Our contribution deals with an Austrian case study on racist discourse strategies in the forums of the Austrian online newspaper derStandard.at. First, we will consider forums as a communicative form characterised by specific linguistic features as well as its technical and functional design. Furthermore, we will present an analysis of the reader’s postings from a critical-discursive perspective following the discourse-historical approach, where the readers’ comments on articles on migration and language are investigated against the background of online-specific communication. Another subject of discussion will be areas of conflict between freedom of expression, deliberation and the ‘censorship’ of the forums by the editorial staff with the help of semi-automated tools for filtering out explicit racist postings. Finally, we discuss chances and risks of the investigated forums regarding discursive and social practices within democratically constituted societies and address the question which actions can be taken to improve the quality of such forums.

Keywords: online discourse, reader comments, cyber hate, deliberation, racism, discrimination, migration, discussion boards, Austria, Critical Discourse Analysis

1. Introduction

Notwithstanding their increasing prevalence and relevance in contemporary society, online discourses have only been researched to a comparatively limited degree from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. This is especially true of specific forms of communication such as forums for reader commentary. Such Internet-mediated forms of communication, however, are of interest to critical discourse
analysis (CDA) precisely because of their function as interface between public and private language behaviour, particularly where research of the interplay between society and discursive practice is concerned. Theoretically as well as methodologically, we will therefore complement critical discourse analysis in form of the discourse-historical approach (DHA) by drawing on media linguistics and research into computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the following. The result is an analytical framework for critical online-discourse analysis. We demonstrate our approach through the analysis of two threads of reader commentary published in the section “Bildung & Integration”, i.e. ‘Education & Integration’, in the forums (discussion boards) of the Austrian online-newspaper derStandard.at.

The approach introduced here does not merely propose a new empirical focus (online discourses in general and forums for reader commentary in particular), but furthermore establishes a theoretical and methodological link between concepts from political science and communication studies and the DHA. Our approach is not limited to the analysis of discursive strategies and linguistic features, but allows us to reach critical conclusions as well as make suggestions for the improvement of the media context (the ‘design’ of the respective forms of communication) on the basis of pre-defined discourse-ethical rules and discourse analytical results. Using a software tool for the analysis of qualitative data, MAXQDA, allows us to conduct the analytical process of all data in an intersubjective fashion that is comprehensible and replicable. It thus offers the advantage of avoiding objections that only such passages have been selected and analysed as conform to the already pre-determined views of the analyst.

In the following, we focus on three approaches: (1) Online discourses must, first of all, be studied within their larger social context. Forums for reader commentaries, for instance, are part of a trend that increasingly dissolves the traditional relationship between producers and audiences. Forums that are institutionally framed, such as the forums of derStandard.at, follow discourse-ethical guidelines that are expressed in forum regulations/rules and specific measures such as moderation or ‘censorship’. (2) Technology and content cannot be viewed as separate. The technological-interactive possibilities of the web also offer audiences new possibilities for language behaviour that have to be taken into account by discourse analysis (e.g. design parameters such as text length, reply functions and premium functions). (3) The interplay between the two approaches described above is connected to a critique of racist language use in the discourse on migration and education. We assume that such language use, which is opposed to the deliberative intentions of the forums, is crucially determined by the institutional framework and design of the respective forms of communication. By way of a conclusion and based on the results of our analysis, we want to offer several suggestions for improving the design of the forums on derStandard.at.
2. Critical online discourse analysis

Among the varied approaches to discourse analysis, the discourse-historical approach (DHA) is, in our view, well-suited for linking critical approaches to ideology, society and language to linguistic approaches in an interdisciplinary framework designed to account for the social relevance of online discourses. The DHA largely corresponds to other approaches to critical discourse analysis in its view of discourse as a context-dependent cluster of semiotic practices that refer to a specific macro-topic as well as a specific set of problems, and is subject to diachronic change (Reisigl and Wodak 2009, 89). Discourses moreover contain arguments over validity claims, such as truth claims or claims to the normative validity of actions, and are articulated by various social actors from multiple points of view (ibid). The assumption that discursive practices are both constituted by society and themselves (re)produce society is central to the DHA (cf. Fairclough and Wodak 1997, 273p). The definition of discourse given by the DHA thus allows us to focus attention on several specific characteristics of online discourses, which contain discursive practices that are especially argumentative, strongly focused on social problems, multi-perspectival as well as strongly intertextual and interdiscursive. In particular with respect to racist and discriminatory discursive practices, the DHA has proven itself reliable, although it requires theoretical and methodological fine-tuning with respect to each specific object of research, research question or setting (cf. Reisigl and Wodak 2009; Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, and Liebhart 2009).

Applying the discourse-historical approach to the new focus of online discourses requires such a methodological fine-tuning, since these discourses owing to their multiple interfaces between public/private, social/individual, institutional/non-institutional and written/oral processes of communication necessitate an inter- and transdisciplinary approach that takes into account the specific conditions of web-based communication. This will be shown in our analysis of forums for reader commentary.

