

The Representation of Meghan Markle in Facebook Posts: A Discourse Historical Approach (DHA)

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Abstract

Following the royal wedding of American actress and feminist Meghan Markle to Prince Harry who is sixth in line to the British throne in May 2018, Markle has been going viral on social media. Not only did the wedding spur a wave of mixed reactions, but the new Duchess of Sussex has also become a controversial figure as apparent from participants' comments which range from admiration and fascination to outright criticism and racism. Drawing upon Wodak's (2001) Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) as a theoretical framework with specific reference to its application on Computer-mediated Discourse (CMD) as discussed by Reisigl and Wodak (2008), the present study attempts to examine the representation of Markle in Facebook posts following the royal wedding. A manageable sample comprising eighty status posts about Markle was gathered randomly using the Facebook search option. The study aims at examining the linguistic features that contribute to the construction of a positive or negative image of Markle in the selected posts with specific focus on nomination and predication strategies. The findings point out that the two groups, pro- and anti-Markle employed various nomination and predication strategies in the Facebook posts they wrote following the royal wedding to create a positive or negative representation for this public figure respectively.

Keywords: Computer-mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA), Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), Meghan Markle, royal wedding

1. Introduction

On 19 May 2018, Meghan Markle, an American actress, fashion icon and feminist married Prince Harry who is sixth in line to the British throne and earned the title Duchess of Sussex. The wedding has spurred a "fever pitch of media coverage and global public interest", the major reason being the bride's origins and identity (Rodriguez, 2018, par. 1). The wedding has been said to represent a turning point for Britain as it has marked a departure from royal traditions in many ways that may initiate a new era for the tradition-bound royal family. It is said that for the first time in its history, the royal family has allowed a mixed-race member which has been viewed as a change towards more openness and egalitarianism. Some have viewed this as an attempt on the part of the British monarchy towards a future of more diversity and acknowledgement of the demands of modernity (Hirsch, 2018a). Markle is a 36-year-old American actress born to a white father and an African-American mother. Since the announcement of the wedding, Markle has become a controversial figure in the press and on social media for being an American, biracial, formeractress who is also divorced. According to the *Time Magazine*, she "has all these points of difference and otherness" (Hirsch, 2018a, par.16). As an enthusiastic advocate of feminism, Markle has often upheld gender equality and advocated women empowerment. In 2015, she gave a famous speech about gender equality as an advocate for UN Women in which she stated that she is "proud to be a woman and a feminist" (What We See, 2015).

The wedding has received mixed reactions ranging from fascination with the graceful royal ceremony and traditions and admiration of the great love story that has transcended all barriers on the one hand, to racial criticism of Markle, especially by tabloids and on social media which abounded with negative derogatory comments, on the other hand. Maynard (2018) argues that "the volume of comments that couldn't be published on the blogs or that had to be deleted on the respective Facebook pages is far beyond anything ... anticipated" (section 6). This has led the *Time Magazine* to describe the wedding as a "romantic fairy tale, change of tradition and racial slur" (Hirsch, 2018a, par. 3).

Markle herself has acknowledged that she and her family have been subject to racism and described her strife to identify her biracial identity (Williams, 2017). Even back in 2016 when Markle was Harry's girlfriend, the Palace had issued a statement saying that she 'has been subject to a wave of abuse and harassment' involving "racial undertones of comment pieces; and ... outright sexism and racism of social media trolls and web article comments"(A statement by the communications secretary, 2016, par. 3). A notorious racist article appeared in the Daily Mail which described Markle as a descendant of slaves who grew up in "the tougher neighborhoods of L.A.", ignoring her career as a Hollywood actress and misrepresenting her true background (Jones, 2017, par. 8).

The United Kingdom is known for its long legacy of slavery, colonialism and racism (Eddo-Lodge, 2014; Hirsch, 2018b). "To bring non-white blood into the royal family is seen as the ultimate scandal" (Williams, 2017, par. 10). Eighty-seven percent of Britain's population is white, with people from black or other ethnic groups twice as likely to be unemployed as whites and black workers earning less wages than white ones (Evans, 2018). This has led some to claim that blackness and Britishness are mutually exclusive (Hirsch, 2018b). In Britain, the royal family is often considered the main symbol of whiteness that some have claimed that "Britishness is at its core a white identity" (Hirsch, 2018a, par. 12).

According to Williams (2017), "any discussion of royalty is pervaded by an obsession with blood purity and unbroken lines of inheritance for both power and genes" (par. 2). The fact that blood purity is inherent to the royal tradition makes the idea of royals marrying people of mixed heritage difficult to accept both by the public and by the press. Princesses are usually stereotyped as "pale, blue-eyed and beautiful and anyone who is not is of a lesser status" (Williams, 2017, par. 12). Diana Spencer who married Charles, Prince of Wales in 1981 was recognized as the first commoner to marry an heir apparent in 300 years. The year 2011 had witnessed another controversial royal wedding, that of Kate Middleton who is considered a commoner to Prince William who is currently second in line to the throne.

