

Young YouTubers: Multimodality and Language Variety

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Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2020

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **University of Zagreb, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Filozofski fakultet**

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-07-27**



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Young Youtubers: Multimodality and Language Variety

Diplomski rad

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Zagreb, 2020.

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Abstract

The usage of the English language among the young speakers of other languages is often debated and discussed. This paper explores the usage of the English language in YouTube videos made by four young Croatian YouTubers. The goal of the paper is to show that the English language usage in this context can be explained through the concept of the community of practice and its three criteria: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. The analysis of twenty-four videos in total has shown that the selected YouTubers fulfil all three criteria for belonging to the same community of practice and that the English usage is an important part of their shared repertoire. Even though there is a decent amount of variability among the YouTubers in how English is used, some important consistencies have been noted in the analysis, such as its most dominant use in the written mode for multiple purposes (communication with audience, commenting on the content of videos, establishing topics/themes, and in titles). Multimodal Social Semiotic approach is used to demonstrate that such use of English is not accidental, but motivated and a part of a multimodal design.

Keywords: community of practice, imagined community, virtual community, YouTube, multimodality

1.0. Introduction

The English language is the modern world's *lingua franca*. As such, it has spread its influence all over the world, also carrying with it many features and novelties from the Western culture, mainly from the US and the UK. With the advent of the Internet and its spread into virtually all countries of the world, it seems as if English has become even more ubiquitous. The influence that the English language may have on local languages seems to be a frequent point of discussion in society, especially when it comes to what effect it has on the language of the young and Croatia is no exception. Since the young are now exposed to the Internet, and thus to English, much more often and at a much earlier age than before, one might often hear their parents or grandparents expressing their fear or worry that the young will neglect their own language and culture in favour of English. On the other hand, the young often seem to be enthralled by the Internet and all the possibilities it offers and the knowledge of English can only expand their access to all the goodies that can be found online. These may often be, among other things, new people, friends, and even communities. The Internet enables everyone to create content, to then share it or even create it with others, to find or even found a community which suits one's needs. The notion of the existence of online communities, and the fact that

some of them may even be communities of practice, is interesting because it may help to dissolve the idea that the Internet is most prominently a source of distraction and loss of traditional values for the younger generations. For many it may often be much more than that. That people can and do indeed become a part of many different communities, not just in the physical but also in the virtual world, is what may provide a deeper insight into the relationship between people, in this case the young, their language usage, and the Internet. Furthermore, when it comes to primarily non-English online communities of the young, it may be of interest to see how and when they use English and how it is related to the influence of foreign, English-based, communities. The aim of this paper is to provide such an analysis, on an example of four young Croatian YouTubers, to see whether their usage of English is a mere, somewhat accidental, language fad or if there is, perhaps, some more substance and design to it.

2.0. On Community

The notion of community has had an important role in sociolinguistic research. One of the more popular notions in sociolinguistics is that of a speech community. John J. Gumperz defines a speech community as “any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage” (1968, 381). In short, it may be said that a speech community is a group of people who share linguistic norms that are unique enough to make the group differ from other groups. While it is often considered useful in research, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet deem the concept a “loosely defined construct” which, when applied, often boils down to defining speech communities “on the basis of location and/or population” and it often results in viewing “[d]ifferences and relations among the speakers [...] in terms of abstracted characteristics – sex, age, socioeconomic class, ethnicity.” (1992, 7) While such abstractions do play a role, there is a need to look more closely, more concretely at practices and interactions that are almost always bounded to language usage. In order to do that, it is necessary to look at the notion of community more closely and define it more minutely. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet explain why the way in which communities are defined is so important for the study of language: “It is mutual engagement of human agents in a wide range of activities that creates, sustains, challenges, and sometimes changes society and its institutions, including both gender and language, and the sites of such mutual engagement are communities” (1992, 7). In other words, by wilfully acting and engaging in practices and events, people contribute to the shaping and forming of new ones and changing or sustaining old ones. This, of course, includes language and linguistic practices. The key part of this definition is that humans are not merely

passive recipients of culture's norms and practices; they are seen as agents who are actively and mutually engaged in them. While there most certainly is some amount of conforming to the rules and expectations of a person's society and/or a community, human agency should not be overlooked. Because communities are spaces where all of this takes place, the way we define them is important for understanding language in its wider social context. In order to bring together the abstract and broad categories, like gender and age, and the real-life "on-the-ground social and linguistic practice", a new construct was introduced to sociolinguistics by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet in 1992 – that of a community of practice (Eckert 2006, 1). So, let us go a bit deeper into the concept.

2.1. Community of Practice

"A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of their joint activity around that endeavor." (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 8) We can see that the aforementioned human agency is an important part of this definition, as well as its mutuality. No one person makes a community, so it is through being and doing with other people that communities and its practices are created and negotiated. This makes the first of the three criteria for community of practice established by Etienne Wenger in his 1998 book *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, namely, a) mutual engagement. However, simply being engaged in an activity with other people is not enough to make a community of practice. People in public transportation do not make a community of practice even though they are engaged in the same activity of riding a bus or a train, which includes rituals like waiting for it to arrive, scanning the ticket etc. King states that such situations are not communities of practice because they are "ephemeral and routine as opposed to being sustained and grounded in any history that might be shared by the members" (2014, 64). So, a group of people who happen to be in the same place at the same time, who are guided in their behaviour by some external rules (*not* co-constructed by their group) and who have no common history of mutual engagement do not form a community of practice. Their behaviour is merely triggered by the place they are in (King, 64). They might not even constitute a community *per se*. The common endeavour mentioned by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet in their definition implies a certain amount of time spent together in a purposeful activity that over time creates a shared history as well as shared experiences and norms which are, in turn, checked and shaped by what Wenger calls "mutual accountability" (1998, 81). This notion of a common endeavour makes Wenger's second

criterion: b) a joint enterprise. Communities of practice may be of different sizes and of different levels of intensity and complexity. Also, individuals are normally not members of only one community of practice, but rather they fluidly move from one to another in their daily life, successfully acting out different forms of practice in each one (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 8). A marriage, family, classroom, high school/workplace cliques, worker's unions, sports clubs, and Facebook groups may all be different communities of practice and a person may be a part of all of them or just some of them. Sometimes they might even overlap. However, each and every one develops some unique ways of doing, behaving, speaking, communicating (Wenger, 83). Due to the scope of this paper, however, we will be focusing mostly on the linguistic ways of expressing uniqueness of a community. "Speakers develop linguistic patterns as they engage in activity in the various communities in which they participate" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 9). In other words, when people come together and when they share experiences, with time, the development of somewhat unique expressions and ways of communicating is bound to happen. "But in actual practice, social meaning, social identity, community membership, forms of participation, the full range of community practices, and the symbolic value of linguistic form are being *constantly and mutually constructed*" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 9, emphasis mine). So, patterns of behaviour, as well as of linguistic use, established by the community are usually not set in stone. Both linguistic and non-linguistic patterns are always susceptible to change, especially as new members come into picture and old ones vanish. But even without new members, the existing ones often, through joint agency, negotiate with each other the existing practices and meanings. How this happens and who is eligible for such (re)negotiations is an interesting point of discussion but it goes beyond the scope of this paper. King's research of a sexual education classroom in a New Zealand school is a great example of how a shared repertoire develops over time and how he, as a newcomer, had some difficulties in understanding some of it, but with time he learned and adopted the repertoire (70). Language usage specific to each community of practice, among other things, is an important point of discernment from other communities. This makes the third criterion: c) shared repertoire. All three criteria will be used later in this paper as a lens through which data will be analysed.