Our goal in the following is to take into account the position of internet forums as interface and the resulting complexity of such forums by modifying the DHA. We will limit our analysis of internet forums to two perspectives: that of media linguistics and of cyber-hate.

3. Internet forums from the perspective of media linguistics

The self-professed liberal newspaper Der Standard is among the Austrian broadsheets with the widest circulation. As early as 1995, Der Standard was the first German-language newspaper to begin offering journalistic texts in digital format
and build up the platform derStandard.at. Development of the online Standard must be seen in the broader context of changes underwent by journalism due to the advent of the internet such as increasing ‘hybridisation’ (Bucher 2006, 214) and dissolution of the text-recipient-position. The central component for and at the same time expression of this active community are the forums: online since 1999, they are used for an average of 20,000 new reader postings per day, an extraordinary and unique figure in the German-speaking world. The article that received the most comments in 2010 had 3,676 postings (derStandard.at 2011). In terms of content, the forums for reader commentary are institutionally framed by the forum rules (derStandard.at 2010b), which represent an ethical standard and, as a discursive practice, manifest the ideal model of deliberation in concrete form. The forum rules of derStandard.at favour rational argumentation, urge consideration, respect and relevance to the topic, and strongly reject discriminatory use of language.

It is these two factors, i.e. the notion of forum postings bound to ethical rules of discourse (formulated in the forum rules) and the role of forums as interface between public and private language use, that frame the focused attention that forums currently receive in the media, in politics and in academic studies. The reason for their controversial status as both discursive and social practice is that they allow deliberative aspects (e.g. participation or horizontal exchange) as much as discriminatory phenomena of discourse, the latter being directly opposed to the requirements of a normative ethics of discourse that are essential to the success of deliberative exchange.

The forum as a form of communication can be characterised and distinguished from other forms of communication such as e-mail and chat on an abstract level by means of parameters such as semiotic mode of communication (primarily text-based) and conceptual mode of communication (conceptually oral as well as conceptually written), direction of communication (dialogic), number of participants (n:n), simultaneity (asynchronous) and durability (high) (cf. Gruber 2008, 365; Holly 1997, Herring 2007). On the concrete level of technical realisation, however, further, specific parameters also affect the respective form of communication. We shall refer to these as design-specific parameters of communication or, in short, design parameters. In this, the term design is intended to convey that a specific form of communication does no simply exist as a pre-determined entity, but must first be created, formed and embedded, before it can be used for actual communication (cf. Meier-Schuegraf 2006; Wodak and Wright 2007). This process of ‘design’ can, depending on the specific institutional background, involve professional decision makers but also the users of the respective form of communication themselves. The design, which can affect the realisation of genres and texts as much as the form of communication itself, is situated on a level of abstraction below the form of communication and above genre, the latter being determined by
parameters of genre (above all function and goal). Figure 1 presents the terms used by us from top to bottom according to their level of abstraction and the direction of their influence.

The following table gives an overview of the most important design parameters and their realisation on derStandard.at:

Table 1. Design-specific parameters of the forums on derStandard.at

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design parameters</th>
<th>Realisation on derStandard.at</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Layout</td>
<td>Embedded in the layout of the online newspaper, forums below each article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Tree structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderation</td>
<td>Pre-moderated by a semi-automated kill-bot (“Foromat”), post-moderated by ‘report’ button, rarely by postings of an editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymity</td>
<td>Users are anonymous through nickname (provided they register)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limits on text length</td>
<td>Free of charge: 750 characters, subscription (‘power user’): 1,500 characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modes of communication</td>
<td>Free of charge: text, links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subscription (‘power user’): linkable banner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules of conduct</td>
<td>‘Forum rules’ (derstandard.at/2934632)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional functions</td>
<td>‘Evaluate’ button, permalink, visiting card, collected postings, follower function …</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among the above-mentioned design parameters, we would like to single out limits on text length, anonymity and moderation (for more details on the other design parameters, see Dorostkar and Preisinger 2013). In order to be able to post, users must create an account, registering with personal data, and validate it via e-mail. Registration is free of charge, but a paid subscription gives access to additional functions such as an increased limit of characters per posting (1500 instead of 750) and linkable banners. While the character limit helps the editors to manage the postings, it also means that users often do not have enough space for explicit references and elaborate, succinct argumentation.

The editors of derStandard.at have made it clear they will respond to violations of the forum rules by deleting the posting or account in question or even filing charges against the user, which is interpreted by some users as an infringement on the freedom of speech. In order to monitor adherence to the forum rules, the forums are both pre- and post-moderated. Pre-moderation was introduced in February 2005 in the form of the “Forenwartungsautomat” or, in short, “Foromat”, an automated maintenance tool that uses keyword algorithms to screen postings before publication and highlights the text passages concerned so that they can be manually checked by the editors. As a post-moderation tool, the ‘report’ button allows users to suggest, after stating reasons, that specific postings be deleted. This tool, however, seems to be used exceedingly rarely:1 The editors ultimately base their decision largely on the context of the discussion (cf. derStandard.at 2010a, 6). Users whose postings are frequently deleted are tracked in two separate lists: the postings of users on the grey list are automatically filtered by the “Foromat”, while the accounts of users on the black list are deleted.2 Should postings in violation of the forum rules appear in masses, the editors have sometimes deleted or blocked entire threads, which means that the entire article can no longer be commented on (ibid: 10).

