

J a c e k M i a n o w s k i

Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego w Bydgoszczy

## *Painting Minis and Self-Praise.* **Communicative Practices of Tabletop Wargamers**

### **Introduction**

Analysing emotion from a linguistic perspective has been substantially covered in the literature. Different studies, albeit approaching the subject from various angles, agree that emotion cannot be isolated and must be studied in context. Wierzbicka argues that from the perspective of anthropology, emotions rather than feelings are seen as the correct point of reference, as this underlines social and interpersonal foundations. The idea of feelings is treated equally to bodily feelings.<sup>1</sup> She argues against equating emotion with bodily processes, culture or thoughts, as the English term relates to feelings and thoughts, as culture usually shapes them both. From a different standpoint, **Pavlenko**<sup>2</sup> underlines the importance of the relationship between the concept of self and bilingualism. The relationship between language, cognition, and emotions is seen as pivotal in understanding how bilingual individuals navigate their emotional experiences. Depending on the language in use, articulating emotions differs. Emotional terms are evoked more often when using the native language, which suggests a deeper emotional connection to the first language. For bilingualism, one of the key factors resides within the emotional investment in the second language, as it can affect a learner's motivation and resistance, which shapes their self-identity within this linguistic framework. Moreover, bilingual individuals are likely to articulate their emotional experiences in culturally specific ways. This indicates that the language used not only serves as a medium of communication but also as a framework through which individuals construct and convey their emotional selves. Finally, Ochs<sup>3</sup> argues that lan-

<sup>1</sup> Wierzbicka A., *Emotions Across Languages and Cultures: Diversity and Universals*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 1–19.

<sup>2</sup> Pavlenko A., *Bilingualism and emotions*, "Multilingua," 2002, 21, pp. 45–78.

<sup>3</sup> Ochs E., Schieffelin B., *Language has a heart*, "Text," 1989, 9 (1), pp. 7–25.

guages fulfil the need of a speaker to channel feelings, attitudes and moods, whereas Wilce<sup>4</sup> observes that for post-industrial Western societies, if one wants to participate socially, he or she ought to become a person of ambition, assertiveness, and internal locus of control.

Emotion can be viewed as directly relating to action. One of the most basic functions of emotion is allowing adaptation to specific circumstances in which one can find oneself. It relates to survivability in various circumstances, which translates to viewing emotion as elemental for action. Another factor is the motivation towards achieving a specific goal. The judgement of the situation at hand, while taking into consideration needs, goals and values, takes place to facilitate responses. Fontaine and Scherer<sup>5</sup> conclude that the scope of participants' action responses can be correlated with a specific emotion. For the following study, categories of *being with*, *excitement* and especially *dominance* seem to be of utmost interest. Moreover, the amount of focus given to individuals and groups varies culturally. Scherer and Fontaine<sup>6</sup> argue that social appraisal, seen as the outcome of an event for an individual or a group, depends on pleasantness and goal conduciveness. In short, the foundation of the appraisal process lies in understanding the relations between one's needs or goals versus knowing whether something is essentially good or bad.

### Self-praise and bragging

Self-praise is a concept accompanying cultures in a variety of ways. In oral cultures, rhetoric is intertwined with struggle. Ong<sup>7</sup> argues that engaging in intellectual battles between interlocutors by producing a proverb or riddle aims to provoke a stronger and more sophisticated reply. If an exchange of insults leads to a memorable linguistic formula, interlocutors are likely to use it in the future. Within African American speech communities, this practice is known as flyting and usually revolves around offending the interlocutor's mother. Demonstrating one's oral prowess, as Dayter<sup>8</sup> argues, is perceived to enhance one's esteem or reputation, while a temporary suspension of face-saving occurs whenever bragging is used interchangeably with insulting. The cornerstone of these exchanges is the closeness of the participants, whether it be a small group of friends or family.

<sup>4</sup> Wilce J. M., *Language and Emotion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 64–65.

<sup>5</sup> Fontaine J. J. R., Scherer K. R., *Emotion is for Doing: The Action Tendency Component* [In:] J. J. R. Fontaine, K. R. Scherer, C. Soriano (eds.) *Components of Emotional Meaning. A Sourcebook*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 170–185.

<sup>6</sup> Fontaine J. J. R., Scherer K. R., *Driving the emotion process: The Appraisal component* [In:] J. J. R. Fontaine, K. R. Scherer, C. Soriano (eds.) *Components of Emotional Meaning. A Sourcebook*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 186–209.

<sup>7</sup> Ong W., *Orality and Literacy*, London, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> Dayter D., *Self-praise in microblogging*, "Journal of Pragmatics," 2014, 61, pp. 91–102.

Self-praise possesses culture-specific and universal traits. Wu<sup>9</sup> writes that distinguishable practices concerning self-praise can be observed within the Chinese culture, where praise is employed with subsequent modesty constraint modification. This is an indication that speakers foresee the upcoming constraint on interaction and plan to retreat to maintain status equality. Universally, that self-praise encompasses positive statements about oneself, with the aim of face-enhancing, face-boosting or face-flattering. For Dayter<sup>10</sup>, self-praise is a speech act that explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to the speaker for an achievement or skill that can be seen as positive by both the speaker and their audience. Therefore, self-praise consists of announcing accomplishments and a clear, positive evaluation of oneself.