2.2. Imagined Community and the Online World

When the Internet is introduced into the discussion about communities, things get a bit more complicated. Internet, as a virtual space which enables, among other things, an unprecedented level of sharing of information and creating connections among geographically distant people,

has tremendously influenced the modern society and way of living. However, before we start talking about communities in the virtual world, we must turn to the notion of an imagined community since the two seem to be knit closely together. The term was coined by Benedict Anderson in 1983 in his book *Imagined Communities*. Even though his primary concern when writing the book was how societies may create new national identities for its people by focusing their attention on a, perhaps, artificially orchestrated community, the term also proved to be useful in other contexts, such as the one we are dealing with in this paper. For example, in both Grădinaru (2016) and Gruzd et al. (2011), the notion of an imagined community is used to explain and delve deeper into the workings and existence of virtual and online communities. Drawing on Anderson's postulate on imagined communities, Grădinaru states that "[t]he impossibility to know in person all the members of a big community is just one factor that determines its imagined face. Moreover, the set of values and inner presuppositions that guide the members are important bricks in the construction of community" (187). The main premise here is that when a community is big, one has to *imagine* what a prototypical community member is like (since he cannot know them all) and what their motivation, values, and behaviour are like so that he can know what kind of person he himself needs to be in order to be a part of the community. It is this image that one draws upon when deciding how to act. Imagination is an important support for the existence of big communities. This necessity to imagine is only amplified in the online world where all communication is mediated by technology and where disclosing one's true identity is not obligatory. In this world where one is often not in physical proximity to others, the inner workings of people reveal themselves to be the propellers of online communities. Steve Fox developed a model called the Community Embodiment Model (CEM) which is based "on the assumption that community comes from 'within'; that is, it is produced by an individual and sustained over time by the participants in the community (be it virtual or physical)" (2004, 54). Both Fox and Grădinaru acknowledge the importance of the inner workings of individuals for the establishment and functioning of communities. Fox goes on to say that "[f]or individual members to truly belong, they arguably must be able to both imagine the community and in turn perceive themselves as a part of that community" (54). So, Fox places the ability and will to imagine (others as well as themselves) at the heart of his model. He does so, admittedly, in the context of virtual communities where the importance of one's imagination can perhaps be a missing link in understanding how people can create such strong bonds online, but he still sees the value in his model being applied to the 'real' world. The Internet has shown that physical proximity of people is no longer a

necessary prerequisite for community formation since we can *imagine*, and even feel, that our Internet peers are close to us, if we wish to.

2.3. The Imagined, the Virtual, and the Physical

Grădinaru explains very clearly why she believes virtual communities are so closely intertwined with the imagined, stating that “the imagined community is a valuable set of beliefs and practices that underlie and bolster the effective meaning and functioning of the virtual communities” (185). We can see in her reasoning the link between the two important notions that have already been mentioned in this paper: imagination and practices. When one is engaged in a virtual community, they must rely on a technological medium in front of them as well as be willing to accept that they might never know the true identity of others in the community. They must be able to imagine that other participants are there in front of them, just behind the screen, and not tens or hundreds of kilometres away. They might imagine what other participants look like or what they are like in the real life. Or they might choose to disregard all of this as irrelevant in favour of a shared interest and use their imagination to conceive others as rid of most of the worldly features and look at them only through the lens of a given community. For example, while playing online video games where real players are paired with each other, we may perceive other players just as the game characters they play and not be interested in the slightest in what they are like in real life. But we need our imagination to pretend it is so. In their mind, one holds an image of a virtual community’s rules, norms, values, beliefs, topics, ways of communicating, etc. and this becomes the foundation of communication between members (Grădinaru, 188). It is this mental image that then goes on to guide a person’s behaviour and practices in the community. If we take into consideration that, as we have seen in chapter 2.1, through mutual engagement in community’s practices its members do indeed partake in the community’s (re)creation, maintenance, and evolution, we may start to appreciate the role that imagination has as, perhaps, a driving force behind the functioning of virtual communities. Also, as Grădinaru put it: “The imagined part provides the landmarks for the proper journey in the virtual realm” (189). Thus, it may be said that, with our imagination, we create mind maps and rule books in our heads for navigation and successful coordination in the virtual domain so that we may be able to act accordingly. Perhaps this might be one of the reasons why older generations may be having issues with fitting in the online world; maybe they are having a hard time imagining distant as near, anonymous as friendly, virtual as real, or stranger as not always a danger, all of which possibly makes it more difficult for them to create reliable guideposts for online world. But that is a topic for a different paper. In his CEM

model, Fox proposes that the imagined cannot be separated from the concepts of neither physical nor virtual communities because “both are dependent on how one envisions ‘group’ members, activities, communications, technology, and so on” (60). It is perhaps obvious that he places the individual and the insides of his mind as the basis of communities. He argues that the imagined may even serve as a link between the two seemingly vastly different worlds and that they, instead of being separated, actually form “a single communal spectrum in which interactions are measured in degrees of virtuality and physicality” (60). In this sense, a community may be purely virtual, with its members never meeting offline, or it may be purely physical where members never commune online. However, there are many degrees of interaction in between these two poles and many modern-day communities, it may be argued, fall somewhere in between. Friends who have met in the physical world nowadays tend to also create, for example, WhatsApp or Facebook groups to commune even when they are not physically together. On the other hand, many people who have met online and who develop close relationships or communities also tend to, if possible, meet up offline, even when they have to traverse great distances. Many romantic relationships and business co-operations these days may start in this way. It would also seem that, with the rise of social media, a unique type of physical-virtual relation has been created in the recent years and it revolves around the somewhat infamous word – influencer¹.

2.4. Influencers

Influencers are, most often, individuals who manage to gather many followers or subscribers on Internet platforms, like Instagram or YouTube, by creating content that is appealing to their audience. For many of them the key to their success is creating an online community of their own centred around the content they produce and their own personalities. Many influencers try to create communities by developing an emotional connection with their audience via sharing their experiences, opinions, and other elements of their private lives. In this way, a viewer may end up liking the person even more than their content. Stuart Dredge wrote an article for The Guardian² in which he explored the reasons behind the popularity of YouTube stars and concluded that “[t]he key thing to understand about YouTube stars is that the content of their videos (...) is only one half of their appeal. The connection to their audiences is the other” (2016). Once an influencer has established this emotional relationship of trust with their

¹ “a person or thing that influences somebody/something, especially a person with the ability to influence potential buyers of a product or service by recommending it on social media” [Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries](#), accessed 14 October 2020

² [Why are YouTube stars so popular?](#), accessed 14 October 2020

followers, he has created almost like a ready army of people willing to spend their money on products the influencer produces or promotes. Sometimes, this connection is so strong that people will buy stuff that they do not really need or want just because they wish to support their beloved influencer. A whole new occupation under the name of ‘community manager’ has risen just to fulfil the need of companies to create a similar kind of connection to amass a loyal aggregate of buyers. However, this does not necessarily imply that the sole motivation behind influencing is money. Nevertheless, some amount of profit does seem to be a consequence of it, especially if we talk about the big shots. So, influencers create online content providing insight into their private physical worlds, thus making the screen into a window through which the viewer may peek, to establish online communities and make physical profit off of it. Physical and virtual do seem to be peculiarly meshed together in this type of a relation.

2.5. YouTubers doing YouTube

YouTube is currently the most popular platform for publishing and sharing videos. Its content ranges from amateurish to professional, entertaining to political, and obscure to mainstream. It is free for use and anyone can start a channel and try to make a business of it. And many people do. Being a YouTuber³ has become a real business and a fulltime job for those who manage to gather a following large enough to attract business opportunities and deals with companies who wish to be promoted on their channel. Many YouTubers even make a brand of themselves and start making their own products (e.g. notebooks, journals, perfumes, make up, online classes, etc.) to sell to their audience so that they can stop relying only on their ad revenue. As has been suggested in the previous chapter, many YouTubers, as influencers, succeed in doing this through the creation of their own online community. However, it is possible that the way in which Youtubers create their content is somewhat affected by the unwritten rules and practices generated and shaped by YouTubers in general as a community. There might be certain expectations about how things are done on YouTube that successful YouTubers understand and employ, and which newbies may try to appease to while finding their own way of doing it. For example, Julie Beck wrote an article for *The Atlantic*⁴ about “YouTube voice.” She noticed that many high-profile YouTubers speak in a similar way, so she asked a couple of noted linguists, namely, Naomi Baron and Mark Liberman to explain the situation. Baron explains to

³ There are many YouTube channels led by the music and TV industry. This paper does **not** deal with those, but only with individual, independent YouTubers. Everything stated about YouTubers does not necessarily apply to the former.