The following figure gives an overview of how the above-mentioned design features are realised in the forums on derStandard.at:

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1. Source: expert interview conducted on 08.11.2010 with Heidi Weinhäupl, a former editor of the online Standard and one of the founders of the “integration” desk on derStandard.at (which has meanwhile been shut down and divided among the other desks).

2. Source: expert interview conducted on 17.12.2010 with Olivera Stajic, head of daStandard.at, a section of derStandard.at which covers articles on migration by journalists with migrant background.
The amount of time and effort invested in the moderation of the forums by der-Standard.at is remarkably high, as up to a third of the editors’ work hours are taken up by this. The alleged anonymity of posters (they are still traceable through IP addresses) is likely the main reason why the forum rules are still violated on a regular basis. With respect to the quality of forums, this results in the following dilemma: We can assume that the quality of forums will rise (with respect to deliberation and the discourse ethics of the forum rules, i.e. the share of succinct, rational arguments etc.), if the forums have specific mechanisms and functions (e.g. posting under real name, selection of postings that seem valuable to the editors etc.). Such measures, however, at the same time also raise the access threshold, thus decreasing pluralism and increasing exclusivity and elitism (cf. Winkler 2007). In contrast, a low access threshold, which is supported by the possibility of anonymous postings and allows a broad participation – which would have positive effects in terms of democratic and pluralistic terms -, would decrease quality through violations of discourse ethical standards in the form of racism, discrimination and flaming.

4. Internet forums from the perspective of cyber hate

The as yet not fully realised possibilities of internet communication in general and of recent developments associated with Web 2.0 in particular have, at least in theory, participatory and deliberative potential. Especially the egalitarian access of private persons to the internet, the tendency for deliberate networking among citizens acting largely independent of institutional frameworks as well as the

increasing interconnectedness of public/social and private/individual processes of communication are creating new conditions for the realisation of deliberative elements. Equally evident as the potential for positive change, however, are the negative sides of the internet in terms of anti-democratic developments, such as the propagation and spread of extremist, racist or discriminatory thoughts and material, which are directly opposed to the discourse ethical approaches of deliberation. Recent discursive events that demonstrate the growing problem of cyber racism are, for example, the European refugee crisis beginning in 2015 or, with regard to Austria, the presidential election campaign between Alexander Van der Bellen (former Green Party leader) and Norbert Hofer (being the candidate of the far-right Freedom party) in 2016. However, our study, which has been conducted before these events, shows that cyber racism has developed parallel to the rise of the internet and the Web 2.0.

In this, we follow Reisigl, Wodak (2011, 10) in defining racism as an ideology of syncretistic nature, which is at the same time a discursive and thus also a social practice, which can be institutionalised and supported through hegemonic social groups. The foundation for racism is the hierarchic construction of groups of people as communities of descent or ancestry, which are ascribed specific collective, naturalised or biologically characterised and negatively evaluated traits in accordance with hegemonic views (ibid, cf. Rattansi 1998). Lüddecke (2007, 23) points out that racism, as understood in both biological and culturalist terms, persists in the international research community despite difficulties with its definition. It must be noted, however, that English ‘race’ and German ‘Rasse’ have distinctly diverging connotations. Nevertheless, the terms ‘xenophobia’ and ‘ethnic prejudice’ cannot replace the concept of racism due to their limited reference (‘foreigners’ or ‘aliens’ and ‘ethnicities’), because prejudices are not confined to ethnic traits, but include other social traits (religion, language, sexual orientation, class etc.). Racism manifested in discourse is frequently not a surface phenomenon and can be multi-layered and implicitly expressed, as in blindly accepted assumptions, clichés and fallacious patterns of argumentation.

Studies in critical discourse analysis and postmodern approaches have in many cases managed to show the movement from notions of race based on biological, purity-oriented ideologies to the currently prevalent and normalised racism based on culturalist difference (e.g. Jäger 2010; Rattansi 1998). This involves, on the one hand, that a culture, usually defined via the construction of nation, replaces the term race as a substitute with positive connotations, thus facilitating a differentiation against outside (the ‘others’) by means of homogenizing the inside (‘we’). This strategy has also been termed culturalist racism (cf. Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 9). On the other hand, it has been noted that multiculturalist, civil rights and anti-racist movements have been misappropriated as an ethnopluralism that
is then employed in discourses of exclusion and marginalisation by announcing the defense of one's own culture and homeland, which are presented as incompatible with the culture and customs of the ‘others’ (cf. Fischer 1998; Felgitsch and Gärtner 1998; Rattansi 1998). With respect to racism on the internet, we are pursuing the hypothesis that ‘online reality’ is not simply a mirror image of ‘offline reality’, but that both spheres, as distinct domains of social reality, are subject to specific conditions and interact with each other (cf. ibid).

