

Communicative and linguistic features of reality show interactions: A case study of *Love Island UK*

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Abstract

Reality television is a rapidly evolving format of TV pop culture, which has become a resounding commercial success. This study examines one season of the reality show *Love Island UK*, first from the perspective of the communicative context, looking at direct/indirect, synchronous/asynchronous, explicit/implicit, performed/natural, as well as private/public aspects of communication between the contestants, audiences and producers. It also considers the language of interactions in order to determine whether the complexity of communicative context of the show is reflected in the linguistic features of the contestants' speech. The study employs a corpus approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis of keywords, concordance lines and n-grams. It demonstrates the specificity of language and style in reality show exchanges, which, even though appearing natural, have significant departures from natural unprepared speech. The use of corpus methods emphasizes the potential afforded by corpus studies not only for the linguistic analysis of telecinematic material, but also for studies of the language of such hybrid genres as reality shows which have become an intrinsic part of modern pop culture.

1. Introduction

Pop culture is now seen “both as a globalized and linguistic phenomenon” (Werner 2018: 4). Interest in the linguistic side of pop culture has been growing in recent years, and there has been extensive study of the language of telecinematic discourse (Bednarek 2010; Lambrou & Durant 2014; Schubert 2018; Bednarek et al. 2021; Werner 2021a). In particular, there is a growing body of research into the differences and similarities between fictional TV dialog and spontaneous exchanges (Kozloff 2000; Quaglio 2009; Bednarek 2010; Bednarek 2018: 19-23). There has also been increased interest in the genre of reality television, which appeared in the pop culture landscape in the early 1990s. Reality television is, of course, an instantly recognizable format, already termed a TV genre; previous research, however, has pointed to its generic ambiguity (Bednarek 2010: 14; Ouellette 2014: 4; Neal 2015: 5). There is also little agreement as to its definition (Hill 2015:161), which is not surprising because it is an evolving genre which has incorporated a variety of different formats (Neale 2015: 4-5). Reality TV is a broad term covering a wide variety of shows with varying degrees of editorial manipulation and audience involvement – from talk shows and political debates to crime and dating programs.

Studies of genre commonly take into account three correlated genre-specific characteristics: situational context, the communicative purpose and language form. In defining genre, Swales draws particular attention to communication purposes of particular discourse communities which determine style and content choices (Swales 1990: 58). Similarly, Tribble includes communicative purpose, contextual and linguistic features into his genre analysis framework (2002: 133). Accordingly, genre in this study is viewed as a stable set of language forms used in a particular communicative context by a specific discourse community to achieve certain communicative goals.

Among reality programs, romance and dating shows, which have developed in the last 20 years, have become a rapidly evolving format bringing resounding commercial success. To give one example, in 2018, the opening episode of the fourth series of reality show *Love Island* scored ITV2's highest ever ratings for a series premiere (ITV, 2018); its final episode has become the channel's most-watched program ever (ITV 2018). *Love Island* has definitely become 'event TV'; as such it "attracts huge audiences and becomes part of popular discourse of everyday life" (Biressi & Nunn 2005: 11). *Love Island* is a reality romance show defined by Dubrofsky (2014: 191) as "serials following the development of a romantic relationship over time" as opposed to dating shows focusing only on one or several dates. The format of reality romance shows is not homogeneous. The shows may differ, among other things, in terms of producers' involvement, audience participation and the roles of the participants.

Even though the discourses (Blitvich & Lorenzo-Dus 2013; Pardo 2013) and pragmatic aspects (Gordon 2013; Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2013) of reality shows in general and discourses of reality romance shows in particular (e.g. Sgroi 2006; Dubrofsky 2014) have been discussed in previous literature, the linguistic and communicative characteristics of the speech of these shows have received relatively little attention. This study examines the reality show *Love Island UK* (Season 4, broadcast in 2018 on ITV2; hereafter LI) from three angles: first, the context of LI communications; second, the language used by the participants in these communications; and finally, its genre characteristics. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the distinctive communicative features of this reality show?

- What are the differences between the language of LI exchanges and natural conversations?
- Do the communicative and linguistic features of speech in a reality romance show constitute a specific conversational genre?

The focus of this study is on the ‘product’, the language of the show as presented to the viewers, leaving the equally fascinating topics of production and reception (Bednarek 2018; Trotta 2018: 34-35) for further study.

2. Communicative context

The fundamental communication model dating back to Aristotle (1909: 1358) comprises three basic elements: the speaker, the subject-matter and the addressee. This model is significantly different from that of dramatic communication outlined by Short (1988), who noted that in drama there are two levels of interaction – one between the characters and another between the author and the audience/reader. Thus, communication in drama has an “embedded” (Short 1988: 146) or “layered” (Simpson 1997: 164) character (see Figure 1).

<FIGURE 1 HERE>

Figure 1. The model of “embedded” communication (adapted from Short 1988: 146).

Similarly, films and fictional TV are an embedded medium of interaction between the producers and the audience (Addresser 1 – Addressee 1 in Figure 1) via characters (Addresser 2 and Addressee 2 in Figure1) (Short 1988: 146; Huisman 2005: 166; Bignell 2014),

complicated by the fact that the role of Addresser 1 is performed by the whole production team. Camerawork and the editing process add another level of mediation (Huisman 2005: 165-167; Bednarek 2010: 15). The addressees' role in communication is interpretative: They take "an active, responsive attitude" (Bakhtin 1987: 68) towards the speech they hear and co-create meaning by interpreting it (Morley 1992). The addressees can therefore be seen in two ways: as real viewers watching the show and as viewers projected by TV producers (Huisman 2005: 165-167; Bednarek 2010: 15).

2.1 A communication model of the LI reality show

As with drama and telecinematic communication, the message from the producers of reality TV is delivered to the viewers via participants' exchanges. However, two basic features of the reality shows like LI distinguish them from other genres: real participants and interactivity (Andrejevic 2004, Bignell 2014), which opens up communication channels nonexistent in drama, film or fictional TV (see Figure 2).