Unlike in traditional forms of media, such as the press for instance, users of social media have become producers rather than mere consumers of texts, being able to express their opinions and attitudes with a great degree of freedom. Since the announcement of her engagement to Prince Harry, Markle has been going viral on social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, with participants' comments revealing both favorable and unfavorable representations of her and her identity. Whereas some could not accept a colored American divorced actress to marry into the royal family, others conceived her as a romantic symbol for the victory of love over discrimination and a hope for a more egalitarian world. The new duchess has come to have a universal impact that has been referred to by Forbes magazine as *the Meghan factor* (Rodriguez, 2018).

The wedding has also triggered a wave of adverse reactions and criticisms to the entire institution of the royal family. It is argued that whereas the role of the monarchy is supposed to be providing a head of state, it actually ends up playing a ceremonial role rather than a political one. The royal family justifies its expenses in general and of royal weddings in particular on the basis of benefit to the economy by boosting tourism and trade. Whereas some believe that the contributions of the royal family to the economy outweigh the costs, others have even demanded abolishing the royal family as an obsolete undemocratic institution (Smith, 2018). Several observers have thus condemned the royal wedding due to the extravagant expenses incurred by tax-payers, which have staggeringly been estimated at above \$42 million (Elkins, 2018).

Drawing upon Wodak's (2001) Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) as a theoretical framework with specific reference to its application on Computer-mediated Discourse (CMD) as discussed by Reisigl and Wodak (2008), the present study attempts to examine the representation of Meghan Markle in Facebook posts following the royal wedding. This particular public figure has been selected as a topic for this research not only since she is a controversial character who is very popular on social media, but also as she embodies several intricate issues including race, gender discrimination, as well as the distinction between royals and commoners. A manageable sample comprising eighty status posts was gathered randomly using the Facebook search option. The study aims at examining the linguistic features that contribute to the construction of a positive or negative image of Markle in the selected posts through the use of different discourse strategies, with specific reference to nomination and predication strategies. The research also sheds light upon the applicability of DHA to Computer-mediated discourse (CMD).

2. Literature Review

The study of how language is used in texts whether written or spoken reveals discursive patterns which are important for identifying identities, relationships, and societal power. Discourse is described as a form of social practice that can produce and reproduce unequal power relations between different social classes, genders, or ethnic groups (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Wodak (2001) defines Critical Discourse Analysis, now more commonly referred to as Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), as “a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research program, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods and agendas” (p. xix). It studies “the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk, 2001, p.352).

CDA is centered on three salient concepts: *critique*, *ideology* and *power*. The use of the term ‘critical’ does not mean that the issue under investigation has to be ‘negative’ as in common usage. Rather, the term implies examining a given socio-political phenomenon that lends itself to critical investigation. Most CDS studies are based on a topic-related corpus of linguistic data analyzed with reference to a sociopolitical context from a critical point of view (Unger, Wodak & Khosravini, 2016). Ideology refers to ‘a one-sided perspective or world view composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group’ (Reisigl & Wodak, 2008, p.88). Power, on the other hand, is achieved by the ability to control the acts and minds of other social groups (Van Dijk, 2001). Several scholarly approaches have emerged under the framework of CDA. Fairclough’s (1995) social model, Van Dijk’s (1992) socio-cognitive approach, and Wodak’s (2001) Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) represent the major paradigms.

2.1 The Discourse Historical Approach (DHA)

The DHA is concerned with intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between texts, in addition to extra-linguistic and sociopolitical factors, while taking into account the historical context of texts (Wodak, 2001). The model can thus be used to examine discourse and discrimination (e.g., racial, ethnic or gender both in classical print media and social media). Reisigl and Wodak (2008) list a number of advantages for using this approach, including its interdisciplinary nature, capturing a topic from different perspectives, as well as the ability of practical application. The DHA achieves triangulation by including several sources of data combined with background information and analyzing them from various perspectives and methods in order to avoid subjectivity (Wodak, 2001). According to Reisigl and Wodak (2008), the DHA is three-dimensional as it involves (1) identifying the specific content or topic of discourse (2) investigating discursive strategies (3) examining linguistic means both as general types and as specific tokens or linguistic realizations.

The DHA provides several analytical categories useful for the analysis of self and other representation. In discourse analysis, the term representation refers to how language is used in a text to assign meaning to people, social groups, objects or events (Fairclough, 1995). Wodak’s (2001) five-level analytical method comprises the following five discursive strategies (p. 73; see also Reisigl and Wodak’s, 2008, p. 95) which can serve as a general framework of analysis but may vary depending on the problem under study:

1. Nomination: discursive construction using nouns, verbs, deictics, metonymies and metaphors.
2. Predication: discursive characterization using adjectives, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, and allusions.
3. Argumentation: persuading addressees using topoi and fallacies.
4. Prospectivization: positioning writer’s point of view using direct and indirect speech, quotation marks, and prosody.
5. Mitigation and intensification: modifying illocutionary force using diminutive or augmentatives, tag questions, vague expressions, and indirect speech acts.

2.2 Critical Discourse Studies and Computer-mediated Discourse

Although mainstream media may still be a powerful medium of communication, there has recently been a paradigm shift leading to a huge amount of human communication being transferred to the online realm. Khosravini and Unger (2015) maintain that new forms of online media are worthy of examination just like newspaper articles and editorials. Online media, however, is characterized by a switch in roles in which the text consumer takes up the role of text producer. Therefore, unlike traditional media which is unidirectional and dominated by a few ‘elites’, social media is by nature interactive and user-centered, thus marking a distinction between official content and user-generated content. However, “a dynamic critique of power still applies to communication in these digitally mediated spaces” (Khosravini & Unger, 2015, p. 230).