These conditions include, among others, the low threshold level and (alleged) lack of barriers as two properties of cyberspace, which racist and extremist movements already knew how to use for their propagandistic goals in the 1990ies, at a time the internet was just starting to become popular. German-language research into racism, which has dealt with the phenomenon of ‘cyber hate’, has drawn attention primarily to websites of radical right-wing and neo-Nazi organisations (cf. Flatz, Riedmann, and Kröll 1998; DÖW 1997). The expansion of cyberspace has brought with a concomitant increase of ‘cyber hate’: Riedmann and Flatz (1998), for instance, list only 400–700 racist and radical right-wing websites based on figures of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Swiss police and their own research, whereas in 2010 the organisation jugendschutz.net listed 1,872 radical right-wing websites for the German-speaking world alone, indicating a 10% increase to their figures of the previous year (jugendschutz.net 2010). At present, a strong increase in anti-Muslim websites can be noted in particular (Lohlker 2009).

While older statistics are mostly confined to individual websites, more recent publications emphasise that racism has become part of a social norm that is spreading beyond clearly recognisable extremist organisations and movements, using more subtle and thus also more dangerous channels – such as newsgroups or social media websites such as Facebook, but also the pertinent case of forums for reader commentary (cf. the concept of ‘normalisation’ in Messerschmidt 2010; Jäger 2010; Broden, Mecheril 2010).

In many countries, explicit racist contents, which are recognisable as such through, for instance, specific keywords, are deleted by those responsible for the respective website according to local laws. Since this is well known to many participants of the discourse, they rely on more implicit forms of racist language use, as we will show in Section 5.

The critical approach within the framework of the DHA targets the spread and legitimisation of racism as ideology through discourse. Such criticism must be understood not only as a contribution to avoiding racist practices, but also to moving the boundaries of social norms with respect to racism (Broden and Mecheril 2010). Criticism in this context must furthermore be seen as maintaining a distance to the data collected, but we also mean to contribute to improving communicative relations by using results, for instance, in school teaching and vocational
training for teachers. As the basis for this critique, our analysis uses a recursive research process in which theory and empirical research inform each other. The text analysis on the micro-level focuses on three dimensions: (1) the identification of contents or topics of a specific discourse, (2) the analysis of discursive strategies, in particular strategies of nomination, predication and argumentation, and (3) the study of linguistic means and specific linguistic realisations. The following subsection presents the results of the analysis conducted according this analytical scheme using the Qualitative Data Analysis-tool MAXQDA (for more details on using QDAS in Critical Discourse Analysis, see Dorostkar 2014, 94 ff.).

5. Micro analysis of the forums on derStandard.at

The data analysed in the course of our study consists of two forum threads on the topic of education and migration, which are located under the category of 'Education and Integration' (http://derstandard.at/schuelerintegration) on derStandard.at and were opened in spring 2009 with the publication of the two respective articles. Both articles, each of which is subject to reader commentary in the respective thread, deal with the increasing number of ‘pupils with a first language other than German’ (Miljkoviæ 2009) and the introduction of pre-school classes for pupils without sufficient knowledge of German (Fernsebner-Koker 2009). Both articles were also published in the print version of the daily newspaper Der Standard and received 120 and 165 postings, now being the corpus of our pilot study, in the respective threads of the paper’s online edition.4

With respect to the corpus of our pilot study, the following criteria were decisive: attribution to the online category ‘Education and Integration’, the number of postings and its stabilisation (no further postings in the last six months) as well as the publication of the respective articles in the print edition of Der Standard.5

As the macro-theme of the discourse focused on by our study, ‘Education and Migration’ features numerous interdiscursive overlaps with other topics and subtopics. Using content analysis we were able to identify the following topics as dominant in the two threads: educational institutions (mostly types of school),

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4. The two threads containing the analysed posting commentaries as well as the respective online articles in their most recent version can be found at http://derstandard.at/1234261150227 and http://derstandard.at/1234509033442.

5. The mx4-file compiled in our project and the MAXQDA reader needed to open it can be downloaded at the following addresses: http://www.univie.ac.at/sprachigkeit/mimas.mx4 and http://www.maxqda.de/produkte/maxreader. The MAXQDA reader can be used to follow our coding system as well as understand the actual coding of the data in the mx4-file.
educational level, language courses and language learning, language competence, demographics (mostly population statistics), ideology (mostly ‘-isms’), culture, Austrian party politics and the economy (mostly taxes and welfare as well as costs and financial affordability).