Another essential dimension is synchronicity of communication, which is "a fundamental determinant in any mediated and unmediated linguistic production" (Werner 2021b: 560). The LI show combines synchronous and asynchronous elements of communication, which set it apart from both fictional TV and natural communication. Other distinctive characteristics are a combination of direct and indirect communicative events, which can be both explicit and implicit, as well as private/public aspects of communication.

Further complexity is provided by the dichotomies of performed vs. non-performed (natural) and public vs. private communication. The next section considers these features as their

combination underpins LI language. Figure 2 presents the communicative model of the LI show. Next section considers direction and characteristics of communication in different segments of the model.

<FIGURE 2 HERE>

Figure 2. Reality TV communication model.

2.2 Direction of communication

A central direction of communication is between the production team and the viewers (Addresser 1 to Addressee 1 in Figure 2) which is asynchronous and mediated by both physical and temporal distance, as “the producers are absent from the place where the actual communicative transaction is completed” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 121). Such communication is implicit and indirect: It carries unspoken messages of values and attitudes related to relationships, body image, fashion, life style and celebrity status. However, in many reality TV programs, including LI, there is another level of communication aimed at ‘breaking the fourth wall’ between the producers and the audience: direct, verbal communication of narrator voice-overs. Narrator commentary is infrequent in drama and film, where it is used as a stylistic device (e.g. *Fleabag* or *House of Cards*; see Schubert 2018), as opposed to reality shows, where it is an integral part of the fabric of the show. In LI, voice-overs constitute more than 10% of the words in the transcript, varying between 5% (episode 48) and 16% (episode 49).

The production team is in direct contact with participants (Addresser 1 → Addressee 2 in Figure 2) via text messages or, occasionally, face-to-face, when a presenter makes an

appearance on the island to reveal public votes or announce eliminations. In these direct and synchronous communications, the power balance between production and the contestants is asymmetrical. The presenter has institutionalized power to influence the course of events, which is reflected in the presenter's speech: She initiates conversations, asks questions and uses the imperative mood, so contestants often (appear to) feel intimidated by the presenter.

The LI viewers also have a back-channel to express their views directly to the production team (Addressee 1 → Addresser 1 in Figure 2) and indirectly - to the participants (Addressee 1 → Addressee 2 in Figure 2). The viewers communicate through voting taking an active role in developments on the island: they have power to 'dump' or 'save' the contestants, or to control their dating. Production team acts on audience's decisions, as illustrated in examples (1) and (2).

(1) *Presenter* [live]: The public have been voting for their favorite couple. Zara and Adam, Ellie and Alex, Megan and Eyal, you have received the fewest votes from the public and are now vulnerable. Only two of you will leave the island tonight.

(2) *Text*: Niall, the public have voted and have decided that you should go on a date with Georgia.

This interactive format allows the production to involve the audience in developing content. (Andrejevic 2004: 17). Thus, the viewers and production exchange roles: The viewers become the addressers and the producers - the addressees of the audience's messages. Active viewer role changes the balance of power between audience and producers as well as between audience and contestants. By voting for or against a participant, viewers send implicit

messages of approval or disapproval to the production team and the participants. Public opinion can affect the participants' behavior, see (3).

(3) *Sam*: I'm really excited to see what happens next with us because, after this public vote it's something that could bring us closer together.

Communication between the contestants (Addresser 2 → Addressee 2 in Figure 2) is marked by the interplay of the authenticity of 'real-world' participants and performance for the camera.

In general terms, performed communication is understood as delivering planned and scripted material; it is asynchronous and lacks interactivity and backchannelling (Werner 2021b: 561-562). LI interactions, for the most part, cannot be considered 'performed' in this sense because they are not written beforehand by the producers and performed by the contestants, they are interactive and mostly synchronous. It is not the words but the setting and the format of show that are tightly planned and scripted. There is, however, one part of LI exchanges which is "consciously composed as if spoken" (Werner 2021b: 547). These are the "re-coupling" speeches when participants choose either to stay in the same couple or to change their partner. These speeches sound much more coherent than spontaneous conversations with few pause-fillers, stuttering and repetitions; it is an open secret that the speeches are prepared in advance and 'performed' in front of the group, as the narrator admits in (4).

(4) *Narrator*: We know Jack has written his re-coupling speech and Adam has finished his too.

The pre-prepared performed nature of these speeches is signaled by the formulaic start: *I want to couple up with this girl/boy because* and ending: *The girl/boy I want to couple up with is* [Name]. These written-to-be-spoken monologs, which constitute only a small part of LI communications, share some features with telecinematic speech, in particular, their pre-planned and author-controlled character (Kozloff 2000: 121; Werner 2021b: 541).

Reality TV genres are often considered performative on the grounds that “[t]hose who present themselves before an audience are said to be ‘performers’ and to provide a ‘performance’ – in the peculiar, theatrical sense of the term” (Goffman 2081: 165). Lorenzo-Dus (2005) and O’Keeffe (2006) use the concept of performance to analyze media talk arguing that TV interviews and chat shows are “first and foremost oriented towards an overhearing audience, and hence, performed” (Lorenzo-Dus 2005: 611). The crucial difference between these TV genres and LI is that LI conversations are not exclusively oriented towards the viewers – in order for the show to take place, the participants need to communicate between themselves in an authentic way. Interestingly, even though contestants are aware of the watching audience, they commonly see their conversations as private.