Unger, Wodak and Khosravini (2016) point out that CDS scholars should not treat ‘offline’ and ‘online’ texts as separate and independent of one another, which is sometimes known as ‘digital dualism’. That of course does not mean ignoring genre-specific problems of CMD which included data selection among vast amounts of accessible data, ethical considerations, as well as the non-linearity of the medium. Khosravini and Unger (2015) also argue that “with the increasing availability and growth of digitally mediated linguistic data and the impact of social media in various aspects of social, political and economic processes, a socially oriented critical approach such as CDS cannot remain oblivious to these changes” (p. 206).

Androutsopoulos and Beißwenger (2008), however, raise the question of whether methodological frameworks developed for traditional verbal communication can be adequate for the study of CMD. They report findings revealing important implications for CMD in understanding key concepts in discourse studies, such as interactional coherence, participant frameworks, intertextuality, in addition to language-identity relationships. Herring (2004) also suggests that a CDS researcher who is interested in social media may consider which classic analytical categories to apply. Therefore, in order to advance CMD studies, existing methods must be adapted and developed to devise new research paradigms.

Herring (2004) and Androutsopoulos (2008) are pioneers in introducing discourse analysis techniques to the study of language use on social media. Adopting linguistic and ethnographic approaches respectively, they proposed models of Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA). A number of other scholars have subsequently adopted CDS in tackling CMD of social media posts involving a variety of topics, especially on Facebook and Twitter. Among these are Dehghan (2015) who examined resistance against compulsory hijab law in Iran as represented in Facebook posts using the DHA. Fahad (2016) also conducted a CDA of online communication between native speakers and non-native speakers to study power and identity on Facebook groups. Employing Fairclough’s methodology and Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach, Hamrita (2016), explored how secularists represent their Islamist rivals on their Facebook pages in post-revolution Tunisia. Aljarallah (2017), on the other hand, examined how tweets were used by Saudis to express either support or criticism of women driving in Saudi Arabia using CDS. Finally, Farkas, Schouand and Neumayer (2018) investigated how discursive practices can produce new modes of antagonistic relations on social media platforms through a discourse analysis of posts on fake Muslim Facebook pages.

3. Data and Methodology

For a manageable sample, the first resulting 80 status posts were collected by conducting a search on ‘Meghan Markle’ on Facebook and selecting the option *posts* yielding a corpus of 6925 words. The data was gathered approximately a month following the wedding, specifically, on 16th June 2018. Unlike Twitter, Facebook does not provide advanced search options or filters, so location and participant characteristics were not restricted or specified, thus yielding posts written by users of various characteristics, nationalities, ages, backgrounds, etc. Posts that included Markle’s name but did not express any opinion on her were discarded, e.g., those that discussed factual description of the wedding ceremony itself, since they would not provide any useful results.

DHA was selected as the methodology for the present research since it is useful for the analysis of self and other representation. Most of the studies that adopted this approach have tackled identity politics, racism, discrimination, especially sexism and ethnicity (Reisigl, 2017). For the purpose of the present study, only nomination and predication strategies are adopted since they were found to be the most applicable to the data in question. Reisigl and Wodak (2008) list eight methodological steps for the DHA presented with specific reference to application on social media data which are followed in the present study starting with the consultation of previous theoretical knowledge and systematic data collection and ending up with the application of detailed analytical results (p. 96).

Based on Wodak’s (2001) DHA, the present research seeks to answer the following two main questions:

1. How is Markle referred to linguistically in the selected posts? How are social actors, actions and events related to her named or lexicalized?
2. What characteristics and features are attributed to Markle in the sample posts?

4. Data analysis

In this section, the selected Facebook posts are analyzed on the basis of the DHA strategies of nomination and predication outlined above.

4.1 Nomination

Nomination strategies designate the different ways in which entities are referred to in the course of the text. Reisigl and Wodak (2008) list some of these including nouns, verbs, deictics, and metaphors. This section is concerned with how persons, actions and events related to Markle are referred to linguistically in the data.

4.1.1 Reference to social actors

The most important social actors mentioned in the selected Facebook posts are Meghane Markle, Prince Harry, Meghan's father Thomas Markle and the royal family.

Markle is referred to in the selected Facebook posts in a number of ways carrying both positive and negative evaluations. First of all, several phrases are used to refer to Markle's skin color, distinguishing her as a *biracial woman*, *biracial bride* or *biracial choice*, indicating that she is of mixed-race. Other more neutral terms include *half African American*, in addition to the terms *racially-diverse* and *of mixed heritage* used favorably to indicate that her origins create positive diversity rather than being racially subordinate. Several posts describe Markle as *the first black princess*, although others *challenge her 'blackness'* by arguing that she *is not fully black or white*. Similarly, another participant sets out that *she is not black enough* to be called black, nor *white enough* to be considered white. In the second example below, Markle is referred to as one of the children of slaves as opposed to the royal family she is joining:

This bi-racial woman is marrying into the royal family

One of the children of slaves is marrying a royal whose forerunners sanctioned slavery

Some distinguish Markle's identity not only as being black, but also as being non-British emphasizing that she is an outsider:

the sheer breadth of a trans-Atlantic black identity...