With respect to the thematic macro-structure of the discussion, we observed that multiple, thematically more limited strands of discussion or smaller ‘sub-threads’ (containing more than three levels of replies) often develop within a thread. In total, we identified eight thematic sequences within the first thread, including two focused on assessing or interpreting the increasing proportion of pupils in secondary education (AHS, i.e. Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule) with a first language other than German, and one thematic sequence each focused on highly skilled workers (“Schlüsselarbeitskräfte”), the consequences of political correctness, youth language, the deteriorating language competence of a user’s son, the reference to migrants as ‘guests’ and the demographic decrease of ‘true’ Austrians.

Adapting the analytical scheme of the DHA described in Reisigl, Wodak (2009, 112pp), extending and slightly modifying in our approach, we used MAXQDA to code linguistic realisations of nominations by means of two macro-codes, i.e. (1) discursive construction of social actors and (2) discursive construction of objects/phenomena/events/procedures/actions. Inside the first macro-code, the sub-codes for collectives (‘adolescents’ and mostly non-ethnic terms imposed by others) occurred most frequently. Inside the second macro-code, the following types of nomination were coded most frequently: ‘(school-)political measures’, ‘individual languages’ (32x ‘German’, 6x ‘English’, 3x ‘Turkish’ and 1x each ‘French’ and ‘Latin’) and states (>5: 30x ‘Austria’, 8x ‘Turkey’, 6x ‘Canada’).

As expected, nominalisations for the group of ‘others’ include an especially high proportion of discriminatory patterns of discourse. In our data, the group of others’ (meaning ‘not Austrians’ or ‘not truly Austrians’) is discursively constructed more explicitly than the (‘Austrian’) ‘we’, whose implicit construction can be derived from its differentiation from the ‘others’. The implicitness of this ‘we’ may be due to the fact that the community of derStandard.at is decidedly more heterogeneous and less ‘close-knit’ than that of other forums (cf. Moshtagh Khorasani 2009, 182). Labels for the poster’s own online community are correspondingly rare: the label ‘people in the forum’ occurs once, whereas the reference to ‘posters’ is more common.

While we cannot cover the development of themes within the discussions in detail, the previously mentioned results of content- and theme-related analysis indicate several aspects related to the question of the racist or deliberative effects of forum discussions. The example posting given below cites the high proportion of pupils with a first language other than German as the reason for the deteriorating
language competence of the poster’s own son. This strategy of perspectivisation connects institutional – in this case journalistic – public discourses with non-institutional, quasi-private ‘everyday discourses’. Such postings contain personal experiences alongside narratives reported by acquaintances (1§212)6:

(1) **ossok 11.02.2009 11:36:30**

In the fourth grade of my son's primary school, he is the only German native-speaker.

Therefore, it is no wonder that after almost four years of primary school his language competence is worse than at the beginning of his time at school.

Thanks to all responsible!

The fact that the discussion is only loosely connected to the article’s topic favours the possibility of connecting the public discourse with private experiences such as ossok’s narrative about his son being the only German native-speaker in his class. Compared to other, thematically much more limited and focused forums, this allows the users great thematic freedom, which is confirmed by the relative lack of meta-discursive reprimands or announcements related to thematic. On the one hand, the fallacious argumentative patterns of “ossok” (discussed below as the topos of the first language) as well as the nominations and predications ‘guest’ (1§55 f.) and ‘Austrians on paper, but not in reality’ (1§343) for (naturalised) migrants thus indicate discriminatory patterns of discourse. Regarding the context of the discussion within the thread, however, deliberative elements of discourse can equally be identified as, for instance, when such discriminatory patterns are criticised and refuted by other users or lead to meta-discursive reflections about labels like ‘guest’ (1§63) or to criticism of racist attributions and political correctness, which is seen as responsible for the confusion of ‘mismatched’ labels like ‘migrants’ and persons of ‘native languages other than German’ (1§377).

Comparing non-ethnic labels for ‘others’ in the journalistic articles to those in the respective forum discussions, it becomes evident that journalists do not use the label ‘foreigners’ except in the compound ‘foreigner classes’ (which, in turn, is quoted as the fear of ‘Viennese teachers’ in the article’s headline). In contrast, it is used equally frequently as the journalists’ preferred label ‘migrants’ in the users’ postings (11x on its own, 12x in the compound ‘foreigner classes’). In addition, the label ‘autochthonous’ occurs sporadically, usually in the context of ‘autochthonous

6. We have translated the quoted postings in this article from German to English. The paragraph number indicates where the quoted postings in the German original can be found in the MAXQDA file of our project, the number before the $ sign indicates the respective thread. The paragraph numbers are also linked to the permanent links of the individual postings, so that they can be followed directly to the original on derStandard.at (provided that they have not been deleted by the editors in the meantime).
minorities, but also in the sense of autochthonous or true Austrian (1§222). More frequent are temporalising anthroponyms in the form of the label ‘generation’ (mostly ‘3./4. generation’, 6x in the postings, 2x in the articles) as well as language-related anthroponyms (17x in the postings, 12x in the articles), i.e. personal references tied to languages, especially in the form of ‘non-German-speaking’ (“nicht-deutschsprachige”), ‘non-native speakers of German’ (“nicht-deutscher Muttersprache”) and ‘non-German-speakers’ (“Nichtdeutschsprachige”) (cf. Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 50). These nomination strategies were already used in the journalistic articles, but have also led to critical discussions within the newspaper’s forums (see above).