Bragging, on the other hand, incorporates competitiveness and tends to be more aggressive.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, bragging involves exaggeration, statements of low effort, comparisons, and disposition. In contrast, positive self-statements, attributing high effort, the help of others, the will to not disappoint others, or displaying honour and gratitude are reported by observers.<sup>12</sup>

Dayter<sup>13</sup> also observes that the simplicity of communication allows unveiling information positively by a particular community through positive disclosure. With that in mind, although the line between positive disclosure and bragging begins to blur, it is important to distinguish between these two concepts, as this allows distinguishing between friendly displays of self-esteem and conceited insecurity.

It is worth noting that responding to compliments depends on how the achievement is framed initially. Manes<sup>14</sup> argues that this can happen in two ways. Firstly, the compliment recipient frames his or her achievement as not causing difficulties. The second view is that the achievement is attributed to diligence. Dayter<sup>15</sup> links the latter to Miller et al.'s<sup>16</sup> high effort attribution, framing self-praise as an appreciative acknowledgement.

A significant proportion of self-praise strategies derive from a specific medium. Dayter<sup>17</sup> suggests that in the case of Twitter, users focus on self-presentation. To that

<sup>9</sup> Wu R.-J. R., *A conversation analysis of self-praising in everyday Mandarin interaction*, "Journal of Pragmatics," 2011, 43 (13), pp. 3152–3176.

<sup>10</sup> Dayter D., *Self-praise in microblogging*, "Journal of Pragmatics," 2014, 61, pp. 91–102.

<sup>11</sup> Decapua A., Boxer D., *Bragging, boasting and bravado*, "Women and Language," 22 (1), 1999, pp. 5–22.

<sup>12</sup> Miller L., Cooke L., Tsang J., Morgan F., *Should I brag? Nature and impact of positive and boastful self-disclosures for women and men*, "Human Communication Research," 1992, 18 (3), pp. 364–399.

<sup>13</sup> Dayter 2014 Dayter D., *Self-praise in microblogging*, "Journal of Pragmatics," 2014, 61, pp. 91–102.

<sup>14</sup> Manes J., *Compliments: a mirror of cultural values*, [In:] N. Wolfson, E. Judd (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and Language Acquisition*, Rowley, MA, Newbury House, 1983, pp. 96–102.

<sup>15</sup> Dayter D., *Self-praise in microblogging*, "Journal of Pragmatics," 2014, 61, pp. 91–102.

<sup>16</sup> Miller L., Cooke L., Tsang J., Morgan F., *Should I brag? Nature and impact of positive and boastful self-disclosures for women and men*, "Human Communication Research," 1992, 18 (3), pp. 364–399.

<sup>17</sup> Dayter D., *Self-praise in microblogging*, "Journal of Pragmatics," 2014, 61, pp. 91–102.

end, they risk self-directed face-enhancing acts to portray themselves as “the heroes” of a community of practice. Twitter feed reminds of an autobiographic narrative, yet the sole purpose of the users’ activity is to share the knowledge of the author’s achievements with other members of the community. Finally, the framework of a community of practice allows for distinguishing between self-praise and self-elevation in the context of their circuitousness. As these two notions are often very nuanced, their proper evaluation can be achieved only from the insider’s perspective. Studies by Wu<sup>18</sup> report that in the case of Weibo, a Chinese counterpart to Twitter, praise from a third party is the most frequent. Weibo users adapt statements of others to certify self-praise as coming from an outside source. Self-praise is employed because of the platform’s anonymity, the evolution of Chinese society and how Chinese individuals prefer to be seen in public, and as a strategy to protect the user’s face.

### Image sharing on social networks

A large part of our social and communicative space is occupied by social media platforms that provide sociality, connectivity, and creativity.<sup>19</sup> Castells<sup>20</sup> argues that at the end of the twentieth century, “flows of messages and images between networks [came to] constitute the basic thread of our social structure.” As a result, images are becoming viewed as a solution to the speed and efficiency challenges in networked communications. The distribution of self-generated online content was explained by Jürgen Habermas<sup>21</sup> theories on lifeworld and the public sphere. In his view, anyone can attend events in public spaces, their participants have equal rights to engage in conversations and debates aimed at forming opinions and making decisions which reflect public opinion.

Salomäenpää<sup>22</sup> argues that the emergence of personal blogging and new social media facilitated the production of self-made content. Users usually retain their true identities and can interconnect or share content as they see fit. It is possible to gain insight into aesthetic requirements, practices, and values from the interactions of users on Facebook groups or pages. These interactions provide a basis for understanding

<sup>18</sup> Wu R.-J. R., *A conversation analysis of self-praising in everyday Mandarin interaction*, “Journal of Pragmatics,” 2011, 43 (13), pp. 3152–3176; Wu R.-J.R., *Self-Praising Through Reporting: Strategic Use of Two Reporting Practices in Mandarin Conversation*, “Discourse Processes,” 2012, 49, pp. 622–659.

<sup>19</sup> van Dijck J., *Social Media Platforms as Producers*, [In:] T. Olsson (ed.), *Producing the Internet. Critical Perspectives of Social Media*, Göteborg, Nordicom, 2013, pp. 45–62.

<sup>20</sup> Castells M., *The Rise of the Network Society*, West Sussex, Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Habermas J., *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One. Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. T. McCarthy, Boston, Beacon Press, 1984; *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two. Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. T. McCarthy, Boston, Beacon Press, 1989.

<sup>22</sup> Salomäenpää I., *Art Life as Communicative Action on Facebook* (PhD dissertation), University of Jyväskylä, JYU Dissertations, 53, 2022, pp. 32–35.

the different kinds of artistic acts and interests. Social media technologies have been especially effective in organising and implementing group activities, creating a sense of community and collective identity. Conner<sup>23</sup> explains that Facebook enables people to meet in circumstances that would otherwise be impossible. The openness of the platform constitutes one of its major advantages.