The fact that Markle's skin color sets her apart from 'others' is very obvious in some of the posts, e.g.:

Her story of being 'other' ...

...not a part of their 'group'

Furthermore, several posts clearly set a distinction between Markle being a commoner and her groom Prince Harry being a member of the royal family. In the following example, for instance, Markle is referred to as *the daughter of a social worker*, implying that she comes from a middle-class working family which is not elite enough as opposed to *the son of royalty* whom she marries.

The son of royalty meets the daughter of a social worker

Indeed, in the majority of posts, Markle is referred to as *Meghan Markle* as opposed to *Prince Harry* (sometimes preceded by *HRH* which is short for *His Royal Highness*) who is almost invariably labeled *prince* and whose family name is never mentioned, suggesting that he is too famous to be identified by a family name, as in the example below:

Congratulations HRH Prince Harry and Meghan Markle

Several posts underline this division between the royal family and Markle being 'unroyal'. In the following examples, the pronoun *they* is used to refer to the royal family as opposed to *her*. In the second example below, the writer is being critical, even sarcastic of this distinction.

What on earth have they put her in?

They are royalty...and We are the common.

A few critical posts describe Markle as *a disgrace to the royal family* since she *has brought anti-white politics to royal history*, blatantly stating that *the Royal Family must be totally disgusted to have her as a new member*.

Well if anything changed it's definitely that Megan has brought anti-white politics and anti-Christian talk into our Royal history

She is a disgrace for the Royal family

A number of favorable posts, on the other hand, refer to Markle as *a feminist*, highlighting her efforts in advocating gender equality and fighting discrimination. *A woman with her own mind* is another phrase used to refer to Markle who is known to be independent and unorthodox. She is likened to *a breath of fresh air* for females due to her admirable character and feminist efforts.

What a breath of fresh air for all the little girls and women around the world

By contrast, a few unfavorable posts label Markle as *a divorcee* pointing out the fact that Harry has never married before unlike his bride, which is another royal family tradition overruled by the union of this couple. Those who are pro-Markle, however, voice sympathy with her since she *went through an awful divorce in her early thirties* and deserves to be happy.

She may have been married before but clearly that was a mistake.

Several participants, especially British ones, refer to Markle as *an American woman* and *a Hollywood actress*, indicating that she is an outsider who does not belong to the British tradition. In the following example, the derogatory British term *hog* is used to suggest that Markle is a gold-digger and an opportunist who has cunningly taken advantage of the marriage by becoming pregnant:

A Hollywood hog that grabbed the ring. *PG before being married was a good way to seal the deal for her.*

On the other hand, Markle's fans as *a former actress* refer to her as *Rachel*, which is the name of the character Rachel Zane she played in her best-known role in the American drama series *Suits* from 2011 till 2017, implying that they cherished her as an actress and enjoyed watching her roles.

We'll miss you Rachel!

In contrary to the negative terms used to refer to Markle as explained above, several Facebook posts reveal positive representations of Markle. Many participants refer to Markle as a *Duchess*, thus acknowledging the fact that she has already earned her place as a royal. Several posts label her *Duchess of Sussex*, *Duchess Meghan*, and *the new Duchess*. Some mention that *she is no longer a Markle* and that she is now *the Meghan, Duchess of Sussex*, indicating this significant turning point in her life and status. Several posts, particularly by American participants, express the pride they take in Markle for becoming a princess and reveal solidarity with her by referring to her as *our new American princess*. Furthermore, some call her *a real American princess* (as opposed to Disney princesses). These identify with her as their representative in Britain. One participant even remarks that *we show irreverence when we call her anything else other than Duchess*.

America couldn't be prouder of their new Princess

I couldn't be happier that she's representing us outside of the USA

She is out there making us proud

One of the participants defending Markle has come to call those who are critical of her and the wedding *the haters* which clearly highlights the division between the two groups, pro- and anti-Markle.

Last word on the wedding and the 'Haters'...

In addition to the linguistic references discussed above, Prince Harry is also referred to both favorably and unfavorably in the selected posts. He is praised for his volunteer and charity work and for being the hero of a romantic love story, but is criticized in many ways for being a member of the royal family. Several terms are used to refer to his irresponsible past and inappropriate behavior before meeting Markle such as *a bad boy* and *a dude who depends on the British Nanny State for income*. He is described as one of *the leeches* of the monarchy and *aspare of William* indicating that he is useless and dependent. However, a number of posts point to a change in Harry's life towards more maturity and stability after joining the army.

This Harry character *wouldn't know a stitch of honest work if one bit him in the backside I tell you!*

After enrolling to the army and becoming an Apache pilot, he becomes more mature

Several posts refer to Thomas Markle, Meghan's father, almost all of which unfavorably. He has received extensive derogatory comments depicting him as belonging to a substandard social class. Some have asked him to *stay the hell out of the country*, whereas others refer to him as *a pile of rubbish*. While criticizing Thomas Markle, some sympathize with Meghan for having him as a dad and imply that he abuses his daughter to make money.