Throughout the corpus, when separated from the group, participants use expressions like *having a bit of time just us two, nice to get some private time, had a private conversation, keeping a secret*, which shows that participants do not always have viewers in mind. Hamish Mykura, a recent Head of Documentaries at Channel 4, explains this phenomenon by the fact that fixed cameras make the contestants “more unguarded” when talking to each other (cited in Bignell 2014: 105). Thus, even though the participants are aware of the listening audience, it is arguable whether they are performing for the audience at all times. Contestants pursue their own communicative goals within the show, first and foremost building relationships, and the audience reaction is not always their top priority, as example (5) demonstrates. The

audience is known not to respond well when participants switch partners or break up unexpectedly (Silverio et al. 2021: 13), and yet, some contestants did exactly that even though they must have known that this could diminish their chances of winning.

(5) *Alex*: What she wants and probably deserves, I can't give her; I can't go with the level she wants to be in. I could pretend, you know, whatever, until the final. I could literally try and get to the final by pretending. But I'm not doing that.

However, there is still some element of performance in implicit communication between contestants and the audience (Addresser 2 → Addressee 1 in Figure 2). Even though contestants are addressing each other, as soon as the viewers turn on their televisions they appear to be within the “perceptual range” of the speech event and obtain a particular “participation status” in the communication process (Goffman 1981: 2). This gives contestants a chance to send implicit messages to the audience through speech and behavior, in other words through “performance of the self” (Hill 2014: 52-79, 2020: 207-217) or “presentation of self” (Goffman [1959]1978: 121) when “one person accentuates his or her behavior under the scrutiny of the others” (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998: 40). In a competitive reality show in front of the cameras there is a strong chance that at times the contestants are intentionally trying to present themselves in a positive light to the viewers who are listening to their conversations.

Audiences in drama, film and fictional TV are often considered overhearers or eavesdroppers of conversations between characters (Kennedy 1983; Kozloff 2000; Bednarek 2018: 15). Short (1988: 146), however, takes a different view, maintaining that “the situation of drama is unlike that of eavesdropping because it is arranged to be overheard on purpose”. Indeed, the

issue of intentionality in communication should be taken into consideration. The only intention in creating a dialog in drama, film or fictional TV is for the author/production to communicate something to the audience, thus the audience can be considered *addressees* rather than *overhearers*. In contrast, LI exchanges are not exclusively created for the audience and the viewers of LI are genuinely in a position of overhearers listening to the exchanges which contestants often consider private, albeit with participants' permission (*ratified* listeners, Goffman 1981). This makes the role of the viewers combined: They are primarily overhearers, but also, implicitly, addressees.

The LI format also presents contestants with an opportunity to address viewers in speeches that can be considered 'performed'. These are short monologs made directly to the camera in a type of a confessional – the 'beach hut', where contestants make their feelings clear to the viewers. 'Confessions' allow participants to project explicitly their self-image onto the audience. The 'confessions' can be seen as an asynchronous planned performance (Werner 2021b: 562) in which contestants get a chance to "perform versions of themselves for the audience" (Edwards 2013: 9), as demonstrated in examples (6) and (7).

(6) *Alex*: It's a huge weight on my mind at the moment, knowing that me picking Ellie could send Samira home, that would kill me in a way.

(7) *Wes*: It's weird, but you don't realize until you are in here how fast you form relationships and feelings. It shocked me, and it's quite scary.

These speech events have a dual nature. On the one hand, they appear monological, or "self-talk" (Goffman 1981: 119), where "response is neither awaited nor granted" (Bakhtin 1984: 107). However, beach hut 'confessions' have an implied addressee – the audience, and in this respect they are similar to dramatic monolog. Confessional elements are "framing viewers as

secret confidant(e)s” (Schubert 2018: 165) whose assumed presence makes these speeches partly dialogical, a ‘performed’ speech. These speeches are thus a part of an increasing trend of confessional TV culture (Andrejevic 2004; Aslama & Pantti, 2006; Fejes & Dahlstedt 2013) in line with Foucault’s observation that the West has become “a singularly confessing society” (1998: 59). Foucault highlighted the power imbalance involved in confessions, noting that confessions require “the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority” (1998: 62-63). In LI this power belongs to the producers and the audience.

Like voice-overs, confessions are aimed at ‘breaking the fourth wall’ between the audience and the show. However, even though, this technique is occasionally used for dramatic effect in drama and film (Brown 2013; Perez 2019; Schubert 2018), in a reality show it is part of the format. Monologs constitute on average more than one fifth of all verbal exchanges.

Similarly to dramatic monolog, LI confessions allow a glimpse of the participants’ thoughts and feelings and can be considered performed. However, unlike the dramatic monolog, which is ultimately the authors’ message, in a reality show it is a message directly from the participant to the audience (Addresser 2 to Addressee 1, Figure 2).

2.3 Contextual features of the LI reality show

LI setting, or “the non-linguistic context which envelops a piece of communication” (Simpson 1997:135) also needs considering because “the conditions of communication may motivate certain strategies of verbalization and concrete linguistic realizations” (Werner 2021b: 556).

Above all, there is the broader context of the entertainment industry with its exigencies of increasing viewing figures and obtaining high ratings which is similar to that of film and fictional TV. As a result, viewers see edited versions of interactions, where the drama is enhanced by including participants' monologs and narrator's voice-overs. The production team strive to create a narrative that keeps viewers interested by reinforcing themes of sexual attraction, romance and heartbreak, which prevail in conversations managed by production. There is anecdotal evidence from former participants that conversation topics are controlled by the producers (Jones 2018). Targeted editing is also used to amplify these themes. High emotion and sentimentality bring reality shows close to fictional television (Nunn & Biressi 2013: 479), where emotions have both "interpersonal effect and commercial appeal" (Bednarek 2018: 54-55).

Social context also affects communications. The participants are mindful of the power of the audience to expel them from the island and choose the winning couple. They are also aware that all their moves are widely discussed in the, mainly tabloid, press and on social media (L'Hoiry), which could affect their future careers as emerging celebrities. This context can potentially influence the contestants' verbal behavior if they wish to project a more appealing image of themselves.