⁴ [The Linguistics of 'YouTube Voice'](#), accessed 14 October 2020

Beck that many YouTubers use (although to a different degree) overstressed vowels, long consonants and vowels, as well as aspiration to make their speech more interesting. Liberman refers to it as an “intellectual used-car-salesman voice.” Even though the ‘YouTube voice’ is not native to YouTube, the creators have appropriated and adapted it because of its attention-grabbing value (2015). Because YouTube first emerged in The United States, it might be said that English is its ‘original’ language and that English-based creators, who have arguably been exposed to the platform the longest, were able to lay down the foundations for some of today’s best YouTube practices. Even though the language use on YouTube has been largely diversified since its beginnings, English being the *lingua franca* only helps to maintain its influence in the spheres of this platform. Because of its influence and the influence of English-based creators, the usage of English language in the creation of videos which are primarily made in other languages may be a cue to what some of the most important and deep-rooted practices and ways of doing YouTube might be, since they are often preserved in their ‘original’ form. In Croatia, for the past few years, a generation of young YouTubers has been growing their channels by creating regular content, usually of entertaining and comic nature. Their popularity, as well as the number of their subscribers, has been on the rise. While probably the majority of the adult Croatian population live their lives completely oblivious of their existence (as did the author of this paper before doing her research), it seems that many teenagers, older children, and even some young adults are big fans. These YouTubers create content in Croatian for Croatian (and Balkan) audience. However, in their videos, they also use the English language, not just anglicisms, and they also switch from Croatian to English and back. This paper aims to show that there is more to this occurrence than simply explaining it as just another example of English language intruding into Croatian and of young Croatians merely yielding to language fads.

2.6. YouTube and Multimodality

Since this paper deals with YouTube, where videos are the main focus of creation and tools of communication, it is to be expected that the analysis conducted would be one which takes multimodality into account. Kress argues that multimodality is “the normal state of human communication” in general but in this paper, we will focus on multimodality as it appears in one of the popular mediums for communication of this day and age (2010, 1). Videos, by definition, combine multiple modes of communication: visual, spoken, written, music, gestures, etc., and are therefore multimodal by nature. Kress defines mode as “a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning” and he also states that “[d]ifferent

modes offer different potentials for making meaning” and it is this that has “a fundamental effect on the choice(s) of mode in specific instances of communication” (79). In videos, visual mode is the dominant one. On YouTube, it is shaped by cultural influence of mainly Western videography, as well as the rules of YouTube as a platform and the customs of YouTube community. Written or spoken mode, for example, offer different ways of expressing meaning than the visual mode, so they can all be combined in many different ways, thus evoking many different layers and levels of expressing meaning. As we will see later on in the paper, YouTubers often use written mode in their videos for multiple purposes, such as to comment on the content of the video, to communicate with the audience, or even to establish a theme or topic of the content. This is something that can only be rarely seen in cinematography, for example, even though it is somewhat similar as a medium to YouTube videos. This is perhaps because, on YouTube, everything usually revolves around the author of the video, which cannot be said about film directors. YouTubers, as it seems, tend to choose to use multiple modes to express themselves, be it during filming through speech and gestures, or during editing through writing, and they combine all of that into one visual aggregate. This relates to the notion of multimodal design which is explained by Kress as “the use of different modes (...) to present, to realize, at times to (re-)contextualize social positions and relations, as well as *knowledge* in specific *arrangements* for a specific audience” (139, author’s emphasis). His explanation implies that the choices of modes and in what way they are employed are not coincidental, but purposeful and meaningful, decided on, through design, by the one who is using the modes and who is motivated by the designed meaning reaching the intended recipient. In this way, YouTubers design their content in order to establish themselves as YouTubers, as entertainers, by using multiple modes with the goal of reaching their targeted audience. This explains the social part of Kress’s approach to multimodality, called Multimodal Social Semiotics, because arrangement of meaning is socially motivated. With YouTubers, almost all meaning that they convey in their videos is motivated by what they think their audience will like, since, as it has been previously explained, that is the way to success on the platform. For the semiotic part, Kress explains that his approach “deals with entities in which meaning and form appear as an integrated whole, *a sign*” (61, author’s emphasis). So, he does not separate the meaning and the form like linguists often do in their analyses but believes they should be observed as a whole and thus uses the semiotic concept of a sign in his theory. For him, “[*m*]ode, as the material stuff of *signs*, is central in giving material form to meaning” and the “choice of *mode* is foundational to meaning-making” (155, author’s emphasis). So, it is through mode that meanings come to life and what modes are chosen by the creator and how they are

used cannot be taken lightly. The importance of mode, as well as the intentionality and design behind how they are used will be important for the analysis later in the paper.

3.0. Methodology

Data was taken from four YouTube channels led by young Croatian YouTubers, three male and one female, with the number of subscribers ranging from 83 000 to over 500 000, as of 20th August 2020. Three videos with the most views from each channel were taken into consideration, as well as three most viewed vlogs⁵. So, six videos per YouTuber, i.e. twenty-four videos in total. Vlogs were taken into account because they tend to be somewhat less scripted and they tend to portray a YouTuber in a more relaxed manner and thus may provide examples of a more natural way of addressing the audience. However, it must be noted that there is no truly unscripted video since every video is edited to some degree. Even if a video might seem as if it was completely spontaneous, one must always bear in mind that some editing has surely taken place, whether during shooting or after. I wanted to see whether there would be any difference in the way and the amount of the English language usage between vlogs and most viewed videos. To be clear, the main point of interest of this paper are not anglicisms *per se*, i.e. English words which have been appropriated to Croatian language and adjusted to its norms, but rather the usage of English words and phrases in their original form in a manner of code-switching. Videos taken into consideration are all published on the authors' original accounts. Videos made by YouTubers in question but published on other accounts that do not belong to the author (e.g. Joomboos's channel) were not taken into consideration for the simplicity of collecting data and probable influence of other people on filming, editing, and scripting. Due to the very nature of videos, multimodality has been taken into account, so the focus is not solely on spoken language, but also on language as used visually and in written form, including the titles of videos, thumbnails, as well as in the video itself. The usage of the English language is later viewed through the lens of the notion of community of practice and its three criteria.

4.0. YouTubers

This chapter provides an overview of the YouTubers' selected videos and the most important and peculiar instances and ways of their English usage in the videos. The interpretation of data

⁵ A video blog. Although it can be used for statically filmed videos, the word is mostly used for videos filmed 'on the go', while on a trip or a day out. The point of this type of video is usually to allow the viewer to peek into a more private part of a YouTuber's life, to see what they do in a day, how they hang out with friends, what they did on a trip etc.

will follow in a later chapter. What they all have in common is that they cater to a younger audience, namely children, teenagers, and also to young adults to some degree. Also, all of them are, or have been at some point, a part of JoomBoos, a media brand aimed at the young which consists of a web portal, a magazine, and a YouTube channel where successful regional YouTubers are teamed up to create entertaining content. This confirms they are perceived as YouTubers by a wider population.