What a pile of rubbish *he wasn't going anyway*

This whole 'father' thing is a true circus and shows just how crazy her family is

A number of posts in the selected data criticize the British monarchy, with some either criticizing Markle or pitying her for becoming part of the royal family.

The bride is praised for being vocal on issues of race and gender equality yet she blunders by choosing such a colonial representation on her veil

Poor thing. *Who in the world would ever marry into this family*

Several participants point to the British colonial history and reject the institution of the British monarchy. These believe that the royal family deceives and manipulates the public and should thus be abolished.

The British empire dark history and the devastating legacy

For the royals they must think the public is really stupid I know they can play them like a fiddle.

They really need to go

Supporters of the monarchy, on the other hand, defend the royal family by describing it as *a British tradition and institution* which takes part in charity and brings revenue to the country. They also acknowledge a progress in the royal family towards more engagement with the people and compassion towards them.

Like it or not, the Royal family is a British tradition and institution and that they respect them for what they do for charity. The royals (especially the younger ones) seem to be good, engaged, compassionate people

The Royal Family brings in £1.8 billion per year

4.1.2 Reference to actions and events related to Markle

Actions and events related to Markle are also referred to in some significant ways in the selected Facebook posts. Several participants believe that Markle has earned her place in the royal family and that she is already playing a major role in Britain.

Our American Princess has clearly earned her place, and title.

Meghan has truly become a member of the royal family.

Meghan Markle is already shaking things up in England.

Several posts depict her as the protagonist of a romantic and inspiring love story.

She found the love of her life, best friend and soulmate in Harry

Meghan won the heart of Prince Harry whose love she accepted.

Others, however, believe that Markle's behavior on official occasions is inappropriate and unsuitable for her new status as a duchess. They suggest that she should be trained to behave like a duchess in order to be able to conform to the royal traditions.

I think that she should be briefed on these situations

She ... will have to conform a little.

As mentioned above, several participants, especially Americans regard Markle as a great source of pride and inspiration.

She brings some dignity back to the USA

She inspires me in so many ways!

Concerning the renowned royal wedding of Prince Harry to Meghan Markle, it has been recurrently referred to as *a fairy tale* implying that the marriage of this couple may be too romantic to be true. It is likened to *watching a Hallmark movie*. Along the same lines, some have also termed it a *Cinderella story* which depicts Markle as a common girl who has been leading a hard life before meeting her savior, the prince. Some participants wish that the couple *live and work happily ever after as royals dedicated to the common good*. Markle is likewise compared to Disney princesses in several posts.

For once, a fairytale is about to become fact!

What a fairy tale wedding!

*Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty as ornamenta, ... And then we had Belle with her brains, Pocahontas with her courage, Ariel with her determination, and Mulan with her warrior's spirit. But as much as I enjoyed these fairy tales, I'm 100 times more delighted to introduce my daughter to **the reality of Meghan, Duchess of Sussex**.*

One of the participants describes the wedding as *a thing of beauty*, referring to a poem by Keats.

*What the world witnessed was a **thing of beauty** that will gladden hearts forever.*

A lot of posts refer to the royal wedding as a historic turning point since it has broken away from traditions in many ways. This has led some to describe it as *a very significant event, a world-changing event and a radical break from tradition*.

*I have been tracking **the radical break from tradition** that this couple brings.*

*The '**change of direction**' statement it made in the history of the Royal Family*

*This Wedding **marked two worlds together***

This group of participants believes that the wedding symbolizes the power of love in transcending all barriers and uniting human beings, thus *promoting love, beauty and peace*. The wedding is depicted as a victory over racism and prejudice.

as a great victory for basic human values against racism and prejudice

showing the world that true love can look beyond the past marriage, beyond being biracial

Meghan and Harry, with their love for each other brought a meeting of minds that such larger-than-life leaders, like Gandhi and Mandela, spent years to bring about but never quite could achieve it.

For another rather indifferent group, the royal wedding is not very significant since they believe that it will not bring more equality or diversity to the royal family or to Britain in its entirety. These underplay the importance of the wedding, especially since Markle is not truly black.

Meghan Markle's engagement didn't give me hope

Such an act of unity cannot ameliorate the ongoing racial hostility that black Britons...now face.

The engagement of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle is of supreme indifference to most of us.

As mentioned in the introduction, the wedding has been criticized due to the sheer expenses which were also reflected in the sample posts.

Why should hard working people who could be struggling to make ends meet pay for such an extravagant waste of time?

Table 1 summarizes the nomination strategies discussed above.