Lastly, there is the physical setting. Hill (2020: 202) categorizes reality shows according to their setting: 'real world' (e.g. hotels, airports, etc.) or specifically designed one. This distinction is important, because the physical setting of communication has a bearing on speech events (Simpson 1997). Interactions on LI happen within an artificial physical setting akin to that of a film, or a soap opera: a luxury villa inhabited by single young men and

women. The contestants live and talk within a limited, monitored space without any contact with the outside world, which restricts the choices of interlocutors and conversation topics and impacts their conversations which still sound near-natural. The physical setting reflects the hybrid character of the show placed between reality and fiction, “between information and entertainment, documentary and drama” (Hill 2005: 2). Not surprisingly then, some authors consider soap operas and melodrama among precursors of reality TV (Nunn & Biressi 2013: 478), whereas others trace it back to documentary and observational television (Bondebjerg 2002: 159).

Sections 3 to 5 consider the language of LI interactions in order to determine whether the hybridity of the LI show is reflected in the linguistic features of the contestants’ speech. It can be hypothesized that the language of reality show is on the cline between performed and natural language. The further corpus analysis tests this suggestion.

3. Data and methodology

The present study employs a corpus-stylistic approach, relying on the “the application of theories, models and frameworks from stylistics in corpus analysis” (McIntyre 2015: 61). As yet, corpus-stylistic studies (see, for example, Culpeper 2009; Mahlberg & McIntyre 2011; McIntyre 2015; Stockwell & Mahlberg 2015) have been mainly focusing on the analysis of literary texts. However, as recently noted by McIntyre & Walker (2019: 83), stylistics “is also (increasingly) interested in non-fiction, and any type of language data, both written and spoken”, so the subject-matter of stylistics in general, and corpus stylistics in particular, is not just literary texts. With the analysis of discourse from LI, a reality romance

show, I intend to follow this recent trend and to break some new ground for a genre ignored to date.

To answer the research questions, a specialized corpus of transcripts of the reality show *Love Island* 2018 (Season 4) was compiled (henceforth LI18). In corpus design, several principles laid out by Sinclair (2004) were taken into consideration. To ensure that the sample is representative of language used in the show, the complete transcripts of one entire season of were used. The corpus contains 308,752 words of manually transcribed contestant speech from 49 episodes, which constitutes 20% of all 244 episodes of six seasons of the show.

The narrator commentary (31,782 words), although an indispensable part of the show, was not included in this corpus because it represents different kind of speech: Prepared and read out producer intervention, rather than participants' dialogs.

This study employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. Quantitative analysis is seen as the first step in linguistic enquiry, commonly supplemented by qualitative interpretation of corpus data. This study uses a corpus-driven approach, moving from observation of data to generalization and conclusion (Tognini-Bonelli 2001:85). The first step in the analysis was extracting keywords, words that appear in the target corpus with unusually high frequency in comparison to a reference corpus (Scott 1997: 236). Target and reference corpora were constructed to suit the research objectives of exploring the differences between reality TV conversations and natural speech. The BNC 2014 Spoken corpus was chosen as the basis for the reference corpus. In constructing a reference corpus, the demographics of the LI speakers were matched with those of the BNC 2014 Spoken by

age: 20–30; nationality: British/English/Scottish/Welsh (to match the nationality of the participants); first language: English. Additionally, the occupations of the LI contestants were matched as closely as possible to those of BNC 2014 speakers. Using these speaker characteristics, a sub-corpus of BNC 2014 was compiled in *Sketch Engine* (<https://sketchengine.eu>; Kilgarriff et al. 2004) which was further used as a reference corpus. This reference corpus containing 1,040,775 tokens will be referred to as *BNC 2014 Spoken: Sub-corpus by Age and Occupation* (BNC14SAO).

Keywords were automatically derived by *Sketch Engine*, using the simple maths method. A frequency cut-off of 20 was applied so that only keywords occurring in the target corpus more than 20 times are included in the keyword list. The resulting keyword list contained 617 words (https://osf.io/tp89s?show=view&view_only=). This stage was followed by an in-depth concordance examination of patterns in which the keywords occur to identify the recurrent formulaic units that go beyond the keywords because, as observed by Adolphs & Carter, “[m]any high-frequency clusters are more frequent and central to communication than even very frequent words” (2013: 29). Such formulaic clusters are referred to in this study as multi-word units (MWUs). Next, the key n-grams, automatically generated by *Sketch Engine*, were examined. Key n-grams show unusually frequent multi-word combinations and are potentially genre-specific (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 10). Particular emphasis was placed on 4-grams because of their high frequency and structural variety (Cortes 2004: 401). They were identified applying a minimum cut-off point of 10, comparable with cut-off frequencies discussed in Biber (2009), resulting in 379 4-grams.

4. Results

Keywords were used to identify areas of interest for close analysis (Gabrielatos & Baker 2008) because they point to the “lexical focus” of the corpus (Baker 2010: 26). Importantly, keywords can reveal genre features of the corpus by showing what is typical of a particular type of text (McEnery et al., 2006: 308; Baker 2010: 27), as necessary for this study.

4.1 Keywords

The keyword list was manually inspected and proper names and function words were eliminated, leaving 536 content keywords. Proper names are usually disregarded because they are unlikely to appear in the reference corpus and by default are categorized as unusual. However, proper names can be indicative of personal nature of fictional texts (Scott & Tribble 2006; Culpeper 2009: 7). Scott & Tribble (2006: 70) noted with reference to drama that “proper nouns appear prominent [...] where each character relates intensely to the others”. Similarly, the fact that the first 14 keywords in LI18 are proper names indicates that the attention of LI contestants is very much focused on each other.