Internet access has enabled passive audiences to become active *agents of cultural production*. The term *audience*, as Salomäenpää<sup>24</sup> argues, is replaced by *users* or *participants* when referring to people online interacting with one another on social media. In this continuum, active participation is defined as writing posts or sharing pictures.<sup>25</sup> Explicit participation entails a professional perspective and user-generated content, while implicit participation does not involve conscious production. Likes or shares on social media are considered *explicit rather than implicit participation*. Facebook's like button presents itself as an insignificant gesture or as an easy way to pledge support for something without participating.<sup>26</sup>

Cultural conceptualisations remain a foundation for language use. In the scope of cultural linguistics,<sup>27</sup> this relationship is strengthened by imprinting cultural conceptualisations of experience into language. Speech communities share the cognitive framework of culture to a varied degree, while the internalisation of a community's cognitive schemes is dynamic, employing contact with other speech communities. In essence, cultural cognition becomes a "complex adaptive system that emerges from interactions between members of a speech community across time and space." Cultural cognition also has a prolonged effect on language as it enables language to become a storage device by encoding traces of cultural cognition. Language is, therefore, both a memory bank and a vessel for the retransmission of cultural cognition. In the modern, digital world, where communities are formed rapidly and often on an ad-hoc basis, cultural cognition, based on previous cultural encounters, becomes a potent entity. Within online communities, cultural cognition is formed and unfolded similarly to real-life situations. The cognitive set of actions includes practices concerning sharing goals and information. The set of adaptive and storage capabilities of language, maintained by the speech community, finds their counterparts within virtual communities.

<sup>23</sup> Conner J., *Facebook, the Image, and the Virtual Cedar Bar*, "Afterimage," 2009, vol. 37, (2), pp. 11–14.

<sup>24</sup> Salomäenpää I., *Art Life as Communicative Action on Facebook* (PhD dissertation), University of Jyväskylä, JYU Dissertations, 53, 2022, pp. 32–35.

<sup>25</sup> Villi M., Matikainen J., *Participation in Social Media: Studying Explicit and Implicit Forms of Participation in Communicative Social Networks*, "Media and Communication," 2016, 4 (4), pp. 109–117, <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v4i4.578>.

<sup>26</sup> Cammaerts B., *Protest Logics and the Mediation Opportunity Structure*, "European Journal of Communication," 2012, 27 (2), pp. 117–134.

<sup>27</sup> Sharifian F., *Cultural Linguistics: The State of the Art*, [In:] F. Sharifian (ed.) *Advances in Cultural Linguistics*, Singapore, Springer, 2017, pp. 1–28.

### Constructing visual literacy online

Cultural linguistics<sup>28</sup> stipulates that linguistic interactions provide space for participants to co-construct cultural conceptualisations. In turn, conceptualisations reflect various aspects of human life, including cultural arts and emotion. Consequently, cultural categories, called *schema*, secure various components of human experience. Finally, the aspect of constant and recurring re-conceptualisation remains at the forefront of cultural life.

The ability to see, as Mitchell<sup>29</sup> observes, is encompassed in a combination of senses, the learnable ability to distinguish objects from their surroundings, tracking moving objects and distinguishing foreground and background. Similarly to natural languages, acquiring the language of vision would be impossible in a later period of life, perhaps in a similar way as acquiring a new verbal language. This is what one could call *visual competence*, or a baseline skill (like reading) that is a necessary but not sufficient condition for more advanced and specialised skills, one might call *visual literacy*. Moreover, Stanford<sup>30</sup> underlines that visual literacy is embedded with temporariness and thus limited by memory and biology. In the digital context,<sup>31</sup> literacy is defined as a set of skills needed to cope with the changing social complexities of contemporary life, encompassing basic literacy or linguistic skills, scientific literacy, economic literacy, technological literacy, visual literacy, information literacy, multicultural literacy, and global awareness. In this perspective, visual literacy means the ability to comprehend, interpret, use, and create images and videos in a way that promotes knowledge, decision-making, communication, and learning, using conventional and 21<sup>st</sup>-century media.

Crouch<sup>32</sup> suggests that visual literacy is not a solitary, individual act but part of a broader set of social practices. A key component of finding meaning in visual texts is negotiating with them, engaging them on many levels and learning how the act of negotiation is constructed. To produce and read visual texts more critically, individuals need to adopt reflexive strategies to identify gaps in their understanding and realise that a visual text reading may be incomplete. Gauntlett<sup>33</sup> underlines the link between

<sup>28</sup> Sharifian F., *Cultural Linguistics: The State of the Art*, [In:] F. Sharifian (ed.) *Advances in Cultural Linguistics*, Singapore, Springer, 2017, pp. 1-28.

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell W. J. T., *Visual Literacy or Literary Visualcy?*, [In:] J. Elkins (ed.), *Visual Literacy*, New York–Oxon, Routledge, 2009, pp. 13–17.

<sup>30</sup> Stanford, B. M., *The Remaining 10 Percent. The Role of Sensory Knowledge in the Age of the Self-Organizing Brain*, [In:] J. Elkins (ed.), *Visual Literacy*, New York–Oxon, Routledge, 2009, pp. 31–58.

<sup>31</sup> Dallow P., *The Visual Complex. Mapping Some Interdisciplinary Dimensions of Visual Literacy*, [In:] J. Elkins (ed.), *Visual Literacy*, New York–Oxon, Routledge, 2009, pp. 91–104.