Creative use of language and neologisms occur frequently in the non-institutional ‘everyday discourse’ of the World Wide Web, thus also in the forums of reader commentary studied by us. Here, they moreover often take on a discriminatory character: Examples include labels such as ‘Döner-party’ (1§135), ‘half moon-disciples’ (1§139) or ‘neo-citizens from Anatolia’ (1§207) (cf. “Neos”, 2§325), all of which refer to persons of Turkish descent in a specific way. Such persons are first constructed as a homogenous group by means of prevalent clichés, only to then defame them through character traits attributed to that group (relating to food, religious and national zeal, an underdeveloped place of origin).

Similar strategies can be found in the self-referencing of the locator, which offers a forum-specific possibility of nomination: In the virtual sphere, nicknames are an integral part of strategies of self-presentation and fulfill the crucial function of distinction, since the forums on derStandard.at allow hardly any other author-specific information to be included. Some of these names have a strong connotative significance in specific socio-semiotic contexts: With respect to the discussion analysed by us, lexicematic units used in the nomination of a person that recipients perceive as foreign must become trigger words which, irrespective of the actual content of a posting, allow the poster to be placed on several continua (local – foreigner) or (discursive) positions (politically left vs. right).

The following posting uses individual surnames as pars-pro-totum for specific ethnic groups (1§365):

(2) **LuzifersEngerl 11.02.2009 17:40:23**
but the navratils and pospischils made every effort to integrate and learn proper german, and besides they did not have any other eating habits and gods!

(3) **eine_katze 09.03.2009 21:53:18**
’besides they did not have any other eating habits and gods!’
and that is not xenophobic???
The synecdochically used antonomasy “navratils und pospischils” is used to allude to the Slavic descent of a group of migrants in Austria that is constructed as being prepared to integrate and as being less foreign as the group of Turkish migrants. By analogy, the group of Turkish migrants is referred to as “Hakans und Serkans” (1§343) and contrasted sharply with both Slavs and Austrians. Explicit references to the foreignness of Turkish migrants are made in the form of food, religion and their lacking willingness to integrate and learn German. In an extreme form of this kind of language-based racism, an earlier posting actually cites the bad pronunciation of the thus constructed group of persons as justification for the label ‘guest’ (1§79). The metonymic or generalising-synecdochic use of proper names for migrants of Turkish or East European descent thus constructs a difference between allegedly ‘good’ and ‘bad’ migrants. In this, the ‘good’ migrants differ from the ‘bad’ in terms of their assimilation to the receiving country’s language, culture and religion, which is so complete that they, paradoxically, can no longer be distinguished from non-migrants except in name.

The following table presents the most important predicative attributions and shows the resulting dichotomy in the structure of the discourse.

Table 2. Strategies of predication, comparing negative representation of others and positive representation of self (direct quotes from the corpus in italics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative evaluation</th>
<th>Positive evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants in Austria: bildungsfern, sozial schwach, integrationsun-willig</td>
<td>Immigrants abroad (e.g. in Canada): Hochgebildete mit Qualifikationen und Bildung, Ostasiaten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turks: Neobürger aus Anatolien, Halbmond-Jünger, Döner-Fraktion, können nicht kürrekt sprechen</td>
<td>Iranians: bildungs- und leistungsorientiert, integrationswillig, Ärzte, Ingenieure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding argumentative strategies, which the DHA identifies on the theoretical basis of a simplified Toulmin scheme (cf. Kienpointner 1992) by analysing topoi, a broad range of topoi can be recognised in the sample of postings quoted above. We follow Wengeler (2003), who combines formal and content-related criteria, in defining topos as the conclusion rule that links the argument to the conclusion (or thesis) and defines it in formal or thematic terms, and can be expressed as
an ‘If-Then’- or ‘Because-Therefore’-relationship. Such conclusion rules are mostly kept implicit in our data, so that making them explicit in the course of discourse analysis can provide clues to the plausibility or fallaciousness of argumentation, the latter especially with respect to racism. The macro-codes, which subsumed specific sub-codes for thematic topoi, were: authority, justice, history, homogeneity (including conformity and culture), usefulness, victim, responsibility and numbers (the respective conclusion rules can be found in the notes to the macro- and sub-codes in the mx4-file, see footnote 5).

Space being limited, we can now exemplify only a few topoi that we view as specific to the online discourse in the newspaper’s forums. This includes, for instance, the topos of numbers, which occurs usually in the form of statistical findings about the population that are used as evidence for the dwindling of ‘true’ Austrians. Equally frequent is a variation of the topos of authority we refer to as topos of political incorrectness. The conclusion rule of this topos, which is often realised via metaphors of ‘bludgeons’ (‘Keule’) (e.g. ‘the bludgeon of racism’ 2§154, which visualises the force of accusing someone of racism as a bludgeon), can be paraphrased as follows: ‘Because certain statements are seen as politically incorrect/ racist/ fascist, certain factual problems in our society cannot or can only inadequately be articulated and thus also solved.’ This topos can be used against political correctness, the differentiation of terms such as ‘migrant’ and ‘person of a first language other than German’ (1§377), but it can also be used in an automatic, instinctive rejection of justified (anti-racist) criticism and thus contribute to the normalisation of racist patterns in discourse (cf. Messerschmidt 2010).