Keywords are known to indicate the topics that are favored in a corpus. The most striking feature that transpired from the examination of the keywords is that they fall only into two semantic groups: ‘Relationships and feelings’ (165 keywords or 30.7 %) and ‘Life in the villa’ (23 words or 4.1%). Consider the following examples from the top 20 keywords:

- 1) Relationships and feelings: *coupled, loyal, recoupling, recouple, flirting, loyalty, kissed, compatible, romantic, feelings, attracted, buzzing, kissing, kiss*
- 2) Life in the villa: *villa, amor, islanders, hideaway, casa, island*

The third group of keywords (60 keywords or 11.2 %) contextually relate to the topics of relationships and life in the villa:

- 3) Contextually related keywords: *buzzing* (getting excited, particularly about a date), *type* (usual type of a partner), *connection* (romantic attachment).

These three related groups constitute 94% of the top 100 words and 46% of all keywords (248). Some keywords form part of frequent multi-word units (see Section 4.2), for example *to have someone's head turned* used to indicate a new love interest. These thematic groups of keywords, as well as key n-grams and the MWU are discussed in detail further. Table 1 presents their comparative frequencies in LI18 and BNC14SAO.

<Table 1 HERE>

Table 1. Comparative frequencies of keywords, multi-word units and pronouns in LI18 and BNC14SAO.

4.1.1 Keywords related to relationships and feelings

Coupled is the top keyword, perhaps unsurprising for a romantically themed show. Words from the same family (*recoupling*, *recouple*, *couples* and *couple*) are also on the keyword list. The lemma *couple* is used in the LI18 corpus five times more often than in BNC14SAO (see Table 1). The most frequent forms are verbal: *coupled*, *recoupling*, *recouple*, constituting 41% of the usage of the lemma in LI18, as opposed to 1% of verb forms in natural speech recorded in BNC14SAO. Differences also lie in the collocational patterns of this lemma. Concordance lines show that the verb *couple* is predominantly used in LI18 in three stable multi-word combinations, *couple up*, *couple with* and *couple up with* none of these phrases

are found in BNC14SAO. Two stable 9/10-word combinations, *I want to couple up with this boy/girl because* and *(So,) the girl/boy I want to couple up with is* are used during ‘recoupling’ ceremonies as part of the format of the show.

Buzzing is used to denote excitement, predominantly collocating with the first person pronoun *I* (84% of cases), as in (8).

(8) I’ve gone through nerves, panic, excitement and now *I’m just buzzing*.

This is a partly flexible sequence containing variable elements – hedges and intensifiers – *really/fucking/literally/absolutely buzzing*. In BNC14SAO this phrase is 40 times less frequent (Table 1) with only three instances, two of which meaning ‘excited’. Frequent use of *buzzing* in LI18 indicates that it is a preferred, situationally conventionalized way of expressing excitement, used “in preference to an alternative combination which could have been equivalent had there been no conventionalisation” (Erman & Warren 2000: 31).

4.1.2 Keywords related to life in the villa

Among keywords related to life in the villa are *islanders, dumped, challenge, text, public, fire (pit)*, for example, *fire pit* is the place where participants meet for recoupling, see (9).

(9) The *fire pit* where all the drama is...

Islanders (top 11th keyword) is used in 81% of all cases by the presenter when she appears on the island as a form of addressing contestants (27%), often in directives (16%) followed by *Let’s* or *It’s time*, see (10).

(10) *Islanders, it's time* to find out how the viewers rate you as couples.

The presenter speaking on behalf of the production team uses *islanders* as an institutionalized form of address. Participants, on the other hand, never address each other as *islanders* and refer to themselves less frequently in this way (19%).

4.1.3 Keywords contextually related to the themes of relationships and life in the villa

Examination of keywords, concordance lines, co-text and context resulted in identifying a particular group of 60 keywords (11.2%) that are contextually related to the two main themes. The keywords were categorized into this group relying, as noted by Baker et al. (2013: 262), not on the dictionary meaning of the word, but on the way it reflects the topic.

Sofa occurs 24 times in the corpus. All the occurrences are used narrowly and metonymically to mean that the person who is sleeping on the sofa has fallen out or split up with a partner, as in (11) and (12).

(11) How was the first *sofa* night for you, mate?

(12) This is a nightmare. The Love Island *sofa*.

Clearly, this meaning is contextualized within the realities of LI with no such uses in BNC14SAO.

Connection, potential, opportunity and *option* are used in LI18 to describe relationships.

The keyword *connection* is used in the recurrent formulaic phrase *to have a connection (with)* meaning 'to have mutual romantic attraction'. It is 16 times less frequent in BNC14SAO where it is not used to describe romantic attraction (see (13)).

(13) Do you feel like we *have a connection*?

Erm, I think there could be *potential*, maybe, yeah.

The noun *potential* (*to have/see potential with somebody*) in 92% of cases describes a relationship that has possibility of developing. BNC14SAO has five cases of *potential* but none with this meaning or using this structure. Similarly, *opportunity* in 98% and *options* in 100% of cases refer to the prospect of developing a relationship (see (14) and (15)), a usage of the words not recorded in BNC14SAO.

(14) I see an *opportunity* with Kendall.

(15) Now I am considering, like, the both of them as *options* for me.

The rest of this group of keywords show similar contextual restrictions on usage, for example *effort* refers to paying someone romantic attention (90.1%); *stronger* describes a bond or relationship (100%); *pick/picked* is used with reference of choosing a partner in the ‘coupling’ process (91.7%); *open* is exclusively used to describe someone as either ready for a relationship or sincere (100%).

4.1.4 Swear words and expletives

A number of swear words appear on the LI keyword list: *bloody*, *shit*, *balls*, *fucking* and *fuck*. *Fucking* and *fuck* frequently occur in both corpora, but there is still some difference in frequencies: *fuck* is used 13.6% and *fucking* 20.5% more frequently in LI18 (see Table 1). The function of this expletive in LI18 (following the classification suggested in McEnery & Xiao (2004: 257-258) is not to insult. *Fucking* is predominantly (90.5%) used as an

intensifier, as in (16), whereas the usage of *fuck* is mainly idiomatic (27%); it is used in set phrases like *fuck off*, *fuck up*, *what the fuck*, see (17).