<sup>32</sup> Crouch C., *Afterword*, [In:] J. Elkins (ed.) *Visual Literacy*, New York–Oxon, Routledge, 2009, pp. 195–204.

<sup>33</sup> Gauntlett D., *Using New Creative Visual Research Methods to Understand the Place of Popular Media in People's Lives*, paper presented at the *International Association for Media and Communication Research [IAMCR]* conference, Porto Alegre, Brazil, July 25–30, 2004, [www.artlab.org.uk/iamcr2004.htm](http://www.artlab.org.uk/iamcr2004.htm).

visual literacy and its emotional paradigm. This includes the codes inscribed into TV soaps and magazines, which engage young people with emotional issues through media consumption.

Dallow<sup>34</sup> writes that the perception of manmade signs entails learning and developing visual cultural forms that involve *coding*: visual representations which work by analogy to the world. Nichols<sup>35</sup> describes images as “sensory impressions that correspond to the physical world.” Nichols’ acts of recognition consist of sleight of hand by signifying “presence through absence,” while dealing with images makes us interact with “a source of sensory impressions upon which meaning has already been conferred.” Understanding and using images are the two paramount aspects of visual literacy. Dallow,<sup>36</sup> Braden and Hortin<sup>37</sup> agree that this aspect incorporates “the ability to think, learn, and express oneself in terms of images.” Moreover, Barry<sup>38</sup> writes that this should encompass an “awareness of the logic, emotion, and attitudes suggested in visual messages,” while the use of images reflects “the ability to produce meaningful images for communication with others.”

### War in miniature

The trend of building, painting and photographing war in miniature, with subsequent development of means of sharing one’s work, was developed by Sheperd Paine (1946-2015). As a war historian and a forerunner of modern miniature modelling, he focused in his work on devising techniques, modelling skills, obtaining materials and honing one’s skill in the hobby, as well as publishing numerous illustrated books on the matter.<sup>39</sup> Paine’s work peaked in the 1970s and 1980s during numerous competitions, exhibitions and modellers’ rallies, while his publishing record stretched beyond the 1990s. His most successful efforts focused on building dioramas. To Paine, the process of building a diorama is the art of creation. The greatest satisfaction derives from creating a three-dimensional painting and can be compared to the one you get when producing a work of art with a *capital A*. A diorama is an interesting structure

<sup>34</sup> Dallow P., *The Visual Complex. Mapping Some Interdisciplinary Dimensions of Visual Literacy*, [In:] J. Elkins (ed.), *Visual Literacy*, New York–Oxon, Routledge, 2009, pp. 91–104.

<sup>35</sup> Nichols B., *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

<sup>36</sup> Dallow P., *The Visual Complex. Mapping Some Interdisciplinary Dimensions of Visual Literacy*, [In:] J. Elkins (ed.), *Visual Literacy*, New York–Oxon, Routledge, 2009, pp. 91–104.

<sup>37</sup> Braden R., Hortin J., *Identifying the Theoretical Foundations of Visual Literacy*, “Journal of Visual/Verbal Language,” 1982, 2, pp. 37–51.

<sup>38</sup> Barry A. M., *Visual Intelligence: Perception, Image, and Manipulation in Visual Communication*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1997, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Paine S., *How to Build Dioramas: Your Complete How-to-do-it Guide to Diorama Planning, Construction and Detailing for All Types of Models*, Airline Publishing Ltd, 1980; *Building and Painting Scale Figures*, Airline Publishing Ltd, 1994, *Shep Paine’s Armor Modeler Guide*, Kalmbach Media, 2016.

because it combines multiple different elements in different ways, while its claim is that one has the chance to tell a story without words; “[i]t’s like silent movies, except nobody moves.”<sup>40</sup> As Paine put it,

[t]he diorama provides a meaning and perspective that a free-standing model cannot. It can also offer more than just a historical context. In its most developed form, a diorama is a scene that tells a story. This does not imply a story in the narrative sense, it simply means that a diorama can show ‘something is going on’. In this sense, a diorama is not just a model of an object or a group of objects, but of an *event*. This event may be active or obvious, such as an infantry attack, or it may be passive and subtle, such as weary infantrymen resting after a battle, or a forlorn and derelict aircraft abandoned in the desert. When a diorama becomes narrative, figures become an important element, it is difficult to have something going on without people around. Even when there are no people at all, as in the case of the derelict airplane, it is their conspicuous absence that tells the story and makes the scene work.<sup>41</sup>

Paine’s view on the matter still echoes within contemporary artistic efforts carried out online. Sharing photos of one’s work, often with an added commentary to aid its reception, facilitates a discourse in which entering discussion is seen as a part of weaving the narrative and enhancing further interaction. On the other hand, the whole situation takes place within a highly hierarchical structure founded on the social media platform.<sup>42</sup> The last element is handled through a peer-review process, where the more respected modellers are encouraged to provide feedback or commendation.

### Wargaming Art Practices

Tabletop wargames provide a rich background for analysing social and linguistic practices. Among the various practices, there are several that players enjoy performing. These include the modelling and hobbyist aspects, such as painting miniatures or building dioramas. While being a pastime based on craftsmanship and practice, painting and modelling incorporate a multitude of actions, performances and activities and provide a rich discourse for players to interact, exchange ideas, boast or construct visual narratives.