4.1. Dennis Domian

Dennis Domian, the oldest of the four YouTubers, having turned 30 in 2020, has gained 388 000 subscribers since he started his YouTube channel in 2016. His most viewed videos are actually music videos starring Elizabeta, his cringy female *alter ego*, and each has over a million views. They contain little English (e.g. feed, hashtag, kill, rap battle) and one case of satirically applying English spelling and pronunciation customs to a Croatian word (e.g. poosa⁶ – normally written ‘pusa’, meaning ‘kiss’). An interesting moment in the song *YouTube kraljica* is when the line says “ajmo ga hakirat” (let’s hack it), where the English word ‘hack’ is in spoken language completely adapted to Croatian, in pronunciation (/hæk/ vs /hak/ in “hakirat”), in spelling (seen in the subtitles) and it has undergone Croatian conjugation, creating an infinitive. However, in the video, while the line is being sung, at 2:38-39, the word “hack!” appears visually six times in its English form. All three videos contain some sort of an invitation to viewers, usually at the end, to like, share and subscribe. It might be said that these three words are crucial to every YouTuber, whether Croatian or English (and possibly any other nationality), because they encourage viewers to actively support the channel and help its growth. Because they are so common, they deserve a more detailed analysis. In the video *YouTube kraljica*, the invite is purely verbal and made by the female *alter ego*, while in *Zvončica (Official Music Video)* it is purely textual, and in *Bokić Kokić (Official Music Video)* it is both verbal and visual. The word ‘like’ is used as completely appropriated into Croatian, both in spelling and in combining with Croatian affixes (lajk, lajkajte). With this author, ‘subscribe’ is interesting because he does not use the word verbally, but rather the Croatian equivalent ‘pretplatiti se’. However, he also uses the English word visually in his videos in the form of a red YouTube button on which ‘subscribe’ is written⁷. Two out of three vlogs had the same ending scene as *Bokić Kokić* where the viewer is visually invited to subscribe, visit website and click on a previous video, which can be seen in Image 1. Dennis’ vlogs contain a

⁶ Dennis Domian, *YouTube kraljica*, at 2:00

⁷ Dennis Domian, “Bokić Kokić (Official Music Video)” at 3:38-3:46, and “YouTube kraljica” at 1:41.

few spoken English phrases such as: “last summer”, “free promo!”, “oh my god!”, “seriously?”, “ship name⁸”, “beauty shot”, “flame of freedom”, “awkward moment” as well as some English swear words and, of course, some words which are already fully or partially adapted to Croatian (e.g. lajk, actually, vlog, creepy, fail, prank etc). All in all, Dennis uses little English in his spoken language and he generally does not seem to have a tendency to visually/textually intervene with his editing into his videos. Examples where he did so are interesting because they show an interesting disparity between his spoken language, where he uses Croatian terms or anglicisms, and his visual communication which remains in English (examples with ‘subscribe’ and ‘hack’).



Image 1. Dennis Domian’s ending scene from the vlog *Goli ljudi i razbijene glave*

4.2. TheSikrt

This YouTuber has been making videos since 2011 and has the most subscribers out of the four: 508 000. The name of his channel consists of the English article ‘the’ and an English word ‘secret’, spelled phonologically, i.e. the way it would be pronounced by a Croatian speaker. His three most viewed videos are all comic sketches that he filmed with his younger brother and they do not really contain much spoken language but are more focused on visually telling a story. His vlogs do contain more speech, but his usage of the English language is limited to mostly swear words and an occasional phrase such as “by the way”, “good boy”, and “later.” However, what is interesting is how he often uses English, visually, to establish time relations between events in his video. He uses this, for example, in his most viewed video *Ovo*

⁸ “When you take a shipping of two people (or characters) and you put their names together, creating one name for the pair that is fluent and doesn’t sound weird” [Urban Dictionary](https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=shipping), accessed 14 October 2020

nije dobro prošlo. The video starts with the protagonist, i.e. the author of the channel, waking up half-naked and confused in the woods. He is angry and is trying to remember what happened. At 0:27 the viewer is taken through a vortex and a black screen appears which says: “3 hours ago” which signals that the viewer has been taken back through time. The viewer then learns about the events that had transpired before the author woke up, namely that his younger brother gave him sleep drugs and dumped him in the woods. Next, at 1:03, another insert appears with the word: “Meanwhile”, which takes us back from the past to show us what has been happening to the protagonist while we were watching previous events – he is now super angry and storms to his house to take revenge on his brother. This insert is what is called a time card, taken from the popular cartoon *SpongeBob SquarePants*, and the words on it are narrated by a French narrator. Due to the popularity of the cartoon, many video makers have been using them to add a bit of a comic punch to the storyline. There are many different time cards, but the one used in this video is shown in Image 2. TheSikrt uses the visual way of establishing time relations in his storylines in three out of the six selected videos. He uses it in one more, but in Croatian language. However, that video is the oldest of the six, suggesting, perhaps, that as he evolved as a YouTuber, he started using more English in this specific context. Nevertheless, a more detailed analysis should be performed to be sure if this is so. There is another example which shows that, at least for this author, there is some intentionality behind using visuals in the English language, instead of in Croatian, for communicating time relations and time frames.

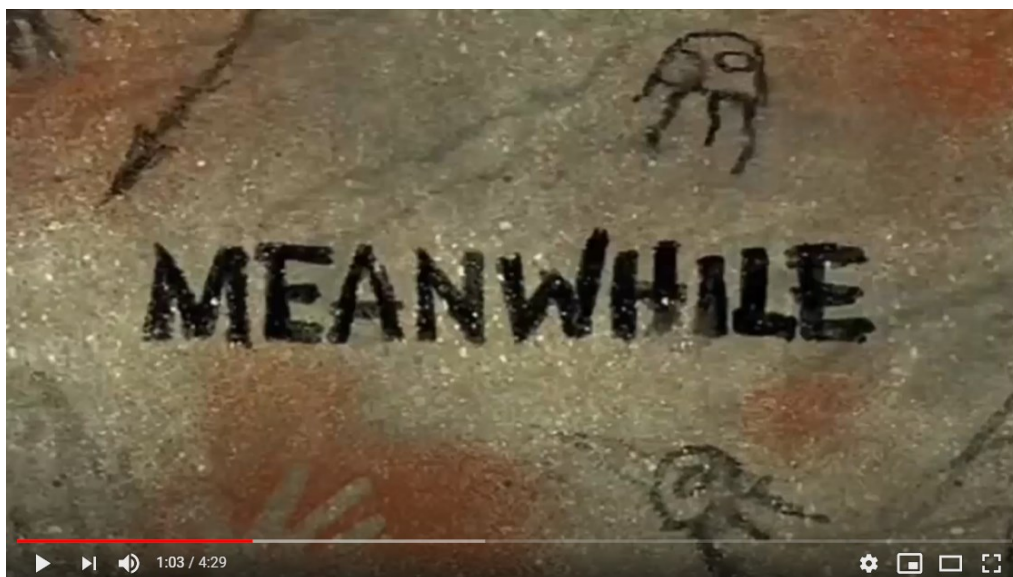


Image 2. Time card from The Sikrt's video *Ovo nije dobro prošlo*

In the video *Pokušali su nas opljačkat! / Bali #1*, at 3:07, a black screen appears with five consecutive statements, four of them in white and the last one in yellow letters, with 4) and 5) appearing almost simultaneously. Their content is as follows:

- 1) “Dosli u hotel” (Came to the hotel)
- 2) “Zaspali u 3 min.” (Fell asleep in 3 mins)
- 3) “Jbga...” (F*ck it)
- 4) “Day 2”
- 5) “I guess?”

The fact that the author chooses to communicate time in English instead of remaining consistent with his usage of Croatian is indicative of something more than just a random spur-of-the-moment English usage. The “I guess?” is also interesting because it is differentiated from 1) - 4) inserts by its colour (yellow) and position (more to the bottom and right) to indicate that it is not a part of the original message portrayed in white letters, but rather, that it is more like an afterthought, or a comment on the message, indicating that the author is not so sure about his statement, i.e. whether the following footage really is from the second day of their trip. TheSikrt also uses English to invite the viewers to like, share, and subscribe in a similar way to Dennis Domian with a structured ending scene which invites the viewer to click on a previous or a random video, i.e. to continue to watch his content. Some videos he just ends with a black screen with a message to the viewers in white letters saying, for example, “Tnx for watching”⁹ and “20k likes for part 2.”¹⁰ So, using English in the endings of videos, or, specifically, in the ending communication with the audience, seems to be a tendency in TheSikrt’s videos too. He also uses English songs quite often for background music. Titles of his videos are all completely in Croatian, except for one which contains one English word formed as a hashtag: “#backfires.”