(16) He looks like a *fucking* Greek god.

(17) Please don't *fuck* this *up*.

The use of expletives reflects the emotionally charged nature of many exchanges on the show, because “[e]xpletives in general are strongly associated with the expression of emotion” (Quaglio 2009: 101), see (18).

(18) Oh, my *fucking* days. Oh, my God. *Shi-it*. Oh, *my fuck*. I think I want to cry a little bit.

LI participants form a tight-knit group, and the use of swear words signals “a close, intimate relationship” within it (Carter & McCarthy 2006: 225, cited in Quaglio 2009: 109).

4.1.5 Forms of address

The list of keywords also contains some forms of address, such as *mate*, *babe/s*, *man*, *bro*, *bruv*. While they are also used in BNC14SAO, they are still more numerous in LI18 (see Table 1), becoming the favored forms of address within the group, a part of inside language.

4.2 Multi-word units

Some keywords are frequently used in stable MWUs; they are “not just frequent by virtue of their single word uses in the corpus, but also because they often occur in so many set phrases or chunks of language” (Summers 1996: 262). In this study, MWUs are understood broadly

to include units with a different degree of transparency, idiomaticity and structural stability, comprising collocations, idioms, phrasal verbs and discourse markers. The examples below illustrate the use of keywords in recurrent multi-word units.

The keyword *outside* predominantly means ‘life outside the villa’ (88.9%), and almost half of the cases (47%) occur in the stable lexical combination *on the outside*, as in (19). This phrase is used 87 times more frequently than in BNC14SAO.

(19) I just am going to wait for him *on the outside*.

Keywords *getting* and *know* form a strong recurrent pattern *getting/get to know* (see Table 1) used to describe a couple drawing close romantically. *To get to know* is the most frequent key 4-gram in LI18. It is significantly overused in comparison with natural speech, occurring 110 times more often than in BNC14SAO where it is used to denote ‘getting acquainted’ with no romantic connotations. Concordance lines show that this MWU appears several times in a longer cluster *getting to know someone as a person*, as in (20). The phrase *as a person* is also widespread in LI exchanges. It appears 52 times more than in natural conversation.

(20) Charlie is a really nice boy and I’m going to enjoy *getting to know him as a person*.

The keyword *type* is used in LI18 with the narrow meaning ‘a typical partner’ in 96% of all cases, whereas, in BNC14SAO, this meaning does not occur. Examination of concordance lines and co-text shows that *type* is commonly used in conversations about preferred partners as a part of recurrent phrase [*be*] *someone’s type*, see (21).

(21) I like tattoos and I like someone a bit older, *that's my usual type*.

It is significantly overused in comparison with BNC14SAO, as it is 80 times more frequent in LI18. This phrase functions as a conventionalized way of constructing one's identity within the group by indicating the preferred type of partner. This shows in the high frequency of the phrase *my type*, which in LI18 occurs 243.5 times more frequently than in BNC14SAO (see Table 1). *Type* in the LI corpus appears in set questions which commonly serve as an opening gambit in conversations with newcomers, as in (22) and (23).

(22) Have you got a *type*?

(23) What is your (usual, ideal, favorite, normal) *type*?

Question (22) appears in the LI18 90 times more frequently than in BNC14SAO, where only one instance is registered. *Type* is also used in the idiomatic expression someone's *type on paper* meaning the 'ideal type of partner' (see (24)). This phrase does not appear in BNC14SAO.

(24) Obviously, Sam cracks me up and that, but I would say Frankie is more *my type on paper*.

The keyword *laugh* is most commonly used in LI18 in a MWU *make someone laugh* (in 72.9% of all cases). It often functions as a characterization of a partner, as illustrated in (25).

(25) I like a girl that can *make me laugh*.

Another keyword, *banter*, also has similar function; it appears in the phrase *have (got) banter* and is used by participants predominantly to describe someone's personal quality, similar to 'being good company' (see (26)), rather than in the conventional sense of 'a exchange of witty remarks'.

(26) You *have got* a lot of *banter* about you.

The phrase *to have chat* is used in LI18 for characterization meaning 'being a good conversationalist', as in (27).

(27) He has the abs and the looks, but I think *I've got better chat*.

Both *chat* and *chatting* are on the list of keywords occurring together with the keywords *pull/-ed* in the phrases *pull/ed (someone) for a chat/aside/to one side* meaning 'to invite someone for a private conversation' (see (28)). None of these phrases occur in BNC14SAO or even in the full BNC 2014 Spoken.

(28) Next thing you know, Kieran *pulls me for a chat*.

The phrase *(I) Got a text!* has also become part of the inside language; it is an announcement made by contestants on receiving a text from the production team. *I got a text!* is 113 times more frequent than in BNC14SAO and is on the list of top 100 key 4-grams.

Another phrase that has become formulaic in the context of LI is *It is what it is* (in the top 20 key 5-grams in LI18); these two phrases are known as the 'calling cards' of the show.

A number of keywords appear as a part of phrasal verbs with usage specific to LI speech. For example, the keyword *crack* is used predominantly (71%) in the phrasal verb *crack on (with)* with a meaning ‘to start showing romantic interest in someone’ (29), which is narrower than the conventional meaning ‘to begin’ used in BNC14SAO. *To crack on (with)* is 64 times more frequent in LI18 than BNC14SAO.

(29) Now, I can *crack on* and proper *get to know her*.

The keyword *mug* is used as a noun only with the meaning ‘a fool’ (31.73 pm), as in (30). In BNC14SAO, *mug* is largely used meaning ‘a cup’, only once (0.96 pm) being used meaning ‘a fool’.