Strauss<sup>43</sup> proposed the term *social world* to denote a group that possesses a certain level of engagement in a common cause. Participation in a social world evades distinguishing specific boundaries in terms of belonging but is heavily embedded within

<sup>40</sup> *Historical Perspective*, “The Chicago Sun-Times,” Oct. 9, 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Paine S., *How to Build Dioramas: Your Complete How-to-do-it Guide to Diorama Planning, Construction and Detailing for All Types of Models*, Airline Publishing Ltd, 1980, pp. 2–3.

<sup>42</sup> Salomäenpää I., *Art Life as Communicative Action on Facebook* (PhD dissertation), University of Jyväskylä, JYU Dissertations, 53, 2022, pp. 52–54.

<sup>43</sup> Strauss A. L., Schatzman L., Bucher R., Ehrlich D., Sabshin M., *Psychiatric Ideologies and Institutions*, New York, Free Press of Glencoe, 1964.

active participation in social tasks. In Strauss's view, social worlds contain multiple sub-worlds, in which participants can but do not have to engage. The level, as well as the scale of engagement, differs depending on the member.

A wargamer's social world – and participation in it – consists of:

1. buying, acquiring and collecting miniatures dedicated to playing a particular wargaming system,
2. assembling, repairing, kit-bashing, scratch-building, and customising models,
3. painting models, and subsequent development of one's painting techniques,
4. playing the game with fellow wargamers or by participating in different forms of organised play (tournaments, ladders, leagues),
5. engaging in numerous social activities outside of the scope of the game itself (socialising),
6. getting to know the background (lore) of the game world (historical vs. sci-fi and fantasy wargames).

A wargaming social world is a community of individuals connected by communication, sharing a specific worldview and a way of perceiving the surrounding reality, especially in terms of the relation of the game system versus the game meta. To that extent, numerous symbolic categories are employed by actors during interaction: language, rituals, norms and values.

Shibutani<sup>44</sup> sees the boundaries of effective communication as constituting the cultural area of a social world rather than formal participation or territory. The communication of social actors and the subsequent spread of views and values is achieved through face-to-face communication, publishing on social media and reading the relevant wargaming literature (monthly-issued *White Dwarf*, *Wargames Illustrated*, etc.). Most importantly, because of COVID-related lockdowns and the resulting decrease in the number of organised play events, communication has increasingly been moving to the online world (Facebook groups, online discussion forums, Twitch or Discord channels).

Goodwin<sup>45</sup> observed that the essential characteristic in consideration of human language, cognition and action is “the situation in which multiple participants are attempting to carry out courses of action in concert with each other through talk while attending to both the larger activities that their current actions are embedded within and relevant phenomena in their surround.” In this context, action is understood as “encompassing this interactively organized process of public recognition of meaningful events reflexively linked to the ongoing production of these same events thro-

<sup>44</sup> Shibutani T., *Reference Groups as Perspectives*, [In:] N. J. Herman, L. T. Reynolds, D. Hills (eds.), *Symbolic Interaction. An Introduction to Social Psychology*, New York, General Hall, 1994, pp. 267–677.

<sup>45</sup> Goodwin C., *Action and Embodiment within Situated Human Interaction*, “Journal of Pragmatics,” 2000, 32, pp. 1489–1522.

ugh the use of appropriate semiotic resources within an unfolding temporal horizon.” With that in mind, the semiotic structure of wargaming hobby-oriented endeavours consists of:

1. depending on the declared skill of the player, employing points 2–3 (painting and related activities);
2. posting pictures of the works-in-progress or completed works onto relevant discussion groups;
3. commenting and advising (techniques, materials, resources);
4. providing feedback (the well-accepted norm is that feedback should be constructive and avoid spiteful or sarcastic remarks);
5. negotiating the scope of the desired target effect one seeks to achieve;
6. encouraging (community-building and empowerment);
7. humour, which can be considered spiteful and sarcastic, or may result from the intention of pointing out obvious mistakes in workshop techniques.

Considering Scolari’s<sup>46</sup> views on media literacy in this study, it can be viewed as a set of skills, practices, values, priorities, sensibilities, and learning or sharing strategies that have been developed and applied within the context of new participatory cultures. In the case of wargaming, these competencies are developed over time through exposure to other painting or modelling works and their subsequent discussion. This is what Sherwin<sup>47</sup> calls *unconscious assimilation*, which takes place through exposure to the codes of contemporary media. If a community considers some of its members as talented modellers, their works are more likely to receive an appraisal if their primary idea of participation revolves around playing the game. Here, visual literacy revolves around deciding what constitutes *good* and *bad* modelling work, as most works considered *good* or *decent* by the community in general end up being posted in groups. It could be said that to understand these practices, one should acknowledge that since an image incorporates social activity and enables interaction, it no longer fits the definition of a picture.<sup>48</sup> This is important in the case of commission painters, who are known for their skill and talent but employ these resources for financial income rather than as a community-empowering tool. Not all painters perform commission jobs, nor do they undertake commissions as a means of their primary income.

<sup>46</sup> Scolari, C. A., *Introduction: from Media Literacy to Transmedia Literacy*, [In:] C. A. Scolari (ed.), *Teens, Media and Collaborative Cultures. Exploiting Teens’ Transmedia Skills in the Classroom*, Barcelona, Transliteracy, 2018, pp. 12–20.

<sup>47</sup> Sherwin R. K., *Visual Literacy in Action ‘Law in the Age of Images’*, [In:] J. Elkins (ed.), *Visual Literacy*, New York–Oxon, Routledge, 2009, pp. 179–194.

<sup>48</sup> Sturken M., Cartwright L., *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.