(4) **molekühl 10.02.2009 21:59:38**
Bravo! Bravo! Bravo! A triple BRAVO! to model political correctness, which by now has made data collection and information transmission impossible. Why are the terms ‘migrants’ and ‘non-German native language’ constantly mixed up – they are not congruent after all, are they? And then we are told ‘data on nationalities were not collected’: would the resulting flood of data have exploded the computer or what? If an affirmative action program is supposed to do more than waste money, one must know which priorities need to be set in which ‘communities’. Or was the intention simply to avoid, once again, that the ‘Ü’s appear in a negative light?

(5) **Erzsébet Lucas 14.03.2009 21:08**
I am not defending Strache at all – I couldn’t care less about him. I am simply annoyed by the FPÖ-/racism argument that some people use to silence critical voices on the topic of integration. It wasn’t very long ago that the problems with ‘foreigner classes’, language deficits of students etc. were simply dismissed as FPÖ lies. Argued mostly by people, who were
themselves far away from the focal points – who do you think did people already confronted with exactly these problems vote for – and above all who can claim to be surprised by that?  

As demonstrated below, the topos can be derived from the text by explicating argument (uncontroversial statement) and conclusion (controversial statement):

1. **Argument:** It is considered politically incorrect: (1) to state that migrants cause problems in society, (2) to use terms that serve to name problems (‘foreigner classes,’ ‘migrants,’ ‘nationalities’) and (3) to use certain strategies to identify problems (quoting statistics on the proportion of nationalities/foreigners etc.).

2. **Conclusion:** Problems that migrants cause in society cannot be openly named and properly identified, and therefore remain unsolved.

In contrast, the above-mentioned nominations and predications ‘guest’ (1§55) and ‘Austrians on paper, but not in reality’ (1§343) as well as ‘neo-citizens’ and “Neos” are based on topoi of culture and conformity, which are also used for the implicit differentiation between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ migrants. They are based on the following conclusion rule: ‘Because immigrants differ from locals in terms of certain ethno-culturally determined traits or mind-sets, these immigrants are not ‘true’ Austrians even after receiving citizenship/ problems are caused for the society of the receiving country.’ This differentiation also draws on a topos of usefulness, which is decisive not only for the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, but also determines whether the respective group is actually in the focus of the labels ‘migrant’ and ‘foreigner’: ‘If persons are highly skilled in their professional field (highly skilled workers, scientists, managers etc.) or are members of the upper classes, their immigration is useful to the receiving country/ not related to problems/ and should therefore be welcome/ supported etc.’

(6) **hans reinsch 11.02.2009 20:56:08**

‘Austrians’ on paper, but not in reality. It is all the Hakans and Serkans who demonstrate that having an Austrian passport does not make anyone Austrian, not by a long shot, just like being born in Austria doesn’t.

(7) **Marilynn E. 12.02.2009 12:26:57**

but in our case it is people from the lowest social classes without education that immigrate, whereas in Canada it is only highly qualified people, where they do not have to prove language competence, but also appropriate qualifications and education in order to be allowed into the country at all. Of course there are fewer problems in terms of integration, education and language with the children of these people than there are with members of lower social classes, whose parents and relatives are often analphabets.
Posting 1§343 uses topoi of culture and conformity to make a racist argument to the effect that Turkish migrants (Hakans and Serkans) are incapable of being ‘true’ Austrians because of their descent, even when they have received Austrian citizenship or have been born in Austria. In contrast, posting 1§195 uses the topos of usefulness to argue that migrants with professional qualifications and education (as in Canada) cause less problems than migrants from ‘the lower classes’ (as in Austria).

The argumentation that the high proportion of pupils of a first language other than German negatively affects the level of both education and German in schools recurs constantly in the discourse about migration and education. In addition to the topos of numbers that it manifests, it is based largely on two topoi belonging to the macro-code ‘heterogeneity’: the fallacious topos of the first language (‘If persons have a first language other than German, they don’t know German/ no language at all/ are stupid/ are migrants’) and the over-generalising and essentialising topos of the school audience (‘If the pupil audience in a given school has the properties p, the school or the teaching/ process of education in this school must also be regarded as p or p’). The fallacious topos of the school audience occurs in various different variations in our data, most of which refer to private schools and AHS (‘If a person attends a AHS, this person is intelligent’ or ‘The less pupils with migration background attend a given school, the higher the level of education in this school/ the less problematic the schooling in this school/ the more likely this school is, in fact, a private school’).