(30) How dare he *make a mug of me*?

The verb *to mug* is used only as a phrasal verb in a stable combination with the preposition *off* (81.97 pm) meaning to deceive or upset somebody, to treat somebody like a fool, see (31).

(31) First of all, I want to say I am sorry. I didn’t want to come in here
and *mug you off*.

Mug off is not found in BNC14SAO and in the full BNC 2014 Spoken it appears once.

Fourteen occurrences of the adjective *muggy* (37.02 pm) are related to objectionable behavior, as in (32).

(32) It was a bit *muggy* of me to kiss Dean in front of you.

Using *mug/mug off/muggy* appears to be a common way for contestants to make value judgements. Such uses of *mug/mug off/muggy* are not registered in BNC14SAO, which points to the fact that participants are developing their own language preferences using and overusing expressions that are not particularly common in general spoken language.

Keywords also point to the preferred use of idiomatic expressions, like *type on paper* discussed above. *Jump* appears in the recurrent idiomatic pattern *jump ship* in the sense of changing partner – different from the dictionary definition, “to leave an organization that you belong to, suddenly and unexpectedly” (OALD 2010). The keyword *toes* is used in two idiomatic expressions *to keep someone on one’s toes* and *to step on one’s toes*; both used in the context of romantic relationships. *To turn someone’s head/ to have someone’s head turned* is used with the meaning of getting romantically attracted to someone new or different (see (33)). None of these idiomatic expressions occur in BNC14SAO.

(33) Do you think *your head could still be turned* from Kaz?

The keyword *gut*, meaning ‘intuitive feeling’, is used in the structurally flexible idiomatic expressions *go with/stick with/go off/go against my/your gut, followed/trusted my/your gut (feeling/instinct)*, as in (34). In BNC14SAO it is used twenty times less often.

(34) *My gut is telling me* that Hayley is not genuine.

Apart from the overuse of particular words and expressions, some lexical innovations were also noticeable in the speech of the participants. Typically, they are extended or narrowed meanings reflecting “social circumstances of its use” (Leech [1974]1990: 14). The idiomatic expression *on the outside* is used by islanders with the meaning ‘in my (real) life outside villa’ as opposed to the meaning ‘not in prison’ registered in OALD (2010).

Metaphoric expressions also often undergo changes, developing different meanings (*jump ship*), or more specific meanings, such as the metaphor *to put all your eggs in one basket*. Out of eight occurrences of this metaphor (21.15 pm) three are used conventionally; the other five show the variation in the source domain adjusted to the situation of use as in (35) - (37) with one mixed metaphor shown in (38).

(35) All your eggs are *not in Megan’s basket*.

(36) Put some eggs *in different baskets*.

(37) These are my eggs and then *there are baskets all over the villa*; I will just put them in.

(38) My eggs are up in the air at the moment, *they haven’t landed in any baskets whatsoever*.

Metonymy is also used to create lexical innovation, for example, *sofa*, discussed above, is a conceptual metonymy PART FOR THE WHOLE. Similes are used in the speech of participants as an emphatic device: All six occurrences are used with the expletive *fuck*, for example *as sassy as fuck*, *as serious as fuck*, *cringey as fuck*.

Finally, the participants of LI 2018 coined a phrase *The Do Bits Society* (society for those couples who had some kind of intimate relations), which was later used by participants of other LI seasons, the press and social media.

4.3 Pronouns

A comparison of frequency lists in BNC14SAO and LI18 show that 9 out of top 10 words are similar, although some of them have different rankings. *I* and *you* score highly in both corpora: *I* is the most frequent in both, while *you* is third on the BNC14SAO frequency list and second on LI18. This similarity is to be expected because personal pronouns, and particularly the interactive pronouns *I* and *you*, are generally more frequent in speech (Conrad & Biber 2005: 64) and reflect the focus of interlocutors on each other (McCarthy 1998). However, the frequencies of these pronouns are higher in LI18: *I* is 29.7% and *you* 25.7%, which suggests the greater mutual involvement of interlocutors.

4.4 Key 4-grams

I and *you* frequently appear in MWUs, many of which (for example, *I don't know*, *I don't think*, *I don't want*) are similar to the ones discussed in previous research of natural conversation (O'Keefe et al. 2007; Biber 2009; Adolphs & Carter 2013;). LI speech shows the prevalence of personal pronouns in key n-grams: *I* or *you* are used in 50% of all key 4-grams highlighting the involvement of interlocutors. The highly personal nature of conversations is supported by the fact that high-frequency n-grams contain private verbs such as *think*, *know*, *want* and *feel*, which “are used for direct expressions of personal attitudes or emotions” (Biber 1995: 143) and are indicators of interactive and affective discourse.

Key 4-grams were investigated from the point of view of their function in LI speech.

Previous studies have developed comprehensive taxonomies of functional types of MWUs, most of which include discourse markers, expressions of stance, hedges, polite formulae and vague phrases (see McCarthy & Carter 2004; Conrad & Biber 2005; Biber 2009; Adolphs & Carter 2013). Examination of 379 key 4-grams showed the strong prevalence of expressions of stance in LI18 (*am not going to, I do not know, be honest with you*), which constitute 40% of all key 4-grams. 45% of expressions of stance contain the pronoun *I* indicating personal character of conversations. Other 4-grams fall into groups similar to those outlined in previous research: discourse markers (*you know what I, What do you mean*; 4.5%), hedging (*It is a bit, it is just a*; 2.9%) and polite expressions (*Nice to meet you, How are you doing*; 1%). However, there are three additional categories of high-frequency MWU specific to the language of LI:

1. Life in the villa: (7.1%), more than a half of these key 4-word clusters are connected with ‘recoupling’: (*I want to couple (up)*); among others: *go on a date, dumped from the island, I got a text*
2. Feelings (12.4%): *how are you feeling, want to be with, I am so happy*
3. In-group expressions (8.1%) (formulaic sequences conventionalized in the LI speech community): (*it is what it is*), *get to know you, to crack on with, my type on paper*.

