have to wonder—what is it that actually makes you so uncomfortable? Let's do better. Not just for me, but for every young girl who deserves to grow up without the fear of being torn apart for simply existing. Thank you.

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