6. Summary and conclusion

The previous chapters have shown online discourses in general and online newspaper forums in particular to be a worthwhile field of research for critical discourse analysis, since they play a significant role for communicative processes in society, being situated at the interface of quasi-private or non-institutional ‘everyday discourses’ and institutional public discourses. The critical online-discourse analysis we have proposed by modifying the DHA is theoretically and methodologically appropriate to such an empirical focus insofar as it combines the analytical tools of the DHA with text and media linguistic aspects of research into online communication, especially with respect to general and design-specific parameters of online-mediated forms of communication.

Regarding our leading research question as to whether and to what extent online newspaper forums contain deliberative or racist language use, the analysis of the forums on derStandard.at must be summarised as follows: Their design incorporates elements that can encourage both phenomena. We could identify deliberative elements in the language use of posting commentaries such as
meta-communicative topicalisation as well as criticism and reflection of racist language use, and design elements that allow interpersonal reference and low-threshold access to possibilities of participation in discourses relevant to society.

These deliberative elements are counter-acted, inter alia, by the following design parameters that favour phenomena such as racism, flaming, cynicism and fallacious argumentation: anonymity and low character limit, as well as the editors’ undifferentiated treatment of postings that is aimed at quantity rather than quality. Even if functional equivalents for public structures, which re-capture, select and synthesise in revised form the de-centralised messages (cf. Habermas 2008, 162) are lacking, as Habermas admonishes in his criticism of the internet public, the forums on derStandard.at do, indeed, feature aspects that encourage and support deliberative politics. In light of their communicative complexity, a global assessment of ‘the forums’ or ‘the internet’ in general appears inappropriate. What is more, empirical social research would have to show in what respect and to what extent online discourses in the forums influence offline discourses (e.g. voting behaviour or cognitive patterns), for instance through association (e.g. as organised groups of political posters).

To do critical discourse analysis entails outlining practical suggestions for changing language use. We would like to offer the following suggestions which, although not tested in empirical research yet, are presented as conclusions to our work.

Re-think and revise moderation: The role of moderation for forums can hardly be overestimated (see Wright 2006). Out of the range of options available for moderation systems, derStandard.at at present uses the simplest variation of top-down-moderation. Including responsible users directly as moderators may affect the awareness of the community. Positive consequences may also be achieved by journalists’ increased presence in the form of posting on the forums: high-quality postings by editors could thus attract special attention and might be emulated by posters; the commentaries’ function as a constructive contribution to the discussion related to an article would become visible to the public.

Propagate the ‘report’ button: Since very little use is still made of this possibility, the community has to be sensitised with respect to discriminatory language use. Furthermore, past deletions are not present in the ‘collective memory’ of the forums: postings disappear from the pages without leaving a trace or noting a reason (the online edition of Die Zeit takes a different approach, leaving visible reasons for deleting a posting). The person who initiated the report is also not informed of the result. Of course, this would entail the disadvantage of greatly increased effort for the editorial team in not simply deleting a posting, but stating the reasons for doing so in each individual case.
Extending the interactive social media system: The anonymity and lacking social mechanisms for sanctioning are likely crucial factors in the production of discriminatory language use. The extension of social media features (profile image, user information, individually designed profile page etc.) could contribute decisively to create stable individual internet presences which are taken seriously in public discourse and vouchsafe more quality. Publishing various information, such as the number of reported and editor-deleted postings, would subject each poster to the pressure of the community. While posters with high-quality contributions would have many subscribers or ‘followers’, it is to be hoped that users who write discriminatory postings or postings that violate the forum rules would tend to be marginalised. Apart from concerns regarding data privacy raised by such measures, this would of course also significantly complicate the as-yet low threshold access to posting.

The prospect of empirically testing the above-mentioned suggestions for changing the design parameters of internet forums highlights the potential for further critical online-discourse analysis. Since our pilot study is based on a small corpus of limited representativeness, future work would also have to compile larger online corpora that would allow corpus-linguistic analyses and international comparisons. Our analysis furthermore excluded, for the most part, the analyses of strategies of perspectivisation, mitigation and intensification. Strategies of perspectivisation could be analysed with respect to the linguistic realisations that are crucial to assuming contrary positions (e.g. for/against immigration). Valuable insights could also be gained by pursuing the question as to which strategies of intensification are connected to online-specific phenomena such as flaming, and whether these are more successful than strategies of mitigation (with respect to replies received, positive evaluations by other user via the respective button etc.). Quantitative measurement of individual postings with respect to variables such as posting name, number of achieved replies, evaluations, number of ‘followers’, editorial category etc. could also represent meaningful complements to the approach proposed here; so could approaches to the online community based in the social sciences (such as interviews or questionnaires). In terms of both methodology and theory, the critical online-discourse analysis proposed here should not be considered closed, but open and capable of being linked to interdisciplinary approaches and questions. It is in this sense that our small selection of aspects of online discourse in newspaper forums, which still need to be studied from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, shows that further development of a critical online-discourse analysis seems both welcome and necessary to us.
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