4.3. Pave Elez

Pave’s channel has just above 83 000 subscribers, the least of the four. His three most viewed videos do not contain almost any spoken English except for a few phrases and words like: “stay hydrated”, “relationship” and “follow.” In his vlogs, there is a bit more spoken English, but it is mostly produced not by the author, but by other people, i.e. his friends and a fellow YouTuber xniks2x (more on her in the next section). So, in the selected videos there is not much difference

⁹ In *Ovo je bila loša ideja*

¹⁰ In *Leonov novi stan! (10.000\$)*

in the amount of used spoken English between the most viewed videos and his vlogs. However, in every video, English appears visually, mostly to communicate with the audience rather than as a way to comment on the content of the video. Just as with the previous two YouTubers, inviting the viewers to engage with the content by subscribing, liking, and commenting seems to be the most common reason to use English visually. Even though Pave almost always verbally invites the audience to do this using Croatian language, when he visually prompts the audience to engage, it is almost always in English with phrases such as: “subscribe for more”, “follow meeee”, and with an image of the English version of YouTube’s subscribe button, instead of a Croatian one (Subscribe vs. Pretplati me). He also uses English in this way for different purposes. In his most viewed video, *Znakovi Da Momak Zeli Poljubiti Curu*, he prompts the viewer to watch the video to the end with a black screen that says: “waaaaait bloopers :)”. In *YouTubers On Vacation*, at 6:30, a small prompt appears in the bottom left corner with the title “Question of the day” followed by a question posed in Croatian inquiring whether the viewer likes coffee or not. In *Home alone s bratom*, Pave uses English visually several times. First, the video’s title appears at the beginning. Then, after twelve seconds, letters appear saying “Welcome back” – again, communication with the audience. At 5:43, letters appear again saying “Haul time!” This time the author wanted to declare to the viewers what kind of content they may be expecting for the following minutes, namely, that he is going to show them the things that he has bought. At 6:39, a light blue screen appears explaining his reasoning behind his choice of dinner “rainy day = waffles for dinner”. And finally, in the end of the video, at 11:40, a blue screen appears again with a message in Croatian stating Pave’s love and appreciation for his viewers. The following second, the message disappears and a new one emerges, this time in English: “Make someone smile today :)”. There is also one instance of using English for establishing time relations, just like we have seen in TheSikrt’s videos. In *YouTubers on Vacation*, at 5:20, a light blue screen appears stating “Day 2” to denote the beginning of content filmed on the second day of their vacation. Just like TheSikrt, Pave also often uses English songs for the background, but he also almost always has some English in the background or on his clothes. In four of the six videos, he used English in his titles.

4.4. xniks2x

This female YouTuber, being just 18 years old, has been working on her channel since 2017 and has managed to gather 168 000 subscribers. Her channel’s name is a rhythmical play on her real name – Nika – which uses the pronunciation of the consonant ‘x’, which is not native to Croatian, but to English, to its advantage. The name is pronounced like this: /ɪksnɪksdvarks/.

For an easier analysis, we will separate the name into syllables: /ɪks/ /nɪks/ /dva/ /ɪks/. The first and the final syllable are pronunciations of the consonant 'x', but adapted to Croatian language, where the consonant cluster /ks/ is preceded by an /ɪ/. In the English language, consonant 'x' changes its phonological expression depending on the surrounding context, but when it stands on its own, and not as a part of a larger unit, it is pronounced as /eks/. If it was used like this, then the play of sounds in the name would not be possible. The second syllable is the key element in the name since it is a play on the YouTuber's name - /nika/ - where the final vowel is replaced by consonant 's', thus creating another, central, /ɪks/ in /nɪks/ which is phonologically equal to 'x'. This change of her name, even though it is already short, makes it *sound* even shorter. The third syllable is Croatian pronunciation of number two. The number is here probably because there are two 'x's in the name and because something short was needed to separate /nɪks/ and /ɪks/ to make the play work. It can already be seen how properties of English language are being adapted to the needs of Croatian speakers. Now, it should be noted here that 'x's are often put at the beginning and end of a username to make it unique (and to make it look good, symmetrical) since, if one wants to use his own name for a username, he will often find that it is already taken by someone else, so one has to get creative, like Nika did. Out of all the selected YouTube channels, Nika's has the most pronounced difference in English usage between her vlogs and most viewed videos. In vlogs, the amount of English used at least doubles, especially in spoken language. She often uses not just English phrases but even whole English sentences. Here are some examples from *Sto se to desilo u bazenu / Summer Vlog*: "So the best part of this vacay is...", "The boys are here", "...cause tan is important and food is not that so much, so yeah", "You're a blessing", "So this is me enjoying my pizza and describing my love life" etc. She also often switches from Croatian to English and back again in the middle of a sentence, for example in *Sve u svemu, simpatično. #vlog3*: "Dobrodošli u sit and chat with xniks2x", "Welcome to...ne znam...welcome to bathing with Hugo and Nika", "Welcome to peglanje with Nika", "savršen look uz background noise", "nije tol'ko deep" etc. Like all the other YouTubers selected for this analysis, Nika also uses English visually in many different ways, but she uses it mainly for her introduction and ending scenes (what she herself also calls intro and outro), to comment on the events in the video rather than to communicate with the audience (as Pave does), and in one video she also uses English visually to denote thematically parts of the video ("Yoga Time" and "Shopping Time"). A black visual shown in Image 3 with the words "Live Your Dreams" is used in half of the analysed videos either as an intro, sometimes as an outro, and once even as an intermission. The message in the image could perhaps be understood as a slogan of hers or as a portrayal of her philosophy of living.



Image 3. xniks2x's visual

In one video she uses a dynamic composition of quickly interchanging scenes and words which creates the following, mostly Croatian, message: “Sve što gledaš tu je da te zabavi kroz komediju, vlogove, collabove, lifestyle.” In another video she uses the same composition as an outro but shortened. Only in two of the selected videos does she use English visually to encourage the audience to engage with the content i.e. to like, share, and subscribe, but she always makes sure to do it verbally in Croatian, either in the beginning or the end, and sometimes even multiple times in a single video. As it so happens, all of the selected videos feature at least one other YouTuber; two vlogs and the most viewed ones all feature Rasta, her then boyfriend and a YouTuber not included in this analysis, and two of the vlogs feature Pave Elez and also some other YouTubers. It is especially interesting that Nika's *Sto se to desilo u bazenu / Summer Vlog* is her side of the story of the events that Pave Elez also made a video about in his vlog *YouTubers On Vacation*. This goes to show that young Croatian YouTubers hang out and collaborate with each other even beyond Internet.