Table 1. Summary of nomination strategies

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Reference to social actors: 1. Meghan Markle	<i>the first black princess the first American princess Duchess of Sussex Duchess Meghan the new (American) Duchess Rachel (Zane) A woman with her own mind a breath of fresh air for all the little girls and women around the world a feminist an advocator for UN women</i>	<i>one of the children of slaves the daughter of a social worker a Hollywood hog a divorcee</i>	<i>a biracial woman a biracial bride a biracial choice an American woman a Hollywood actress the former actress</i>
2. Prince Harry	<i>HRH Prince Harry the son of royalty volunteered for 2 tours of Afghanistan set up The Invictus Games took part in numerous charity volunteer work becomes more mature fell in love with Meghan has found his own People's Princess probably saw in her from this speech alone</i>	<i>this Harry character a royal whose forerunners sanctioned slavery a bad boy a dude who depends on the British Nanny State for income wouldn't know a stitch of honest work his whole family are leeches needed his grandmother's permission to marry a divorced woman had been a spare of Williams</i>	<i>Prince Harry Duke Harry</i>
3. Thomas Markle		<i>a pile of rubbish a true circus a Hideous family a Crazy family should stay the hell out of the country</i>	
4. The royal family	<i>a British tradition and institution has made progress Younger ones seem to be good, engaged, compassionate people respected for what they do for charity brings in £1.8 billion per year</i>	<i>British Nanny State think the public is really stupid cover up for a dark past really need to go has a dark history and devastating legacy</i>	
References to actions related to Markle	<i>has clearly earned her place has truly become a member of the royal family</i>	<i>brought anti-white politics to royal history a disgrace to the royal family</i>	<i>went through an awful divorce</i>

	<i>inspires me in so many ways</i> <i>is in love</i> <i>found the love of her life</i> <i>won the heart of Prince Harry</i> <i>representing the USA</i> <i>making Americans proud</i> <i>brings dignity back to the USA</i> <i>shaking things up in England</i> <i>is praised for being vocal on issues of</i> <i>race and gender equality</i> <i>broke every tradition of the British Royal</i> <i>Family</i> <i>openly announced that she is a feminist</i>	<i>grabbed the ring</i> <i>sealed the deal by becoming pregnant</i> <i>blunders by choosing a colonial</i> <i>representation on her veil</i> <i>should be briefed on these situations</i> <i>will have to conform</i>	
References to events related to Markle The royal wedding	<i>a fairytale</i> <i>a Cinderella story</i> <i>a Hallmark movie</i> <i>a very significant event</i> <i>a world-changing event</i> <i>a thing of beauty that will gladden hearts forever</i> <i>radical break from tradition</i> <i>change of direction</i> <i>marked two worlds together</i> <i>brought a meeting of minds that larger-than-life leaders could not</i> <i>promoting love, beauty and peace</i> <i>a great victory for basic human values</i> <i>helps to ameliorate racial divide</i>	<i>an extravagant waste of time</i>	<i>didn't give me hope</i> <i>cannot ameliorate</i> <i>racial hostility</i> <i>is of supreme</i> <i>indifference</i>

4.2 Predication

Predication strategies refer to the way entities are described whether positively or negatively, explicitly or implicitly (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). The dividing line between nomination and predication is not always clear-cut as appears in some of the examples that may overlap. The following section discusses some of the most salient qualities attributed to Markle in the data.

4.2.1 Natural beauty and elegance vs. sloppiness

As a fashion icon, Markle's appearance and outfits have received numerous comments in the data. Several participants have praised her looks by employing a number of recurrent positive adjectives, such as *stylish*, *gorgeous*, *beautiful*, *pretty*, *lovely*, *feminine*, etc.

*Not only was Meghan's dress **breathhtakingly sleek and stunning**...*

*U HAVE to love Meghan Markle! She is just so cute and funny yet **classy and sweet***

On the other hand, several comments clearly criticize Markle's appearance, frequently describing her hair and looks as *messy* or *ridiculous*. Some even question the fact that she deserves to be a fashion icon in the first place since she looks like a *mess*, and attribute this to *her background*.

*This look, **not so much**. Stop with the **messy** bun.*

*I don't think her '**messy**' hair is attractive, it looks like she **got out of bed***

*I don't think this woman is a fashion icon and I don't think she looks **stunning** at all.*

What a shame.... even I looked better when I got married ... but taking her background what can you expect!!!

Some participants suggest that Markle is not yet used to the royal conventions of appearance and that she still has a lot to learn how to look like a princess. These think that she needs *a new stylist* to *guide her* to look *polished*.

Oh dear... I think she needs advice on how to dress

*Meghan Markle is looking for a **NEW** stylist. Well, I hope she is.*

Just like the entire wedding, the extravagance of Markle's wedding dress was another point of criticism, although defenders of the monarchy claim that tax payers will not incur any of these expenses.

*It is **absolutely disgusting** that she or **SOMEONE** spent over \$5000 on a floral dress to wear to a wedding*

*The wedding is paid for by the Royal heritage and **private funding**, not the tax payer and that includes her dress!*

The fact that Markle's wedding dress and veil were politically symbolic also triggered criticism for the *colonial*

representation on her veil which stands for the 53 countries of the Commonwealth as a reminder of *the British empire dark history and the devastating legacy.*

What a shame truly. They know best how to cover up for an undeniable dark past.

Contrary to the above criticisms, many have praised Markle's naturalness, regarding simplicity as her major quality. These believe that *Harry loves her because she's normal* and that she is *beautiful without a billion embellishments* no matter what she wears since her beauty stems from her soul.

This is authenticity at its finest...She's the real deal. Unpretentious, warm, funny, and smart.

No pretense, no demands of her being anything or anyone other than who she is

...can we please celebrate her natural beauty look?

She would be beautiful in a paper sack.