5. Discussion

A combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses of corpus data shows clear differences between language use in the LI conversations and natural dialog of speakers of the similar age and occupation registered in the BNC 2014 corpus. Keywords related to romantic relationships and life in the villa, as well as associated MWUs, are more prevalent in the LI18

corpus than in natural conversation. The romantic theme of the show, production control of the conversation topics (Jones 2018) and targeted editing favoring footage relevant to romance play their part. Scripted elements of the format account for the repetitious formulae in stage-managed ‘recouplings’ and stereotypical romantic situations account for the overused keywords and MWUs that are conventionalized within the context of the show and are recurrently used in daily conversations, see (39):

(39) *That is my type. We’ve had a chat, we’ve had a bit of a connection going on. I made her laugh. She’s gorgeous, as well, unreal. My type, 100%.*

The prevalence of such idiosyncratic language makes the composition of LI vocabulary limited, repetitive and atypical. Social context and in-group preferences play a significant part in the observed difference between LI18 and BNC14SAO speech, as “interaction with in-group members transmits and forges formulaic language” (Wray 2002:117). The LI speech community has developed a particular in-language different in many ways from the natural colloquial speech recorded in the BNC. There is anecdotal evidence from the tabloid press that large sections of the British population are unfamiliar with many formulaic expressions used in LI. Various publications list *mugged off*, *my type on paper*, *buzzing* as being specific to the show (e.g. Twose 2018, Gladwin, 2019).

Further explanation of the LI in-group language can be offered by communication accommodation theory, in particular by the notion of “convergence” or adapting communicative behavior in keeping with the behavior of the interlocutors (Gallois et al. 2005; Giles 2016). The degree of speech convergence is determined by various factors including social, situational, relational and affective (Gallois et al. 2005). The LI setting

creates and enhances these factors. Participants represent a social group of people of the same age, with comparable backgrounds and similar objectives, who socialize continuously for two months in a shared controlled environment. This communicative situation is conducive to lexical convergence. There are strong affective motives for speech convergence among LI participants: They are forming friendships and romantic relationships within the group, constantly seeking peer approval which results in language alignment (Bowen et al. 2017; Gonzales et al. 2010: 5) particularly prominent between romantically involved interlocutors (Ireland et al. 2011; see also Bowen et al. 2017). Speech alignment contributes to forming an in-group language with its own private vocabulary that, as corpus results have demonstrated, is especially prominent in LI speech.

6 Conclusion

Communicative processes in the reality romance show LI are much more multifaceted than in either drama and fictional TV or natural communication. These features can be summarized as follows:

1. The reality show LI is characterized by complex communication processes between the production team, viewers and contestants. LI communication combines synchronous and asynchronous, performed and non-performed, public and private, direct and indirect, explicit and implicit communicative events. These characteristics set LI communication apart from both telecinematic and natural conversation.
2. The communicative context of reality shows shares some features with that of films and fictional TV: a controlled communicative situation, restricted physical setting, dominant topics of conversations, scripted situations of communication.

3. Social context of daily contact and pressure to form romantic relationships result in speech alignment which contributes to the atypicality of LI speech in comparison with natural conversation.

Language features of this reality romance show identified by the analysis of corpus data have following characteristics:

1. A significant number of keywords are connected to romance, relationships and life in the villa. They constitute 46% of all keywords in the corpus. This is fundamentally different from naturally occurring conversations, where the participants themselves control themes of conversation, but is quite similar to sitcom interactions, where topics of interactions are much more restricted than in natural speech. For instance, in the sitcom *Friends* they are, similarly, limited to relationships, dating and sex (Quaglio 2009: 97).
2. Some vocabulary items are used contextually, appearing in the corpus exclusively or predominantly with meanings connected with relationships and romance, infrequent and atypical for natural conversation as recorded in BNC14SAO.
3. In-group formulaic speech patterns uncommon in natural conversations are consistently used. Such patterns represent a 'packaged' way of speaking about stereotypical situations occurring in the villa.
4. Personal names are used with high frequency indicating that speech is clearly focused on contestants themselves.
5. 4-grams containing the personal pronouns *I* and *you* as well as personal stance key 4-grams are overused in comparison with natural speech which shows an unusually high level of speaker involvement.

6. Predominantly non-offensive use of expletives indicates closeness between the speakers.
7. Preferred forms of address within the group are used with higher than usual frequencies.

Thus, speech of the participants can be considered as having characteristics of a distinctive speech genre exhibiting such genre-specific characteristics as stable types of utterances (Bakhtin 1987), idiosyncratic keywords (McEnery et al. 2006: 308; Baker 2010: 27), atypical patterns of usage (Baker 2010: 109), specific idiomatic expressions (McCarthy 1998) and particular n-grams (McCarthy & Carter 2004: 10; O’Keefe 2006: 216). Previous media research recognized the hybrid status of reality shows, noting that they share features of scripted dialog and natural conversation. This reflects the process of “hybridization” of public and private discourse (Bondebjerg 1996) where authentic and performed features are intertwined (Hill 2014: 70), and where audiences are engaged in a blended “viewing/participating” experience (Andrejevic 2004: 63). This study tested the claim of the genre status of reality romance show against corpus data and identified salient linguistic and communicative features which characterize LI conversations as a hybrid speech genre. The present research expands the scope of corpus-linguistic studies of telecinematic discourse as outlined in Bednarek et al. (2021:4) to a reality show. The study emphasizes the potential afforded by corpus-linguistic methods not only for the linguistic analysis of telecinematic material, but also of reality shows which have become an intrinsic part of modern pop culture.

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