5.0. Discussion

Even at a first glance, it is visible that all the selected YouTubers have their own way of creating and shaping content even though they cater to a similar audience. Some choose to tell a story more visually, and some will rely more on their spoken language. Some will try to engage the viewer in multiple ways, and some will just stick to the basic like-share-subscribe invite. This is not as strange as it might seem at first if one takes into account that a part of being a successful content creator on any Internet platform, including YouTube, is to be as unique as possible while staying within what is expected because that is what will most likely appeal to the audience. Each has to learn the rules of the game; of using the platform and its tools, of

connecting with the audience and creating a community of their own, of catering to the said audience's needs and wants, of making videos and content for their other social media accounts, etc. They, however, must also find a way to do all of this in their own unique way in order to stand out from others who are trying to do the same thing. If we focus on a single YouTuber in an attempt to search for more consistency, we may not find as much of it as expected. In this particular sample of six videos per YouTuber, not one of them had an identical way of opening or closing the video, of addressing the audience, of transitioning between scenes and parts of the video etc. This may not be as peculiar as it may seem at first. This discontinuity may be due to differences in topic or type of video, or a reflection of different phases of YouTubers' style and skill. But despite the inconsistencies in realization, there do seem to be a few areas in video editing, shaping of content, and communication with the audience where the same underlying intention, and something almost like a template, seems to exist. There are most likely even more of them than will be mentioned here, but this paper focuses on those which are expressed through the English language. As I have already argued before, one of the key components of becoming a *successful* YouTuber is the creation, not just of content, but of a community. To be clear, the point here is not that content is irrelevant, but that creating content is only one piece of the puzzle. If we remember the chapter 2.6. on multimodality in which we have established the notion of multimodal design and the fact that meaning is socially motivated, we may conclude that most (if not all) of the noted inconsistencies may be attributed to the YouTubers' motivation to appeal to the audience, and also that all the different ways of how modes are used, and when, may be seen as experiments on what combination will prove to be the most effective in achieving the goal of creating the best content for a specific audience. Moreover, the consistencies that *have* been found, that seem to be established in YouTubers' practices, are features that have probably already proven themselves to be successful in conveying the wanted message and gaining the audience's approval and are thus a great help in building a community. Since it is modes through which meaning comes to life, as has already been stated in chapter 2.6., the fact that YouTubers relatively consistently choose a certain mode to express a certain meaning means that they believe that it is exactly that mode which is the best for expressing the meaning they are trying to convey. So, the fact that all of the selected YouTubers use English visually, in written mode, for one use or another, seems significant. It is, perhaps, only xniks2x who uses English more verbally than visually. Now that we have established that a mode is not chosen accidentally, but that it is chosen because it is perceived to be the best for conveying the author's meaning, it will be useful to keep that in mind throughout the rest of the discussion. So, let us explore

the collected data through the lens of the notion of community of practice, the imagined, and the virtual.

5.1. Mutual Engagement

In chapter 2.1., the three criteria for the existence of a community of practice have been established, the first being that of mutual engagement. Two levels of mutual engagement may be discerned through the analysis of YouTubers in question: engagement with other YouTubers and engagement with audience. Each selected YouTuber has at least one video, out of the six, that features another YouTuber (who is included in the analysis or not). TheSikrt's top 3 videos are all made with his younger brother, who is also a YouTuber with over 333 000 subscribers, and his vlogs are also made with some other YouTubers. TheSikrt himself is starring in one of the top three Dennis Domian's videos and is referred to in another as Elizabeta's (Dennis's *alter ego*) crush. Dennis's vlogs also feature some other YouTubers not included in the analysis. As has already been mentioned, Nika's five videos feature her boyfriend Rasta, another YouTuber, and two of the vlogs feature Pave Elez and other YouTubers. It is visible from this that YouTubers engage with each other in the offline world, often to make content together which, as can be seen in Nika's vlog¹¹, does not necessarily revolve exclusively around filming videos, but also might include photo shoots and other ways of creating content for social media in general. It also seems, at least in the videos, that these collaborations are often accompanied by partying and their relationships seem to be more friend-like than strictly business-like. This shows that the YouTubers in question do create relationships, both private and business, with each other offline, even though they do not live in the same city or even the same geographical region of Croatia. They make an effort to visit each other and to organize events where they can meet and hang out – which also provides an opportunity to create more content. The fact that they come from different cities and regions implies that they mutually connected through YouTube and, arguably, their status as YouTubers. Thus, the first criterion for the existence of a community of practice of young Croatian YouTubers is confirmed. Another level of mutual engagement refers to the engagement with the audience. All of the selected YouTubers in almost all of the selected videos communicate verbally directly with the audience usually to welcome them back to their channel and to a new video, and to invite them to engage by liking, sharing, subscribing, and commenting. Sometimes they might even ask the audience what kind of videos they want to see, and they might ask them to write their

¹¹ xniks2x. *Sjedila sam u kadi i odlučila da idem u Split /Vlog3*

suggestions for the following videos in the comment section. It seems that when verbal communication is in question, all of this is mostly done using the Croatian language. However, when it comes to visual communication it is not necessarily so. In fact, it does seem that the domain of visual communication with the viewers is the domain in which English is used quite frequently and it is most often found at the beginning, and, especially, at the end of a video. In regard to introduction, for example, in one of his vlogs, Pave visually welcomes the viewer with the blinking words “Welcome back”¹², while Nika does the same thing in her own way, in one of her vlogs, by starting the video with white letters on a black background stating “Welcome to a mess enjoy.”¹³ However, using English visually at the end of a video seems to be almost like a rule, and all of the YouTubers used it in this way in almost all of the selected videos. Some videos have fixed, designed, ending scenes arranged around YouTube’s way of recommending new videos to watch at the end of a video which encourages the viewer to click on another video made by the same author. This can be seen in Image 1, and also in Images 4 and 5. This pattern was found in almost half of the selected videos of three out of the four YouTubers.

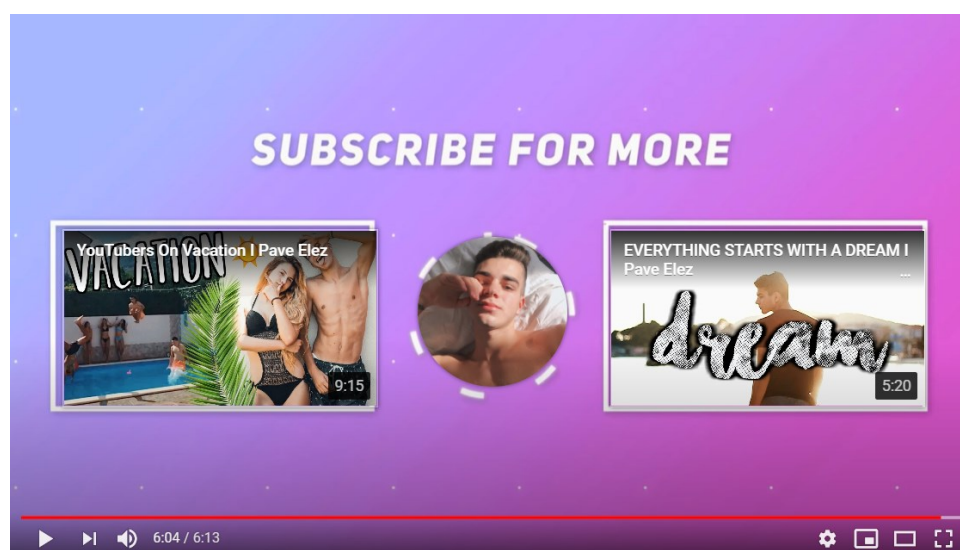


Image 4. Pave Elez’s ending scene

Only in the selected videos made by xniks2x, i.e. Nika, this pattern was not found. However, this does not necessarily mean that none of her videos on the channel employ this pattern. However, it does seem that she uses English visually the least and perhaps this is so because she feels more comfortable using it verbally, and does not need to ‘compensate’, since she uses English much more frequently in her videos than the other selected YouTubers.

¹² Elez, Pave. *Home alone s bratom*, 0:12-0:13

¹³ xniks2x. *Sto se to desilo u bazenu / Summer Vlog*



Image 5. TheSikrt's ending scene

Another way of ending videos is by simply adding English text over a basic single-coloured background, be it black, white, or blue. It usually contains messages like “Thanks for watching” and “Subscribe”, but it also enables the author to move away from the ‘standard’ messages directed at the viewer and to insert a more unique message, such as “make someone smile today :)”¹⁴ or “20k likes for part 2.”¹⁵ This format of conveying a message is not reserved only for the endings; it may be used at any point in the video to aid to the storytelling, as we have seen in TheSikrt's way of handling time relations, or as an interjection of the author in the role of the editor, and not only the protagonist, of the video in question. In the chapter about Pave Elez, a couple of examples of direct communication with the viewer in the middle of the video have also been mentioned. As it can be seen, most of the examples mentioned here are aimed primarily at making the viewer engage with the video he is watching. In marketing, this is known as a ‘call to action’ and its purpose is to “persuade a person to perform a desired action.” (MarketingTerms.com, n.d.)¹⁶ Since the viewer engagement, i.e. active rather than passive behaviour of the viewer, is one of the most important parts of growing a YouTube channel, there are many ways to increase it and encourage it. However, using a call to action seems to be one of the most frequent ones and it is usually used at the end. The fact that such a crucial part of building a YouTube channel tends to be, at least in this set of videos, communicated in English rather than Croatian seems significant.