4.2.2 Independence and intelligence

In addition to admiring her looks, several posts praise Markle as an independent and intelligent woman who is *not shy to speak out*. Adjectives used in this respect include *independent, intelligent, smart, hardworking, accomplished, courageous, strong, confident, self-made* and *well-spoken*. She is described as *a beautiful woman that will be a voice* and who will play *a positive role for many and for the ignorant*. Several participants depict her as an inspiring role model for women.

She is absolutely the person that young women out there should look up to in terms of self-confidence

Meghan Markle is the best of what America should represent. She's educated, well-spoken, stunning, stylish, and a proud feminist.

4.2.3 Comparison to other characters

In the data, a number of comparisons are drawn between Markle and a number of characters. First of all, some liken her to Barack Obama who became the first black US President since she is said to be the first black princess. *I take to Meghan Markle becoming a British princess like I did for Barack Obama when he was chosen US president.*

I just don't get the petty venom against Meghan. It almost reminds me of the bogus hate toward former #PresidentObama

Meghan and Barack are too exemplary

Second, she is likened to Princess Diana who was also a commoner when she married Prince Charles in 1981.

She reminds us a lot of Princess Diana because she really truly embodies a lot of Diana's traits in terms of wanting to give back to the community and her humanitarian interest and efforts.

Third, where appearance is concerned, she is compared to Kate Middleton another commoner who married Prince Williams, Harry's brother in 2011. Middleton is also known for the strong impact she exerts on British and American fashion trends.

Very nice, Meghan ... i thought diana's was horrible and kate's was nothing spectacular

Although I liked Kate's dress more, I am TEAM MEGHAN all the way!

On the other hand, Markle is opposed to two main figures in the data. The first is President Trump who is depicted to have stripped away dignity from Americans, contrary to Markle who has restored it. With her advocacy for peace, love and equality, Markle is contrasted to the American regime that promotes hate, gender discrimination and racial practices. (The derogatory nickname Cheeto is used to refer to Trump in the following post).

*She brings some dignity back to the USA that **Cheeto** has stripped us of.*

*As **Trump and his supporters** try to create racial divides in this country, the union between Meghan and Harry takes it on to another level and helps to ameliorate some of this divide.*

*While **our 'leadership' in America** fouls the world with its racism, misogyny, hate and ugliness, there were many Americans here, in harmony with others from around the world*

In addition, Markle has been opposed to the Kardashians, characters of a famous American reality television series, suggesting that she represents simplicity and sincerity compared to vulgarity and artificiality.

*All I can say is, **in a world of Kardashians**, be a Meghan Markle.*

Table 2 summarizes the use of predication strategies in the selected posts.

Table 2: Summary of predication strategies

Positive	Negative
<p>Natural beauty and elegance <i>stylish, gorgeous, beautiful, pretty, lovely, feminine, breathtakingly sleek, stunning</i> <i>synonymous with style, her usual good taste</i> <i>cute yet classy and sweet</i> <i>dress paid for by the royal family</i> <i>natural beauty look, normal</i> <i>authenticity at its finest, unpretentious</i> <i>beautiful without a billion embellishments</i> <i>no pretense, no demands</i> <i>budget-friendly style</i> <i>would be beautiful in a paper sack</i></p>	<p>Sloppiness <i>messy, ridiculous, not so much, a shame</i> <i>so plain</i> <i>not a fashion icon</i> <i>poor thing</i> <i>ugly dress</i> <i>looks like she got out of bed</i> <i>forgot to comb her hair</i> <i>swamped in her dress</i> <i>doesn't look polished</i> <i>needs advice on how to dress</i> <i>looking for a new stylist</i> <i>absolutely disgusting to spend over \$5000 on a floral dress</i></p>
<p>Independence and intelligence <i>independent, intelligent, smart, hardworking, accomplished, courageous, strong, confident, self-made, well-spoken, educated</i> <i>incredibly amazing</i> <i>not shy to speak out</i> <i>not the typical girl next door</i> <i>that will be a voice</i> <i>a woman who will play a positive role</i> <i>the best of what America should represent</i></p>	
Comparison to other characters	
<p>Likened to: President Obama Princess Diana Kate Middleton</p>	<p>Opposed to: Donald Trump The Kardashians</p>

5. Findings and Discussion

Given the historical background as well as the cultural and social context of the topic in question, the posts under study reveal more than just Facebook messages. Participants have made use of various nomination and predication strategies in their posts that have revealed mixed opinions regarding the representation of Markle as well as the different social actors, actions and events related to her.

The nomination strategies identified in the data reveal that those who are pro-Markle have a positive view of her background and identity. They believe her identity and origins add to her diversity rather than detract from her potential for becoming royal. This group of participants celebrate her as the first black princess, since she has earned her new status as a royal. The emergence of Markle as a highly regarded public figure has spurred pride in African American British citizens since an African-American woman is joining the royal family. Likewise, Americans, especially females, express their pride in Markle as their successful and confident representative. These also show respect and admiration for her former profession as an actress and role as a feminist. They sympathize with her for her previous divorce and wish her happiness with her newly found soul mate.