## Data analysis

The data presented within this section was obtained from one Facebook group dedicated to *Flames of War* modellers and painters. The data was obtained with the acknowledgement of the group administration. The posts were created between late 2021 and 2022, while the choice of specific posts depended on their topic and the breadth of conversation carried out in subsequent comments. Finally, the section is divided according to the type of work presented. For clarity, the original posters have been labelled [OP], while subsequent commenters were assigned numbers. The indented text represents a reaction to a preceding comment, while the original spelling of the comments has been preserved. The cursive text represents the Author's comments.

## Works-in-progress (WIPs)

The following conversation takes place in the context of work-in-progress (WIP) photos of an ongoing project on an allied World War II model, especially in terms of a complicated modelling technique, in which meticulous patterns of masking tape are used to achieve a chequered pattern of black and yellow boxes, often employed on American aircraft. The OP can be assumed to be a skilled modeller and painter, which is again reiterated by the contents of the comments. Aside from the obvious community-building aims, it can be argued that both the post and the subsequent set of comments point to boasting on behalf of the OP. Finally, the post has attracted enough traction to invigorate some of the commenters to invoke a humorous, historically inspired and accent-simulating narrative.

OP: Warfare 2021 is now only 2 months away so I am getting into painting mode again. Inspired by H. I am now trying to do a chessboard pattern on the Thunderbolts so here is the first test. It went ok for a test.

edit: Now with photos of test 2 as well.

[1] Can't wait to see this in person. I'm glad I'm not the only one without my army finished yet

OP: Stuart Howes with 2 months to go, what kind of a wargamer would I be if everything was ready

[2] Looks great

[3] You crazy, crazy man; this is going to be AWESOME

[4] May I ask what type of masking tape you used? And/or the size of it?

[5] Hours of fun? Looking good!

OP: P... year. It took an hour for one plane, but I think it's worth it.

(5) definitely! But: (in a Jedi voice:) you don't need to bring airplanes..

OP: In a German voice: "ohh ze Stummels are zo cheap, we must bring the max". In a Southern Texan voice "howdy, we'll bring the best airplane in the whole goddam world".

[5] OP, who, me?! I'm shocked! I would never! The accusations!

[6] Alleged RAF advice to P47 pilots on what to do when bounced by a 109, "Take evasive action, best would be to undo your straps and run around inside the cockpit." Upon being complimented on the diving ability of his P47 its pilot commented, "Dive? Yea... See More

OP: I hope mine will preform to the standard required of my pilots.

### Works completed

In this example, the OP opens the discussion by posting photos of completed work, in this case, a pair of Allied jeeps, designated as a British LDRG unit. There is a substantial visual correspondence between the work and an illustration on the cover of Tamiya's model of the British LRDG command car.<sup>49</sup> The photos of the work have been welcomed with an appraisal due to the number of details added to the original models, as well as the consistency of applied painting techniques. There is also a learning dimension to the conversation, where one of the commenters seeks information on the historical theatre where these vehicles were used. This may result from the lack of historical knowledge on the part of commenter 7 or the lack of knowledge concerning the model manufacturer's publishing practices. The models themselves are considered out-of-production and are hard to come by, and since they no longer appear as a unit in the game, they remain valuable assets in one's collection and are rarely displayed in public.

OP: The first of my two LRDG [*Long Range Desert Group*] Pilot Vehicles.

Just need to add a bit of dust and let it dry. I attempted "desert pink" which is a rather light flesh tone, pretty happy with it but doesn't photograph well.

[1] Very impressive!

OP: S... thanks man

[2] Absolutely cracking mate ... the extra stowage etc really brings them to life.

OP: J... thanks mate, I really appreciate that!

[3] Awesome

OP: T... thank you

[4] Beautifully presented, well done...

OP: P...thanks man!

[5] OP, this is delightful! One of your best creations to date. Your choice of muted tones and colours is just perfect to my eye!

OP: thanks dude that is awesome and I've certainly been enjoying this project.

[6] Beautiful!

OP: D... thanks man

<sup>49</sup> Scalemates Model Database, <https://www.scalemates.com/kits/tamiya-32407-lrdg-command-car-211434> [28.02.2025].

[7] Looking sweet.. I'm sorry Kristian, I have asked this before, but what period are these for?

OP: P... thanks man! These trucks will be for EW and they'll be swapped out with jeeps for MW. My actual force is themed around late 41/42. I intend to swap some of the half Patrol trucks for F30s if my changes are successful as that is what the LRDG started to acquire after a year or so.

### **Scratch-building, repurposing, terrain-building**

One of the most controversial practices that wargamers resort to revolves around repurposing existing models or their leftover parts. In this instance, the OP has used spare bits of a German tank sprue, including tank top hull, cannon and subsequent elements, to build a terrain piece that works as a dug-in defensive position. Since the creation is not entirely historically accurate, or the community standards in terms of accuracy, aesthetics and colour choices, some comments are received by the OP as a form of irony or unconstructive criticism. This is followed by a moderate comment and a reply by the OP suggesting a potential offence taken, with an indication of past negative interactions in a different wargame community. The final portion of comments regards different takes on historical accuracy, game-wise logic and attitude towards playing style.

OP: Finished my latest project, dug in STuGs, hocker, tobruks and another bunker. Plus some emplacements, etc I made using the spare bits from the bunkers.

[1] Nice work

OP: ty

[2] I like the Stugs, but how do they get out at night for refueling?