¹⁴ Elez, Pave. *Home alone s bratom*, 11:42-11:48

¹⁵ TheSikrt. *Leonov novi stan! (10.000\$)*, 6:41-6:48

¹⁶ [Call To Action](#). Accessed September 21, 2020

5.2. Joint Enterprise

The analysis so far has shown the existence of mutual engagement both between YouTubers themselves and between YouTubers and their audiences. The next step is to review the second criterion for the existence of a community of practice: a joint enterprise. The members, through mutual engagement, arrange their practices around a common purpose and along the way they build their own communal history. It may be said with a decent amount of certainty that all practices and ways of doing things employed by the YouTubers, as well as their audience, revolve around creating and/or consuming content, in this case – videos. YouTubers come up with scenarios, film the videos, star in them, edit the filmed material, and finally publish their videos all the while being careful to cater to their audience's needs, to connect with them, to follow the tried-and-tested ways of doing things while remaining unique enough. The audience, on the other hand, mainly consumes the videos, but they also participate in the creation process in multiple ways. They may propose new ideas to the author in the comments (as authors often ask them to do) or offer their support or criticism. They may also influence the type of videos a YouTuber might make in a more indirect way, for example, by liking or disliking a video, by the time spent watching the video, by subscribing and sharing, i.e. by being engaged (or not). The more an audience is engaged with the content they are watching, the more a YouTuber becomes successful. If a YouTuber mostly makes entertaining videos, and then makes a few videos with, e.g., a political commentary, he might face some amount of backlash from his audience because he let down their expectations, or his views might go down. This goes in favour of an important point within the criterion of joint enterprise, or, what Wenger calls “mutual accountability” (81) - the upholding of negotiated norms and practices is regulated by the members themselves. They may hold each other accountable by, for example, communicating what someone did right or wrong or by showing support or disapproval, as is the case with YouTubers and their audiences, as well as between YouTubers themselves. This is where the imagined seems to be of great importance. “As personal media, new media deal with complex, indeterminate, and heterogenous audiences” (Grădinaru, 187). This is why content creators have no way of truly knowing who exactly comprises their audience, so they need to create an “imagined audience” by establishing a mental image of what their audience is like and what they want in order to create appropriate content (Kavoura, 2014, 493). If they disregard this mind map of how to cater to their audience, they will most likely face either a backlash or a drop in viewer engagement and number of views. The audience also imagines what a YouTuber is like based on the limited information that the YouTuber chooses to share

through videos and thus the viewer learns what to expect from him. Furthermore, joint enterprise does not mean that the members are constantly in agreement, but rather that they are in the constant process of negotiating the norms and ways of doing things (Wenger, 78). So, nothing is truly fixed. A somewhat obvious amount of discontinuity in how things are done in the selected videos has already been mentioned a few times in this paper, mostly in the context of video beginnings and endings. To further expand on this note, an interesting example of a practice being (re)negotiated will be taken from two of Nika's vlogs. In both videos¹⁷, she visually communicates to the viewer that she forgot to take her camera with her so she cannot show them what happened next. In one she calls herself incompetent and in the other irresponsible. However, she does not do so apologetically. She indirectly acknowledges that she, by forgetting her camera, did not act as a YouTuber 'should' and that she perhaps betrayed some of the expectations that the viewers have of her. However, in *Sve u svemu simpatično. #vlog3*, she manages to turn the situation around and somewhat humorously attempts to make the viewers engage regardless by stating that one like equals one prayer for her YouTube skills. So, she is aware that there is something like YouTube specific skills and expectations related to being a YouTuber (that is possibly why she feels the need to explain herself instead of simply moving on with the video), but she manages, at least temporarily, to slightly stretch the meaning of being a YouTuber and to even make her 'mistake' a part of her uniqueness. Judging by the comments, number of likes vs. dislikes, and number of views, the audience did not seem to mind. The fact that this happens in two out of the three selected vlogs implies that there is a decent possibility that she also made a similar mistake in some other videos, and yet it seems that this did not make her less of a YouTuber in the eyes of the community since her channel continues to grow. Wenger states that there are almost always some outside forces which may influence or impose some rules upon a community of practice, but the members still choose how to go about the imposed things in their practices (80). So, a community may build their joint enterprise around the external demands and limits and still do the things in their own way. YouTubers, for example, face some of the limits of the platform itself like the file size for upload or the rules for monetization so they have to organize around that. There are also other external influences which are not as limiting and one of these may be the influence of foreign, mainly English-based YouTubers and the way they are making videos. I would like to argue here that the YouTubers analysed in this paper have taken on some of their ways which is

¹⁷ xniks2x. *Sto se to desilo u bazenu / Summer Vlog* at 3:40-3:45 and *Sve u svemu simpatično. #vlog3* at 11:58-12:07

expressed through the retainment of the English language. The YouTubers have found a way to incorporate the influence of the English-based community into their primarily Croatian videos, but more on this in the next section.

5.3. Shared repertoire

Even though when Wenger writes about shared repertoire, he includes in it much more than just linguistic devices, this paper will focus mainly on those because it seems that using the English language in certain ways and in certain contexts, instead of Croatian, in Croatian dominated videos does seem to be at least a part of a shared repertoire of the Croatian YouTube community of practice in question. English-based YouTubers may be seen as somewhat of a role model to the young Croatian YouTubers because they have, presumably, like many other young Croats been exposed primarily to English YouTubers as content creators on the platform. The YouTubers included in the analysis do employ certain practices that seem to have been established by English-based creators, and some of them still often remain expressed in their English form.

Examples of beginnings and endings of videos, as well as visual communication with viewers and the usage of calls to action in this way have already been analysed in chapter 5.1. Those examples are perhaps the most obvious ones, but there is more to analyse. The English language is also used for denoting a theme or topic for a part of a video. For example, in one of Nika's videos, she visually uses phrases such as "Shopping time"¹⁸ and "Yoga time"¹⁹, and Pave has one instance of using the phrase "Haul time!"²⁰ Even though there are only these three instances of such use of English, it is also interesting that, unlike other noticed uses of English in this set of videos, this one does not seem to have a Croatian equivalent, i.e. Croatian language was not used in any videos visually in this way. It does seem that these themes and topics came from the English YouTuber community since these are the phrases that can often be seen on fashion and lifestyle oriented channels. TheSikrt's way of using English visually to establish time relations between events in his videos has already been discussed in the chapter 4.2. detailing the important features of his videos. The fact that among the six selected videos there is one (which is also the oldest of the selected videos) where this was done in Croatian language implies that at some point he either tried to move away from English, but eventually decided to mostly avoid it for whatever reason, or that the video was perhaps filmed before he adopted

¹⁸ xniks2x. *Provodim dan kao trudnica*, 3:52-3:54

¹⁹ xniks2x. *Provodim dan kao trudnica*, 8:07-8:10

²⁰ Elez Pave, *Home alone s bratom*, 5:43-5:45

this practice. With other three YouTubers, this use can be seen only once in the selected set of videos which at first might seem as if this pattern is not as important, however, not all types of videos need to explain time relations. TheSikrt makes comic sketches and tells his stories primarily visually, rather than verbally, and in doing so, he jumps through time more frequently than the others. So, he needs this kind of tool to tell his stories better. Also, both he and Pave used this in their vlogs which were filmed on a multiple-day trip and they needed a way to let the viewer know what happened on which day. Most of the other selected videos show the happenings of a single day, so they obviously have no need to explain time relations since they all tell their stories chronologically. The exceptions here are two of Nika's vlogs, one which contains footage of a whole week and the other of a weekend. In the former she mostly did it verbally and in the latter she did visually separate the first and the second day, but instead of using English in the way TheSikrt does, she used the opportunity to explain, in Croatian, that she had forgotten her camera and that because of that there is a gap in the events shown and that the following footage is from the next day²¹. In the previous section, this has already been discussed as an example of breaking a 'rule' and of a (re)negotiation of what it means to be a YouTuber. So, if we take into account the fact that most of the selected videos which do not use English to establish time relations do not really have the need to do so, and also that almost all the videos that do have the need do indeed do it in this way, we might be able to see the possibility that such usage of the English language may also be expected to show up more often if a similar analysis of a larger set of videos is to be undertaken.