Those who are anti-Markle, on the other hand, depict her as an African American divorced woman of an inferior background. They believe that she is unworthy of becoming a member of the royal family due to her origins. Being biracial and a descendant of an American middle-class working family, she is inapt to join the royal family or fails to conform to royal traditions and behavior. Rather, given this background, they regard her as an outsider who brings disgrace and disgust to the royal family, especially given her father's substandard behavior which has been extensively criticized in the posts. They also claim that she is an opportunist who has planned for this marriage, especially that she has previously been divorced which does not render her a good candidate for a royal marriage.

Opinions are also divided regarding Prince Harry who is depicted by some as the son of royalty who has matured by joining the army and participating in charity. He is also viewed as the hero of an unmatched love story who will continue serving humanity and promoting peace with his new spouse. On the other hand, critics of Harry depict him as an irresponsible and spoiled young man who is completely dependent on the royal family. Similarly, two main opinions have been discerned regarding the British monarchy. The first argues that the royal family is a highly regarded British institution that takes part in charity and brings revenue to the country and should thus be respected and supported, especially for displaying more flexibility and openness to change and diversity. On the other hand, several comments critical of the monarchy were encountered that call for abolishing the royal family altogether due to its manipulation and harm to the economy. This group of participants believe that the wedding is just a lame attempt to cover up for its dark colonial and racial history.

Several metaphors have been used in the sample posts to create a positive representation of the royal wedding. It has been recurrently referred to as a fairy tale since it symbolizes the victory of love over all barriers of race and prejudice. The comments have also reflected that it is regarded as a turning point and a break away from century-old traditions. A skeptical group of participants, on the other hand, underplay the importance of the wedding thinking that it is not a guarantee for any actual change towards more equality or diversity. A third group, especially of British participants is critical of the unduly extravagant wedding expenses incurred by tax payers.

By examining the use of predication strategies, two main qualities were found to have been attributed to Markle in the sample posts. Several adjectives and expressions have contributed to the representation of Markle as a beautiful elegant fashion icon worthy of admiration. She is particularly praised for her natural and simple appearance, in addition to her genuine and sincere character. By contrast, this has been regarded as sloppiness by the opposite group who claim that Markle's messy appearance reflects ignorance of royal traditions and a poor background. Other anti-Markle participants have criticized the appearance of the royal bride for its extravagance and colonial connotations. The second main quality attributed to Markle in the data is her independence and intelligence with comments highlighting her education, hard work, self-confidence and strength and depicting her as an inspiring role model that should be followed by women across the globe.

Markle is compared and contrasted to a number of other public figures in the sample posts. She is compared to President Obama for becoming the first black princess, as well as to Princess Diana and Kate Middleton for being commoners who joined the royal family, and also for her humanitarian interest and fashion influence respectively. Conversely, she is contrasted to President Trump for representing love, peace and equality as opposed to hate and racism. She is also contrasted to the Kardashians since she represents fame accompanied by fineness and sincerity rather than fake behavior.

6. Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the linguistic features that contribute to the construction of a positive or negative image of Markle in a number of selected Facebook posts with specific reference to nomination and predication strategies. By analyzing a corpus of Facebook posts, the study has generated some valuable insights that responded to the research questions. Presenting a detailed and exhaustive analysis of the data is beyond the scope of the present study, but the analysis has revealed some of the salient linguistic and discursive features employed by Facebook users in their posts. The findings point out that the two groups, pro- and anti-Markle make use of various nomination and predication strategies in their Facebook posts to create positive or negative representation for this public figure respectively based on the opinions and beliefs of each group.

The DHA has proved helpful in providing insights about the representation of Markle in Facebook posts by unveiling how users have employed various strategies in revealing favorable and unfavorable attitudes about this controversial public figure.

The selected approach has pointed to the undertones of racial discrimination, distinction between royals and commoners, as well as disfavoring Americans. It would also be useful to further examine the data for other discursive strategies, especially argumentation in an attempt to investigate how pro- and anti-Markle groups make use of topoi and fallacies to support their arguments, which was beyond the scope of the present study. The exponential increase in the adoption of social media platforms as a user-generated form of self-expression has rendered it imperative to devise new tools and approaches for analyzing the continuous flux of texts being posted online every day. Although online platforms may offer unmatched opportunities for supplying enormous amounts of linguistic data and providing insights into various discourses, CMD poses several methodological challenges.

Most of these stem from inherent characteristics of this medium due to the huge amount of data and its continuous change, rendering representative sampling an extremely cumbersome enterprise. This may sometimes be compounded by ethical considerations of using online data in some cases, as well as the unreliability of data provided by some online users.

Due to the sheer amount of data available online, it would perhaps be useful to examine the representation of public figures on social media on a larger scale using computer-assisted text analysis techniques (CATA) that would enable to investigate positive and negative representation in larger corpora. Parallel studies about similar topics may also be conducted on other social media platforms, especially Twitter since it easily enables hashtag searches with sophisticated options, and also on other public figures, especially controversial ones which may help reveal the attitudes of social media users to various entities, whether persons, objects or events. Future studies can additionally explore how multimodal elements of online discourse can be used to influence power and ideology since the online medium is rich in graphical elements, particularly images and videos. Further studies may also examine intertextuality in more detail as an important element in CMD which makes extensive use of hyperlinks, sharing, and comments.

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