OP: they and other such tanks were used on the ost wall, I assume they were ones that were no longer mobile, engine damage etc, and were more useful as a static defence as part of the line, they would essentially become an At bunker if positioned right

[3] I like your creativity OP! I think your painting of the buried Stug IIIs needs to define them from the vegetation a bit more to make those pieces really pop on the table. To achieve that extra bit I would paint them with a larger part of the tank in Dunkelgelb. Seal with a coat of gloss varnish and then mix a brown/black wash and pinwash around all the raised detail such as hatches etc. Finally seal the lot in a matt varnish

OP: why would I want them to stand out from the terrain? I've painted them in such a way to camouflage them, the fact they blend in with the terrain makes me very happy

[4] because you might forget about them.

OP: what?

[4] lose them on the table.

OP: how the hell would I do that, it's a bug hunk of plastic and foam card on a green carpet/table

OP: I don't play fow in a field

[4] It happens, trust me!

OP: I. Generally play on my mates floor, so I doubt it, and even when I get my own setup sorted.... Its just gonna be a green base table. What the hell are you people playing on if you loose tanks ffs

[4] a green base table...

OP: wow... Just wow

[3] OP, please calm down, not every comment is deadly serious or an attack - not in this group. You don't have to bite or react angrily to different quips. The group is about advising each other on how to improve painting and discussing modelling. You are free to ignore it. When you post in this group you are inviting comment and opinions.

OP: it just sounded like such a daft thing, and the justification for it was...well equally daft. I have played tabletop games for the best part of my life and never once has anyone said to make my models not blend in with the terrain i am blending them in with. It felt like people were having a jab at my technique, and given the amount of negative comments i have recieved over the things i have been sharing, despite them being historically accurate, im starting to feel like im back playing 40k.

[5] I had the same sort of idea for a bogged Sherman objective as I have a few spare hulls from the hit the beach set that weren't used from the 76s.

OP: Just had confirmation that turf was used on bunkers in the channel Islands

[6] It's an awesome option especially with the boxes that give you more tank upper hulls than bottom hulls. (Hit the beach was one such box)

OP: I did the same with my panthers and jagpanther kits, seems a shame to waste them and dug in tank destroyers were a thing on the ost front

[6] indeed

OP: With regard to the grass on the roof, I used artistic license, we have so few wartime axis images of bunkers, most are allied ones taken after they have been engaged, so they could have used turf on the roofs, we have nothing that says otherwise, also I play games set in 1945/1946 on the ost front, which these are all intended for, so who knows how the allies would have built and camouflaged them. As for the dug in assault guns/tank destroyers, these were used on the ost front and are referenced in the osprey book of the same subject, page 48 to be precise.

[7] OP, you do realise that in reality dug in Stugs would be all but useless, as the whole vehicle had to swung around in order to aim the main gun all but for a bit of fine adjustment either side of the centre line. Nicely painted, but pure fantasy. The Tobruks and bunkers are impressive but, grass does not grow on concrete. Better to have left them as a stone finish either plain or with a camo pattern painted on them, or with a camo net draped over them.

OP: assault guns and tank destroyers were used on dug in positions on the Eastern front, which is the area my games are in

Any kind of reaction left within the post's conversation framework is bound to invoke an emotional response. This, as Sherwin<sup>50</sup> argues, results from an encoded chain of reactions in which "photographs, films and videos can appear to resemble reality, they tend to arouse cognitive and especially emotional responses similar to those aroused by the real thing depicted." Here, this is instigated by leaving a *reaction* (*like*, *haha*, or *love* emoticon) from Facebook's repertoire of ideograms. Usually, it is followed by some reaction in the form of a comment, yet some posts miss any verbalised comment beyond the reaction choice.

The presented excerpts align with the concept of community of practice (CofP). The common features here revolve around mutuality of engagement, negotiation, and a shared repertoire of negotiable resources accumulated over time.<sup>51</sup> This understanding extends into virtual worlds.<sup>52</sup> Hössjer<sup>53</sup> uses the term digitally based communities of practice, underlining that although in physical CofP, engagement takes place over many channels, a virtual CofP is likely to focus its attention on one. Dayter<sup>54</sup> rightfully observes that members of a CofP focus on two aspects: maintaining the boundaries of the community and asserting in-group solidarity. Within the communicative chaos, one can observe a systematic set of practices. In terms of self-praise, solidarity building and self-disclosure can intertwine, yet the scope of this process is community-specific. Moreover, compliments and self-praise constitute the same pragmatic paradigm, encompassing the evaluative space of flattering, praise, admiration, commendation, recommendation, and accolade.<sup>55</sup>

Within the present study, the spectrum of comments varies from appraisal and congratulations, or revolves around discussions on modelling techniques, as well as seeking or providing suggestions concerning painting. Looking for approval and facilitating motivation for further developments in one's work or searching for historically-accurate comments are among the most popular comments added to the works by their original creators. Finally, all these motivational cues revolve around techniques of empowering and vitalising the community.

<sup>50</sup> Sherwin R. K., *Visual Literacy in Action 'Law in the Age of Images'*, [In:] J. Elkins (ed.), *Visual Literacy*, New York–Oxon, Routledge, 2009, p. 184.

<sup>51</sup> Eckert P., McConnell-Ginet S., *Language and gender as community-based practice*. "Annual Review of Anthropology," 21, 1999, pp. 461–490.

<sup>52</sup> Locher M., *Advice Online*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006; Graham S. L., *Conflict, (im)politeness and identity in a computer-mediated community*. "Journal of Pragmatics," 39, 2007, 742–759; Perelmutter R., *The flamewar as a genre in Russian blogosphere*, "Journal of Pragmatics," 2013, 45, pp. 74–89.