The next example of a shared repertoire are titles. It is interesting how, in the selected set of videos, the most viewed videos contain little English, be it spoken or visual, and the same goes for titles. Since the target audience are supposedly mainly children and teenagers, many of whom may not be proficient enough in English, it may as well be that such low amount of English is one of the factors that helped the videos get so many views because there was no language barrier to understanding the content. However, this possibility should be explored in a much more detailed way and this goes beyond the scope of this paper. The fact that the amount of the English language used goes up when one switches from the most viewed videos to vlogs, whether verbally or visually, seems significant. When it comes to titles, Pave Elez uses English the most, in four out of the six videos, but only one is purely in English (*YouTubers On Vacation*) while the others are a mixture of Croatian and English where the two languages are either separated by a symbol “|”, e.g. *Mario, imaš li curu? | Never have I ever w/ brother*

²¹ xniks2x. *Sto se to desilo u bazenu / Summer Vlog* at 3:40-3:45

and *Kamera od 6.000 nam je potonula u more* | *Summer Vlog*, or the two languages are meshed together like in *Home alone s bratom*. It should be noted here that the mentioned symbol is not reserved to just separate Croatian from English, it is also used when the title is purely in Croatian. The symbol itself is a part of the shared repertoire, just like e.g. hashtags (#), and it seems that it is used to separate the title of the video from some sort of additional information on the content of the video which may refer to the type of video (e.g. a vlog), it may state the author's name or a topic or a theme of the video, etc. In the example with "Never have I ever", the viewers are informed that the game will be played in the video and they then know what to expect from it. The point with titles, as well as with most of the other examples from videos used in this paper, is that such usage of English cannot be fully attributed to the phrases not having an equivalent in Croatian; why is it that they use *Summer Vlog* instead of a perfectly understandable 'Ljetni vlog', or why does Pave use the English title of the game, when there is a widely known Croatian name for it – 'Nikad nisam' – which is even shorter? To uncover the answer, it would be best to ask them, but since the scope of this paper does not go that far, we will settle for simply noticing it rather than explaining the reasons behind it. If one takes a few minutes of their time and quickly scrolls through the list of videos on the channels of the YouTubers that this paper deals with, one will see many instances of English usage. TheSikrt and Dennis Domian use it much less in titles than Nika and Pave Elez, but nevertheless one can quickly find a few examples on each channel and some of them are as follows: "Try not to laugh!!!", "Scary bedtime stories", "Q&A", "My life with", "Work week in my life", "road trip", "What's in my phone", "Apartment tour", "Review", "Unboxing", etc. It also seems that sometimes they use the phrase "w/" in titles which is short for "with" and there are examples where it is used even if the whole title is in Croatian, for example, TheSikrt has a video named *ili-ili /w mali brat*²². Since the Croatian word for 'with' is usually made of a single letter, 's', the shortening value that the expression 'w/' has in English is lost when used in Croatian. It is even longer than the Croatian word. However, in this particular example it can be noted that the words following the phrase 'w/' (which TheSikrt incorrectly typed in this example) do not change case into instrumental as they would if the Croatian 's' was used ('s malim bratom'). Instead, they remain in the nominative case, thus pertaining to the ways of the Standard English language even though the words themselves are Croatian. Since this kind of usage can be seen with multiple authors, it may be argued that it is also a part of a shared repertoire. The fact that all of them use English in described ways also implies that their audiences understand them

²² Either-or /w younger brother

and accept them. Perhaps the amount of English used might be, at least partly, correlated with the average age of the audience of each YouTuber, so a somewhat older audience might better react to English and the author may feel more encouraged to use more of it. But that assumption should be better investigated before making any conclusions.

All of these examples have hopefully shown that the English language used by these young Croatian YouTubers is not simply a language fad, but a reflection of the influence of the community of English-based creators on the community of young Croatian YouTubers and their audiences and that the YouTubers in question have indeed made parts of this foreign influence, in their own way, an important part of communication and shared repertoire of their community of practice.

6.0. Conclusion

Communities, as places where cultural and societal norms, values, and practices are constantly (re)created through human agency, are an important site for observing many social occurrences and one of them is most certainly language. Community of practice, as a concept which puts emphasis on the human agency, may serve as a useful lens through which language use may be observed. It consists of three criteria: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. When it comes to communities on the Internet, the concept of the imagined is a useful tool for understanding that in the world where one cannot know for sure other people's identity and where some of the rules of the physical world do not necessarily apply, it is imagination that helps people to create mind maps of the functioning of online communities and it also enables them to see themselves as a part of one. As such, imagination may be seen as the basis of all communities, whether online or physical. Through Steve Fox's CEM model, we can see that the physical and the virtual are, in fact, a continuum and that all communities, including the virtual ones, are somewhere on the spectrum. A relatively new kind of relationship between the physical and the virtual is embodied in the word 'influencer' which describes people who, by creating content on various Internet platforms, gather a large audience over which they may exert their influence and make money that way. YouTubers are one type of influencers whose main medium of communication with their audience are videos. Since videos are multimodal by nature, i.e. they express meaning through various modes such as writing, speech, visuals, gestures, etc., the notion of multimodality has been taken into account in this analysis. Through the lens of Kress's Multimodal Social Semiotic approach, the notion of multimodal design and intentionality behind choosing what modes are used has been applied

in the analysis. Twenty-four videos in total from four young Croatian YouTubers have been taken into account and their names are as follows: Dennis Domian, TheSikrt, Pave Elez, and xniks2x. The analysis of the videos has shown that there are plenty of discrepancies in how they use English, but that can be attributed to the different styles, themes, and topics of videos. TheSikrt's way of telling a story through video is mainly visual, so he uses English mostly visually, in written mode, often to express time relations. xniks2x is, on the other hand, very verbal, she uses English in her speech the most, and the difference in English usage between her most viewed videos and vlogs is the most pronounced. Pave Elez uses English the most when he visually communicates with the viewer. Dennis Domian perhaps uses English the least, but there are interesting examples where he communicates the same message verbally in Croatian, but visually in English. However, some interesting consistencies in English usage have been found among all the selected YouTubers, namely the usage of English in introductions to videos, but especially the endings (most often in the form of 'calls to action'), in titles, in communicating with the audience, commenting on the content of the video, and establishing topics or themes in the video. All of these refer mostly to the usage of English in the written mode. Such use of English has been shown to be an important part of the shared repertoire of their community of practice. The other two criteria for the existence of a community of practice have also been fulfilled since the analysis has shown that the YouTubers do commune in the physical world, often to hang out and make content, and also each YouTuber has at least one other YouTuber appearing in the set of selected videos (mutual engagement), and that all that they do in the videos is motivated by reaching and satisfying the audience and designed to do just that (joint enterprise). In the end, it may be concluded that the YouTubers in question are a part of the Croatian YouTube community of practice and that the way they use English is adopted from the foreign English-based community of practice and adapted to become a part of their shared repertoire.

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