<sup>53</sup> Hössjer A., *Small Talk, Politeness and Email Communication in the Workplace*. [In:] S. Herring, D. Stein, T. Virtanen (Eds.), *Pragmatics of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2013, p. 618.

<sup>54</sup> Dayter D., *Self-praise in microblogging*, "Journal of Pragmatics," 2014, 61, pp. 92–95.

<sup>55</sup> Archer D., *Speech acts*. [In:] A. Jucker, I. Taavitsainen (Eds.), *Historical Pragmatics*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2010, pp. 379–417; Jucker A., Taavitsainen, I., *Diachronic speech act analysis*, "Journal of Historical Pragmatics," 1 (1), 2000, pp. 67–95.

The present recession of tabletop wargaming communities is an ongoing development. There are two main reasons for this situation. Firstly, the pandemic-related aspect is that due to lockdowns and limitations in both organised play and the choice of venue for larger events, players resort to playing at home or devote more time to the painting and modelling aspects of the hobby. This is also seen as a good community practice that reinforces group identification or introduces a small proportion of competition. Secondly, the pandemic has had a tremendous impact on small businesses located in larger cities, while the growing costs of running a hobby shop have forced some of the local vendors to move from brick-and-mortar stores to the Internet. This also resulted in the *push for the Internet* during lockdowns and the migration of wargaming communities into the online world. Starting from mid-2022, however, it can be observed that the classical hobby shop model, including player-organised gaming clubs and associations, is coming back to life, with new venues also being opened in smaller-scale cities, where rent charges and related costs are significantly lower.

### Conclusions

The presented excerpts do not represent the entirety of the linguistic output in a wargaming world. Yet, they allow certain conclusions. In terms of framing the immediate life world, there seem to exist certain prerequisites for understanding the internal relations and standards that rest at the foundation of good and bad modelling practices. This constantly changing horizon of interpretations<sup>56</sup> involves getting to know what is considered good or bad practice. This, in turn, is negotiated through works posted by participants considered to be standard-setters by the whole of the community. Yet, the responses to the works posted by the standard-setters are usually received less critically.<sup>57</sup> Finally, there is the process of negotiating one's accordance to these ephemeral rules, both in terms of wanting to achieve a certain degree of skill mastery, as well as trying to negotiate different ways of achieving that goal.

Even though each post suggests the emergence of a new context, the discussions that follow usually reflect on the existing power relations of a community, as elaborated by the positive feedback given to works that fulfil community standards. As there is no external institution to handle the task of setting what exactly the standards should be, it is up to the internal processes of the community to demarcate whose work is responsible for setting the bar. This is often achieved cooperatively, with the combined effort of all members, be it through comments, posting works or providing feedback.

<sup>56</sup> Salomäenpää I., *Art Life as Communicative Action on Facebook* (PhD dissertation), University of Jyväskylä, JYU Dissertations, 53, 2022; Habermas J., *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One. Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. T. McCarthy, Boston, Beacon Press, 1984.

<sup>57</sup> Sherwin R. K., *Visual Literacy in Action 'Law in the Age of Images'*, [In:] J. Elkins (ed.), *Visual Literacy*, New York–Oxon, Routledge, 2009, p. 185.

As pictures are emotional,<sup>58</sup> the process of negotiating standards can get out of hand at times, while the past experiences of participants impact the present reception of works and the ensuing discussion.

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<sup>58</sup> Mitchell W. J. T., *Visual Literacy or Literary Visualcy?*, [In:] J. Elkins (ed.), *Visual Literacy*, New York–Oxon, Routledge, 2009, p. 23.

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### *Painting Minis and Self-Praise.* **Communicative Practices of Tabletop Wargamers**

**Summary:** Tabletop wargames provide a rich background for analysing social and linguistic practices. Among the various practices, there are several that players enjoy performing. These include the modelling and hobbyist aspects, such as painting miniatures or building dioramas. While being a pastime based on craftsmanship and practice, painting and modelling incorporate a multitude of actions, performances and activities, whereas the modelling aspect itself provides a rich discourse for players to interact, exchange ideas, boast or construct visual narratives in the form of dioramas.

A.L. Strauss (1964) proposes the term social world to denote a group that possesses a certain level of engagement in a common cause. Participation in a social world evades distinguishing specific boundaries in terms of belonging but is heavily embedded within activity in social tasks. Moreover, social worlds contain multiple sub-worlds, in which participants can but do not have to engage. The level as well as the scale of engagement differs depending on the member. For a wargamer, participation in the social world encompasses not only collecting, assembling and painting miniature models but also taking part in various means of organised play and engaging in activities outside of the scope of the game (i.e. socialising).

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The boundaries of effective communication constitute the cultural area of a social world rather than formal participation or territory. The communication of social actors and the subsequent spread of views and values is achieved using face-to-face communication, publishing on social media and reading relevant literature. At the same time, the present trend shifts the wargaming discussions from face-to-face meetings into the online world utilising Facebook groups, discussion forums, Twitch or Discord channels.

This study aims to establish the types of practices involved in the modelling aspect of the tabletop wargames and provide an overview of linguistic means and discourse practices that embody the process of communication, be it by face-to-face or online means. This can be achieved by taking a closer look at some aspects of visual literacy, which revolves around deciding what constitutes “good” and “bad” modelling work. The usual spectrum of comments varies from appraisal and congratulations, or revolve around discussions on modelling techniques, as well as seeking or providing suggestions concerning painting.

**Keywords:** tabletop wargaming, discourse practices, self-praise, boasting

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